

# POSTCOLONIAL SUBALTERNIZATION OF CHAMAARS AND DALIT CHETNA IN SUNJEEV SAHOTA'S *THE YEAR OF THE RUNAWAYS*

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## Abstract

The paper, through its study of the Dalit character of Tarlochan Kumar (Tochi), categorizes Sunjeev Sahota's *The Year of the Runaways* (2015) as a vibrant piece of Anglophone Dalit Writing from the outside. Drawing its theoretic framework from the postcolonial studies, the paper incorporates Pramod K. Nayar's concept of 'Postcolonial Subalternization' and 'Postcolonial Protest' along with Laura R. Brueck's concept of 'Dalit Chetna' (consciousness) to analyze Sahota's novel *The Year of the Runaways*. The study highlights the novel as a 'Postcolonial Protest' narrative utilizing upon the device of realism as a prominent feature of Dalit Writing. The protagonist Tochi undergoes severe caste based subalternity both at India and England by the high caste Hindus and Sikhs respectively. He is bestowed with a compromised agency in the novel (unlike a narrative with 'Dalit Chetna') to resist, rebel and change his subalternity. The study concludes with establishing Sunjeev Sahota, belonging to high class of 'Jats', as an Anglophone non-Dalit writer from the outside with a partial 'Dalit Chetna', albeit, the publication of the novel is timely enough to background the political context of "Modi Sarkar" in India with its rise in inter-caste and inter-religious intolerance.

**Key Words:** Dalit Chetna, Dalit Writing, Postcolonial Studies, Postcolonial Protest Narratives, Realist Fiction, South-Asian British Fiction, Subalternization, Sunjeev Sahota

## Introduction

Sunjeev Sahota's massive second novel, *The Year of the Runaways* (2015) converses with the themes of the hardships borne by the Indian Immigrants and the situation of Dalits in India and abroad (Britian). Sahota with his gift of unflinching observation of minute social and psychological details explores subtly, the lives of three Indian immigrants: Avtar Nijjar, Randeep Sanghera, and Tarlochan Kumar (known as Tochi) along with an Indian-British girl, Narinder Kaur.

Avtar and Randeep, pushed hard by their poor and uncertain circumstances respectively, reach England for a better future which to their bitter realization does not come handy as expected by their families. Avtar, after mortgaging his father's shawl shop in Gandhi Bazaar, selling his kidney and borrowing a cumbersome loan by a local thug named

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Pocket Bhai, arrives at England on a student visa along with Randeep whose sister Lakhpreet is his secret lover. Randeep coping with his father's illness and his own shame for his attempted rape of a lower caste college fellow named Jaytha Hall and being expelled for it, gets into a visa marriage with Narinder Kaur who is a devout Sikh and full of the milk for human kindness to help the needy. Narinder's motive for visa marriage with Randeep is religious and spiritual instead of being sexual. So when she cuts her path across Tarlochan's, who is sharing the same boarding house for illegal immigrants with Avtar and Randeep, her sexual drives are kindled. Knowing her religious family background and the social unacceptability of the untouchables she stops herself from getting emotionally involved with Tochi because he is a 'Chamaar' by caste and hence unacceptable for her family too.

Tochi has reached Britain after a blood curdling chapter of communal violence in his life in a suburban village named 'Manighat' near Patna, Bihar. Almost a week after the festival of Navratri in the late nineties, he with his whole family, including an amputee father, mother, a pregnant sister and a younger brother, are brutally burnt alive and murdered at the hands of high caste Hindu militant wing: 'Maheshwar Sena' in order to purge the Indian soil of impurity of the untouchables. Tochi survives the attack and runs away to Calcutta with the help of his Hindu Landlord Babuji. Tochi undergoes incessant social isolation and derision for being an untouchable and leaves, after earning enough money through menial jobs, for Britain, as an illegal immigrant adopting the dangerous methods of human trafficking, only to earn ample money to avert his Untouchability and lower class in order to breathe in a socially liberated atmosphere. However, after reaching England and settling in the Sheffield underground life, there is not a single day in his life when he is not rejected and ridiculed with contempt by the so called 'Apne' (the fellow Indians), just because he is an untouchable. All his efforts to break free of his caste and class end up in failure with the revelation that an untouchable at home (India) still remains an untouchable abroad (Britain) and he goes back to India and embraces his untouchability with its inconsequential life.

