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Intersections of Oppression: Exploring Caste, Gender and Identity in Yashica Dutt's *Coming Out As Dalit*

Pooja Gothwal[1*], Dr Sonia Malik[2]

[1*]Research Scholar, Deptt. of English and Foreign Languages, Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak,
Email- poojagothwal487@gmail.com
[2]Assistant Professor, Deptt. of English Hindu College, Sonipat, Email-soniaphougat8@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study deploys the lens of intersectionality to unravel the nexus of caste and gender in Dalit women's lives. Through the analysis of Yashica Dutt's memoir *Coming Out as Dalit* (2019), the paper contends that considering the pervasiveness of caste and gender interplay is the sine qua to understand the subjectivities and performativities of Dalit women. In her memoir, Dutt expands on her journey of grappling with her Dalit identity. By interweaving Dalit experiences of discrimination, prejudice, apathy, passing, and shame, she shares her observations on the endemic nature of the caste system in India with a socio-political commentary on significant moments in Dalit history. Unlike other Dalit autobiographical writers who document their experiences on Indian soil, Dutt is a USA-based Indian Dalit diaspora activist throwing her weight behind incorporating Dalit subjugation within a global conversation on marginalization and discrimination. This shift enables Dutt to redefine caste from an inherent, fixed identity to a more fluid and performative concept. Moreover, by bringing to the forefront the intersectionality of caste, gender, and identity, her memoir becomes a powerful medium for unmasking the challenges faced by Dalit women in post-independent India while also revealing their resilience and determination to challenge societal norms and claiming their rightful place in the social fabric. Broadly, this paper aims to examine the more profound understanding of the intricacies of identities and abuse in the modern world by studying the interaction of caste and gender in Dutt's memoir.

Keywords: caste, identity, gender, Dalit, intersectionality, resilience

Background

Amidst the age-old Indian civilization, bubbling with intellectual and spiritual torrents, runs deep an inhuman legacy of caste discrimination, putting the lion's share of the Indian population on the fringes of society. Facing and yielding to subjugation for centuries, Dalits have had at least one silver lining of the advent of the British regime in India, primarily the boon of entry to the education system through missionary schools (Kumar; Rao; Tschurenev and Mhaskar). The light of education brought a paradigm shift in the socio-political perspective of those Dalits who have been fortunate enough to shed off the demeaning and disparaging narratives of Hindu religious texts that assign the Dalits a position at the lowest rung of Indian society. This epiphany of Dalit's continual subjugation finds voice through the revolutionary and modernized outlook of Dalit leaders like Dr B.R Ambedkar, Mahatma Jotirao Govindrao Phule, E.V Ramasamy Naicker (Periyar), Gopal Baba Walangkar, and Shree Narayan Guru which unleashed a sense of self-worth and resilience in Dalits of Indian society. Gradually, they realized that Dalits have been not only ostracized from the social structure but have also been neglected in mainstream literary representations. In most canonical literary works, the issue of caste has been either ignored or overlapped with other issues. Over the years, Dalits have understood the importance of voicing their experiences through arts, primarily literature. Notably, the Black Panther movement in the USA propelled a group of Dalit intellectuals to initiate an unprecedented literary movement, resulting in the Dalit Panther Movement of Maharashtra that emerged in the 1960s. As a consequence of spearheading Marathi writings, Dalit literature soon appeared in other languages through narratives such as poems, short stories, novels, and autobiographies. These writings have

been narratives of anger and helplessness, violence and fortitude, pain and sorrow, humor and pathos, despair and hope. According to Arjun Dangle, "Dalit literature is not simply literature, but it is associated with a movement to bring about change. It represents the hope and ambitions of a new society and new people" (qtd. in Dhangadamajhi 43).