Sahota finishes the novel with an epilogue which follows after the lapse of almost ten years to the year 2003 (*The Year of the*

*Runaways*). Avtar and Randeep are settled in England with their families. Tochi has returned to his untouchable life at Kanyakumari, the last city of India down the south by the sea and a noted pilgrimage site. He is married with a small family. Narinder still single, visits India to scatter her father's ashes at Kiratpur. She is no longer a devout Sikh and does not wear her 'turban', 'kara' and 'kandha' and has not visited any 'gurdwara' since her year in Sheffield. On her way back to England, her visit to Kanyakumari in the end of the novel to see Tochi, confirms that her love for Tochi still prevails which might have been consummated had there not been the practice of untouchability in India and Britain alike. Sahota, through his focalization of Tarlochan Kumar, grants preponderance to his theme of the plight of Dalits in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Indian society and Indian-British Diaspora. The paper aims at critically engaging with this theme of postcolonial subalternization of Indian Untouchables as to advance Sahota's *The Year of the Runaways* as a postcolonial protest narrative.

### **History of Untouchability**

The practice of untouchability goes back to the roots of Hindu civilization and religion. The arrival of the Aryans in the subcontinent and their ensuing conflicts with the local people led them towards establishing the *Chaturvarna* system: a system of society that categorized all castes into four divisions, namely, Brahmins; Kshatriyas; Vaisyas and Sudras. This four division social system was further fossilized into a rigid caste system which fixed the membership to a particular caste group on the basis of birth thus initiating the practices of endogamy and commensality (Mukherjee, 2003, p.xxiii). Sudras, the last rung of *Chaturvarna* system, were cast out from the social structure for their practice of eating carrion: a practice they had adopted due to their poverty. They were called 'Avarnas' now due to their excommunication by the three upper rungs of *Chaturvarna* who had self-styled themselves as 'Savarnas' (p.xxiv).

The emergence of the postcolonial sovereign nation state of India in 1947 promised to revisit its social structures by adopting revolutionary guidelines, for its first constitution, as proposed by its first law minister Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956). Although Ambedkar was highly "disappointed with the final draft of the

constitution, [s]till he did succeed in putting in place certain rights and safeguards” (Roy, 2014, Kindle Location 552). Ambedkar, with his life long struggle for the rights of the Indian Untouchables and his incessant critiques of Hindu religion for its paradoxes in social practice, stands out as much of a seer for the Indian Untouchables as Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) stands for Indian Hindus. Both the leaders claimed themselves as the rightful champion of the Untouchable cause. Roy in her introduction labelled “The Doctor and the Saint”, to Ambedkar’s *Annihilation of Caste*, brings out a very vivid picture of this struggle, between Gandhi and Ambedkar, for the representation of the Untouchables.

Gandhi, to uplift the stature of the oppressed Untouchables, replaced the term ‘Untouchable’ with the term ‘Harijan’(children of God) as the neutral identity marker for the Indian Untouchables, which was readily adopted by “the government of India, bureaucrats, political leaders and the national press” (Mukherjee, 2003, p.xxx). The Untouchables however do not accept this title as they consider it to be patronizing, and instead associate themselves with “the term ‘Dalit’- meaning ‘oppressed’, ‘broken’, ‘crushed’ and ‘downtrodden’ in Marathi” (Abraham & Misrahi-Barak, 2016, p.8). This term, as an identity marker for the Untouchables, was first used by Jyotirao Phule (1827-90), a champion of anti-caste struggle in Indian Congress. Gandhi believed that the Hindu society could, gradually, get rid of the abomination of the practice of untouchability with the help of education and social reformation whereas Ambedkar wanted equal political and social rights, safeguarded with the help of legislation, for the Dalits of Independent postcolonial India. Only then could the Indian society get rid of this abomination (Abraham & Misrahi-Barak, 2016, p.6). However, had there not been these publicly known conflicts between Gandhi and Ambedkar, over the representation of the Untouchables, the journey of the untouchable identity from untouchability to Dalitness would not have been possible. But the government of India labels Dalits as ‘Scheduled Castes’: an identity which has become “a bureaucratic necessity for Dalits when they apply for reserved positions” (Mukherjee, 2003, p. xxx). Sarah Beth Hunt in her book *Hindi Dalit Literatures and the Politics of Representation* (2014), believes that the “reservation

measurements have been the single-most important act by the state regarding the welfare of Dalits, and by far the most significant influence on the rise of the Dalit middle class” (p.7). With the rise of this middle class, the Dalits have now established their political parties and literary traditions of Dalit writings in almost all the major languages of India.

### **Dalit Literatures**

The literary representation of Dalit subjects has matured, over the years, as there are established Dalit literary traditions now in major regional languages like Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Gujrati, Kannada, Hindi, etc. and more recently the tradition of Anglophone Dalit Literature too. Almost all the genres of literature like Confessional Narratives, Poetry, Drama, Novel and Short Story are exploited by Dalit and non-Dalit writers to portray Dalit subjects.

### **The Crises of Authentic Literary Representation of Dalits**

The early rigid debates regarding the authenticity of Dalit representation have become flexible and accommodating. The first breakthrough came when in 1958 the Dalit Literature Conference had passed the resolution that “the literature written by Dalits and that written by others about the Dalits in Marathi [should] be accepted as a separate entity known as ‘Dalit Literature’” (Dalit Literature Conference, 1958: cited in Abraham & Misrahi-Barak, 2016, p.8). The resolution, restricting itself to Marathi language, opened up the closed doors of Dalit representation to the non-Dalit writers also. Saharankumar Limbale in 2004 in his book *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit literature*, at first, says that the Dalit Literature is “writing about Dalits by Dalits with a Dalit consciousness” and then further in the book admits the imaginative efforts of non-Dalit writers to represent Dalits provided that they succumb to Dalit perspectives (Limbale, 2004; cited in Abraham & Misrahi-Barak, 2016, p.8). Brueck (2014) labels Limbale’s concepts of ‘Dalit Consciousness’ and adoption of ‘Dalit Perspective’, on the part of non-Dalit writers, as ‘Dalit Chetna’ which according to her moves a step further from sympathizing with the Dalit subjects to granting them individual ‘personhood’ to stand against the social injustices by resisting, rebelling and changing (p.15). For Brueck “Dalit Chetna is being developed as a strategy for Dalit critical analysis, a kind of ‘test’ by which Dalit critics can judge the ‘dalitness’ of any work of literature, whether written by a Dalit or a non-Dalit”

(cited in Gajarawala, 2013, p.2). In the wake of these binaries of ‘*in*’ and ‘*out*’ regarding the authenticity of Dalit representation, Brueck’s concept of ‘Dalit Chetna’, resolves the issue on neutral grounds as long as the literary representation of Dalits, either by Dalits or by non-Dalits, remains loyal to the Dalit cause.

### **Theory of the Authentic Dalit Literary Aesthetics**

The debates regarding the binaries of ‘*in*’ and ‘*out*’, in order to represent Dalits authentically, can be resolved, along with utilizing the critical yardstick provided by Brueck, through determining the features of the theoretic grid for Dalit literary aesthetics. Prasad & Gaijan (2007) demarcate the Indian literatures, dealing with the representation of Dalits, into two classes: Gandhian literature and Ambedkarite literature. They propose that “Gandhian literature is the literature of sympathizers” whereas Ambedkarite literature is that of protest against social injustice and cruelty carrying Ambedkar’s message for the Dalits to “get education, be united, and fight for right” (p. viii).

Darshana Trivedi (2007) theorizing the Dalit literary aesthetics says:

Dalit literature is a journey from main stream literature to marginal literature, from grand narrative to little narrative, from individual identity to group identity, from ideal to real, from vertical literature to spiral literature, from self-justification to self-affirmation. This is the ‘celebration of difference’.  
(Trivedi, 2007, p.7)

Dr. S. K. Paul (2007), in his exhaustive essay on the tradition of Gujrati Dalit short story, draws a map of its literary aesthetics. He theorizes that a Dalit literary plot involves “a central incident of atrocity inflicted upon a powerless dalit by an upper caste [member]..., the rural locale of a ‘vas’ (separate quarters for untouchables) and [dalit] dialects” (p.273). The oppression takes forms of sexual exploitation of Dalit women, betrayal and the impossibility of inter-caste relationship or marriage. The above mentioned literary features of a text can also help it win the title of an authentic Dalit narrative or writing irrespective of its author’s Dalit or non-Dalit identity.

### Literature Review

Sunjeev Sahota's big fat novel *The Year of the Runaways* has attracted a lot of positive reviews since its publication in 2015. Sahota's first novel *Ours are the Streets* (2013) earned him a place in the list of Granta magazine's best young novelists for 2013 and his second massively bulky novel *The Year of the Runaways*, longlisted first and then shortlisted by the Man Booker jury for its 2015 award, has confirmed his literary bravado.

Mihir Bose in *The Independent* (June 18, 2015) dubbed Sahota's *The Year of the Runaways* as "a picture of modern immigration" whereas Kamila Shamsie in *The Guardian* (June 19, 2015) hailed it as a "brilliant political novel" because of its bold portrayal of an untouchable character: Tochi in the political background of India's exclusive high caste Hindu nationalism. Sanjay Siphahimalani in *The Indian Express* (August 15, 2015) reads Sahota's *The Year of the Runaways*, as showcasing "the tension between alienation and assimilation" faced by the immigrants. Lucy Daniel in *The Telegraph* (August 20, 2015) locating the contemporaneous contexts of exploitation of illegal laborers, commonly known as "Faujis" in the Britain, calls the novel "a book of our times".

Julia Calagiovanni in *The Atlantic* (October 12, 2015) calling *The Year of the Runaways* a favorite for the Booker Prize 2015 says that the novel "chronicles the experience of being a migrant", covering all the serious issues like those of "racially motivated violence; the remnants of a lingering caste system; questions of faith and skepticism; [and] the difficult limitations of conventional ideas about gender and sex". She further reads all the main four characters of the novel: Tarluchan Kumar, Avtar Nijjar, Randeep Sanghera and Narinder Kaur as non-revolutionary characters on the basis of their yielding natures in the wake of the trials and tribulations faced by them. For her "Sahota subtly, powerfully shows the devastating effect on his characters of narrow horizons".

Alice Keeffe in *New Statesman* (October 13, 2015) labels *The Year of the Runaways* as "the subtle study of economic migration". Saima S. Hussain in *Dawn* (November 15, 2015) points out the eyebrow raising moments in the novel when some Sikh characters use words, like "Inshallah" and "give my salaam", which are markers of Islamic culture. She translates these cultural anachronisms by Sahota as his conscious

efforts “to connect with readers of Pakistani origin”. It is also useful to remember here that Sahota’s debut novel *Ours are the Streets* narrates the story of a muslim would be suicide bomber: Imtiaz. Michiko Kakatuni in *The New York Times* (March 21, 2016) referring to the new “waves of refugees fleeing the war in Syria” believes that “no recent novel does a more powerful job of capturing the day-to-day lives of such immigrants than Sunjeev Sahota’s *The Year of the Runaways*”.

The brief review of the immediate critical responses to Sahota’s novel clearly shows that it has been mostly read as belonging to the category of immigrant fiction. Only a few reviewers have pointed to the novel’s problematizing of the existence of the Untouchables in the democratic India where the Untouchables are constitutionally categorized as Scheduled Castes with a reserved quota for representation in state services but in practice are maltreated by high caste Hindu Nationalists as living abominations to the purity of Hindu society. The paper at hand, contextualizing this picture of Indian society, attempts to profile the fictional representation of the Indian Untouchables through the character of Tochi as imagined by Sahota in his novel *The Year of the Runaways*.

### **Theoretic Framework**

The theoretic framework for the paper is informed by postcolonial theory. Pramod K. Nayar’s concepts of ‘Postcolonial Subalternization’ and ‘Postcolonial Protest’ along with Laura R. Brueck’s concept of ‘Dalit Chetna’ (Dalit Consciousness) serve as the methodological tools to give Sunjeev Sahota’s *The Year of the Runaways* a close reading.

Nayar recognizes ‘Postcolonial Subalternization’ as one of the main themes of the postcolonial literature (Nayar, 2008, p. 71). He further records:

If the native was the subaltern during colonial rule, postcolonialism created its own subalterns. Women, ‘lower’ castes, and classes, ethnic minorities rapidly became the ‘Others’ within the postcolonial nation state. The new elite was as oppressive and exclusive as the colonial master. Democratic approaches failed, and economic and social emancipation slipped across the horizons as millions of ‘postcolonials’ saw themselves colonized by the new powers. (p. 100)



Invoking Franz Fanon's warning, as prophesied in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), regarding the rise of national consciousness and the emergence of an estranged ruling class following the footsteps of their previous colonial masters, Nayar propounds that "what happens in such a nationalism is postcolonial subalternization" (p. 106). Marking the process of 'Postcolonial Subalternization' as an unfortunate continuity of colonial practices of oppression he says that such a postcolonial subalternization entails the phenomenon of 'postcolonial protest' (p. 102).

Nayar locates the Indian Dalit Writing, in the native regional languages as well as in English language, as the exemplary sites to showcase the 'Postcolonial Protest' against this 'Postcolonial Subalternization' by "document[ing] the sufferings of and atrocities committed upon a large section of the [Indian] population" ( p. 109). He declares Indian Dalit Writing as a concomitant extension of postcolonial literatures as it inherits and follows the anti-colonial spirit

Seek[ing] social transformation(s); freedom from dominating social structures; justice for the oppressed; a counter-point or counter-perspective to established histories; and to protest against the subsuming of local, victim narratives into a larger framework, thereby erasing their specificity. (p. 108)

The theoretic framework is designed with Laura R. Brueck's concept of 'Dalit Chetna' as the third tier to analyze the chosen text. Addressing to the debates regarding the authenticity of the Dalit Writing she, in her book *Writing Resistance: The Rhetorical Imagination of Hindi Dalit Literature* (2014) , theorizes the centrality of 'Dalit Chetna' (Dalit Consciousness) for all kinds of Dalit Writings by both Dalit and non-Dalit writers.

Brueck believes that the debates to rummage out the answer to the question as to "who is Dalit enough to write 'realistic' representation of Dalit experience ... are frequently political, rather than literary" (p. 10). Building upon Sharankumar Limbale's idea of Dalit Writing to be necessarily about Dalit subjects and essentially composed "by Dalit writers with a Dalit consciousness", she distinguishes between a literary work with Dalit consciousness and a literary work without Dalit consciousness. Irrespective of who is the writer she charges non-Dalit

writing with objectifying the Dalit subjects with distanced empathy towards them and also portraying them in their incapacity for bringing in any social change (p. 15). Through her critical examination of a handful of Hindi Dalit short stories, she claims that true Dalit Writings “alternatively develop the possibility of ‘personhood’ for Dalit subjects ... by invest[ing them] with subjectivity and the power to resist, rebel, and change” ( p. 15). It is this Dalit consciousness that she calls ‘Dalit Chetna’, which according to her, grants the fictive Dalit representations with agency and hence can be used as a touchstone for analyzing the literary productions about Dalits either by Dalit writers or by non-Dalit writers.

The paper by combining the concepts of ‘Postcolonial Subalternization’, ‘Postcolonial Protest’ and ‘Dalit Chetna’ (Dalit consciousness) establishes the conceptual grid to analyze Sunjeev Sahota’s *The Year of the Runaways* as a ‘Postcolonial Protest’ narrative and highlights Tochi (a Dalit protagonist) being subalternized in present day postcolonial India. Though Sahota has portrayed morally upright Tochi as an epitome of resistance and rebellion as well as a positive survivor of life’s tribulations, he has not been granted with a changing ‘personhood’. Sahota has succeeded in rousing the empathy of his readers for Tochi but has failed in incorporating the ‘Dalit Chetna’, to its full, in his novel. This is the very argument that the paper unfolds in the pages to follow.

### **Discussion: *The Year of the Runaways* as Dalit Realist ‘Postcolonial Protest’ Fiction**

Sahota, by focusing on the portrayal of Tochi as a ‘chamaar’, depicts the deplorable plight of Indian Dalits in general. Like Dalit Realist Writing, as brought in vogue by the popularity of Confessional Narratives as that of Omprakash Valmiki’s *Joothan* (2003), Sahota’s novel also records postcolonial protest against the rising die hard Hindu nationalism in India. Sahota shows this by his imaginary narrating of the episode of Patna Riots perpetrated by ‘Maheshwar Sena’; a Hindu radical militant group, to rid India of the Untouchables as they believe “Bharat is for the pure of blood and blood we will shed to keep it pure” (Sahota, 2015, p.54). As the elections are approaching, the caste based skirmishes are on

the rise and Hindu nationalists are angry for the rising middle class of Untouchables.

They spoke of the need to regain control. That their religion was becoming polluted, the gods were being angered. The land was increasingly infested by achuts, churehs, chamaars, dalits, adivasis, backwards, scheduleds-whatever new name they decided to try and hide behind. They needed to be put back in their place. Not given land and handouts and government positions. (p.54)

During these riots Tochi's sister Palvinder is having child birth pains and Tochi is out finding the local lady midwife when he comes to know that his village Manighat is attacked by the 'Maheshwar Sena' men. He is, while rescuing his family members to the safe house of his high caste landlord, intercepted by the rioters and burnt alive. His parents are hacked into pieces. His sister's stomach is brutally ripped open. His fifteen years old brother Dalbir's balls are cold bloodedly cut off to bleed him to death. Tochi survives all this. The minute details of Tochi's life leading up to the riots and their aftermath qualify Sahota's *The Year of the Runaways* to top the list of Dalit Realist Postcolonial Protest fiction by a non-Dalit writer.

#### **Tochi as a Metaphor for Postcolonial Subalternization of 'Chamaars'**

The individual story of Tochi's subalternization in the postcolonial casteist India, with Hindu nationalism on the rise, is the metaphor to represent the overall trends, in the postcolonial Indian society, of untouchable subalternity in general. Tochi, a low caste chamaar, is reminded of his 'chamaariness' throughout the course of the novel by the high caste Hindus and Sikhs at home (India) and abroad (England). All his efforts to rise to middle class and earn enough money to "choose his own life" (Sahota, 2015, p. 70) bring him back to confront his 'chamaariness' like nakedness which is publicly observable. When Tochi is working for a high caste Sikh family in a village named Mojoram, some twenty kilometres in the suburbs of Jalandhar, he is not called with real name Tarlochan or Tochi but with the title 'chamaar' by his landlord. Likewise he is all the time referred to, with disgust, as a 'chamaar' by Avtar, Gurpreet, and many others while he is in Sheffield,

England. The rules of the game have not changed for the Untouchables even at abroad.

Tochi after surviving the ‘Maheshwar Sena’ riots runs away to France first and then to England in search of a land where he can live in peace without being stigmatized for his ‘chamaariness’. He is working hard, with honesty, doing multiple menial jobs when he has a hope to find a home as uncle Del and his wife aunty Davinder offer him a marriage proposal with their niece Ruby, thinking that he is Tarlochan Sandhu from Mojoram and not Tarlochan Kumar from Manighat; a Bihari. Tochi had advanced an adopted fake identity to both uncle Del and aunty Davinder to seek work at their cash and carry shop. Tochi, inwardly conscious about his untouchable identity refuses the proposal time and again but finally when his true identity is revealed in an interview with Ruby’s caste sensitive Sikh father, he is hurled with most mundane abuses by aunty Davinder: “To think we trusted you. To think we let you into our home. Marry my niece? Go back to cleaning shit.... You people stink the whole world up! (p. 309)

Tochi, instead of running away, gathers his senses and stays to “see it through to the end” and vehemently asserts that he is “a man” and not a chamaar (p.309). The novel offers a highly satirical situation when the high caste Sikh, Avtar Singh Nijjar, literally takes up the job of underground cleaning of shit holes and drains.

A second chance, at anchoring and finding love, comes for Tochi when he runs into Narinder Kaur’s life. When Narinder seeks Tochi’s help to find her visa-marriage husband, Randeep, and starts living with Tochi, at Vinny’s Victorian house that lays deserted after the raids for illegal immigrant hideouts, she is attracted to his physical beauty and his “lovely smile” (p.423). Knowing that Tochi is a chamaar and an untouchable she still likes spending time with him, cooking with him, sharing meals with him as a beautiful routine: That became the shape of their evenings: one of them cooking up dhal or sabzi, the other making rotis, and then a meal together, quietly, peaceably (p. 426). Tochi, enamoured with this routine and possibility of finding love, rejects the work offer at a construction site in Spain and decides to stay there in England with Narinder. He is ready to resist, rebel and change by tying a love knot with Narinder. Narinder, with the goodness of her heart, brings Tochi back to God and invites him to the local gurdwara where he runs into Ruby’s father who disgraces him publically: “Remember his face, everyone. He’s a chamaar who pretends he isn’t so he can marry our

daughters and get his passport. Isn't that right? Come on, which poor girl have you got your eye on today?" (p. 431).

Tochi has by now come to terms with his chammaariness and is no longer ashamed of it to hide it. He is now willing to enter into a relationship with Narinder and asks her to stay with him as his life's love. Narinder knows how much Tochi loves her, but under the pressure of her familial duties and her family's honor and father's prestige, she recedes from submitting to her heart's call. She thinks that "her being with Tochi would do to him [her father], the lifetime of disgrace" (p. 440). So she lets Tochi go. Tochi, already scorched in body is now scorched in soul too. Being unrequited in love, he takes up the work offer in Spain and then returns to India to settle in Kanyakumari at the end of India where "there can be no more false dreams" (p. 450).

Sahota, through these two episodes as chances of Tochi's finding love and a home to anchor, shows the supremacy of caste in India and Indian culture abroad. Beauty, courage, money and love cannot uplift an untouchable from his untouchability. For Sahota, once a chammaar is always a chammaar. Although he gives Tochi agency to resist and rebel to fight back to his oppressors and fall in love with Narinder, he does not give Tochi enough of it to change the casteist Indian society.

### **Lack of 'Dalit Chetna' in Anglophone Dalit Novel**

The representation of Dalits by the Dalit as well as the non-Dalit writers has attained conspicuous attributes: the Ambedkarite one and the Gandhian one respectively. The fictive representations of Dalit characters by the Dalit writers of regional languages usually wield a 'personhood' by being bestowed with a subjective identity of standing against the grain within a caste based Indian society whereas the portrayal of Dalit characters by the non-Dalit writers takes the Gandhian turn by denying them any real agency. They are only pictured as objects to demand empathy of their reader. The foreignization of the Dalit writing via translation is the most recent advancement but a very large portion of Dalit writing in regional languages still remains unnoticed by the international world. The Anglophone Dalit Writing, especially the novel, is more often written by non-Dalit writers and hence lacks the Ambedkarite fervor, in its fictive characters, for gaining agency by resisting, rebelling and changing. The paper in hand attempts to validate

its argument by highlighting this lack of 'Dalit Chetna' in the Anglophone Dalit Novel by briefly analyzing two Anglophone Dalit novels: Arundhati Roy's *The God of the Small Things* (1997) and Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) and placing Sunjeev Sahota's *The Year of the Runaways* (2015) within the same tradition of Anglophone Dalit Novel following the Gandhian spirit of tackling the Indian society's caste issue.

Both Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Adiga's *The White Tiger*, equally well received by critics for their literary quality and their timely address to the contemporary social debates, are Anglophone Dalit novels as they actively conversate with the issues of Indian caste system and give its rude glimpse through their portrayal of Dalit characters like Valutha and Balram Halwai. Both the novels project the Dalit characters with an empathic detail but only to stop there. They don't provide their lower caste and class characters with enough of 'Dalit Chetna' as to give them 'personhood' and agency.

Roy's portrayal of Valutha excites the readers to look forward to the roundness of character in him. Amu's love affair with Valutha at the cost of her character and honor affirms to Valutha's manly beauty, therefore elevating his personality from the contemptuous life of an untouchable. But is this showing of Valutha's beauty and his quality to attract a Syrian Christian woman so much so as to get her fall in love with him, enough to provide him with a 'personhood' and agency? Roy by acquiescing to give Valutha the fate of an untouchable, for his sin of outreaching, gives him a most brutal death after being inhumanly and cold bloodedly beaten up in police lock up. Roy has chosen the Gandhian path of showing empathy to the Untouchables instead of choosing the Ambedkarite path of giving agency and 'personhood' to the Untouchables. This she could have done through granting Valutha an alternative happy life with his lover: Amu.

Arvind Adiga in his novel *The White Tiger* shows his protagonist Balram Halwai successful in evading his low class by a brutal move of murdering his master whom he served as a driver. Therefore, by murdering his master and usurping his wealth, Balram escapes his poverty and enters into the world of the rich as an entrepreneur. Tarlochan Kumar of Sunjeev Sahota's *The Year of the Runaways* is also

trying to escape his poverty and low caste by fleeing away from casteist India to England. However, Tochi is an honest hardworking principled soul in contrast with Balram. But his qualities of honesty, hardwork and principles are unable to lead him to prosperity of living equal to the high caste Hindus and Sikhs in India and even abroad. The way towards such a casteless and classless goal of living in equality is that of adopted by Balram Halwai: murder, theft and adopting a new false identity name. Adiga does give agency to lower caste Balram Halwai to adopt a rich name and a fake identity: Ashok Sharma, but not the 'personhood'. Tochi adopts fake names too: first Tarlochan Kapoor to avoid a deathly confrontation with 'Maheshwar Sena' rioters and second Tarlochan Sandhu to get work with high caste Sikhs in Sheffield, England. Balram takes up an immoral route towards financial and social prosperity which qualifies him as a protagonist but not as a hero. Balram is an anti-hero. Thus Adiga's *The White Tiger* cannot be read as an authentic Dalit text as it lacks the true spirit of 'Dalit Chetna' that of giving its character a positive agency and personhood in the wake of unequal, brutal and stone cold class and caste based society.

Being an addition to the tradition of Anglophone Dalit Novel, *The Year of the Runaways* also lacks 'Dalit Chetna' partially. Like Valutha in Roy's *The God of the Small Things*, Tochi too has the gift of physical beauty that attracts Narinder to him but Sahota does not give him enough courage to come out of his untouchable skin and claim Narinder on the equal scale of physicality. He'd not lain with her or held her or touched her the way a man can touch a woman. He didn't know what explained this loose, unstructured love that pumped around his body (Sahota, 2015, p. 440).

Narinder's slumbering body only needs a brisk nudge on the part of Tochi to ignite her physical passion and shed away her skin of duty to family honor and religion as this is very much probable to assume keeping in mind Narinder's not wearing 'turban', 'kara' and 'kandha' any longer and forsaking her visits to 'gurdwaras' right after her year at Sheffield. Tochi with the smartness of mind and the agility of body does not take charge of the situation, although "he allowed himself to imagine kissing her neck" (p. 429). This is because of his too much over consciousness of his untouchability. He swallows all the disgraces hurled

on him silently. Sahota, by showing Tochi succeeding at the auto-rider business; digesting the grief of losing his family in extreme reticence and soberness; earning his ticket to Britain honestly and discharging his duties without complaining; and taking up chances to find love, thus allows him a certain amount of agency to rise from his poverty but does not allow him to mix his untouchable blood with Narinder's to purge himself of his so called impurity and claiming an equal psychological footing with the high caste Sikhs and Hindus. Sahota's this falling short of Tochi from attaining a 'personhood' confirms his novel's placement in the shelf of Anglophone Dalit Novel lacking 'Dalit Chetna' albeit categorized as Dalit Novel by virtue of its portrayal of the Dalit characters.

### **Conclusion**

Despite the constitutional rights of equality to Dalits, for which B. R. Ambedkar had started his struggle in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the situation remains still the same: the 220 million Indian Dalits are mistreated by high caste Hindus publicly, burnt alive and raped brutally. In the wake of such a miserable plight of the Indian Dalits in the Indian society, literary writings with 'Dalit Chetna' provide a site for reclaiming the Dalit 'personhood' as projected by Laura R. Brueck. Although the regional language literatures: Marathi, Telugu, Malayalam, Tamil, Gujrati, Kannada and Hindi, etc., give the agency to the Dalit fictional subjects by showing them standing against the tide of inequality, yet the Anglophone Dalit fictions like *The Year of the Runaways*, despite their being empathic to their Dalit representations, still remain aloof in giving them the heroic agency and supremacy over the difficult circumstances they live in. Sahota's representation of Tochi as a 'chamaar', imbibing the spirit of 'Postcolonial Protest', makes a vital statement on the prevailing issue of 'Postcolonial Subalternization' of Indian Dalits. He makes the readers sympathize with Tochi but does not uplift him to the level of 'personhood' by defying the circumstances and overcoming the unequal class system as well as breaking away from untouchability. Tochi at the end of the novel is still an untouchable selling "paper windmills, and plastic chimes, miniature models of the mandapam and pens topped with the statue of Thiruvalluvar" (Sahota, 2015, p. 465) at the beach of Kanyakumari, the end of India.



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