Likewise, the impact of black panthers on Dalit panthers, the black feminist movement, has been a wake-up call for Dalit women. They had a realization that their male counterparts solely encashed the Dalit movement. Dalit women felt relegated to the background in Dalit's fight for dignity and equity. "The masculinization of the Dalit movement and the Savaranisation of womanhood led to the exclusion of Dalit women from this movement and subjected them to interlocking oppressions of caste, class, and gender" (Rege Qtd in Sharma and Geetha 3). Therefore, they joined the bandwagon of change through diverse forms of life writings, giving momentum to Dalit feminism in the 1990s. Dalit women used autobiographies, memoirs, and family histories as alternate historiography to challenge caste discrimination, expose casteism, and counteract the negative cultural stereotypes imposed upon them. These narratives contend that Dalit women belonging to the lowest point of the caste hierarchy experience a compounded form of discrimination that stems from both their caste and their gender. Dalit women face severe social, economic, and political disadvantages that are not fully captured when considering caste and gender in isolation. For instance, while all Dalits may face caste-based discrimination, Dalit women also contend with patriarchal structures within their communities and broader society. This includes higher rates of sexual violence, limited access to education and healthcare, and restricted economic opportunities compared to their male counterparts and women from higher castes (Gupta, Mandal, Sharma). Additionally, the traditional roles and expectations imposed on Dalit women often subject them to greater exploitation and abuse, both within their communities and in interactions with higher caste groups. Dalit feminist autobiographical writers like Bama, Imtiaz Ahmad, Sharankumar Limbale, Gail Omvedt, Anandhi, and K. R. Meera, to name a few, provides critical perspectives on the intersecting oppressions of caste and gender through their personal experiences. The autobiographical annals of Dalit women give an unprecedented and unique perspective on their perils and resistance. This breaking of silence by Dalit women propelled several scholars to reflect on the standpoint of Dalit feminism. (Chakravarti; Datar; Guru; Pan; Rege)

The present study concentrates on the coming out of another Dalit writer and activist with her powerful memoir *Coming Out as Dalit*. Yashica Dutt is an Indian diasporic journalist and writer who lives in New York. She was born in 1986 to a Valmiki (Dalit) family in Ajmer, a city in Rajasthan's northern region. She moved to the United States to pursue her education after spending most of her adolescent years in New Delhi. Her memoir offers a moving perspective on the persistence of casteism in India. Yashica Dutt's memoir *Coming Out as Dalit*, released in 2019, is one of the recent works by a Dalit woman that recounts her own experiences and those of many Dalits who have utilized literary platforms to speak. Unlike other Dalit autobiographical writers who document their experiences on Indian soil, Dutt is a USA-based Indian Dalit diaspora activist throwing her weight behind popularizing Dalit subjugation within a global conversation on marginalization and discrimination. This shift enables Dutt to redefine caste from an inherent, fixed identity to a more fluid and performative concept.

Moreover, by bringing to the forefront the intersectionality of caste, gender, and identity, her memoir becomes a compelling medium for unmasking the challenges faced by Dalit women in post-independent India while also revealing their resilience and determination to challenge societal norms and claiming their rightful place in the social fabric. Along with recounting her trajectory of growing up as a Dalit woman, Dutt exposes the implications of Indian affirmation policies for depressed castes over 70 years after its implementation and challenges the post-caste narrative. Studies have pretty reflected upon the other prominent themes in *Coming Out as Dalit*, such as the reflection of Dalit Consciousness by Bhoot, urban aesthetics of caste by Gurjar and Sristi, Dalit lifeworld by Naik, dalit resilience by Cherechés, rethinking of caste by Jayprakash are some notable readings. However, the perspective of intersectionality in Dutt's memoir has not yet been fully explored. The present study aims to fill this gap by appropriating the intersectionality approach.

Why Intersectionality Matters?

Primarily, intersectionality has its origin in sociology, where it is a research framework that tends to analyze the role of the socio-political status of an individual or group, culminating in a unique form of subjugation or privileges. It contends that the intersection of social identities like caste, class, gender, sex, race, ethnicity, age, height, religion may be both rewarding and demeaning. Black feminist scholar Kimberle Crenshaw is credited for pioneering intersectionality in feminist theory. The introduction of intersectionality to Feminist studies broadened its scope from Eurocentric white women to women from marginal groups like black women, refugees, immigrants, and poor women. Crenshaw's concept underscores the necessity to acknowledge the distinct forms of oppression experienced by Black women, a demographic often neglected by mainstream feminist and civil rights movements that typically address gender and race in isolation. This broader perspective promotes a more comprehensive approach to tackling discrimination and inequality. Using 'intersectionality' in two essays published in 1989 and 1991, Crenshaw illustrated the adverse effects of intersecting systems that give rise to structural, political, and representational components of violence

against minorities in the workplace and society. The ideas of Cranshaw that gender, race, and class, often articulated as separate social categories, are oppressive systems, mutually constructed and contribute to creating inequality finds further endorsement by numerous researchers (Cole; Collins, *Black Feminist*; Walby). Building on similar propositions, Bell Hooks, in her groundbreaking book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984), slams twentieth-century feminism for prominently focusing on white American women's experiences. She espouses that to transform feminism into a comprehensive and transformative movement, the lived realities of non-white women need to be acknowledged. For instance, Hooks argues that black women face dual oppression from both white men and their black counterparts. White middle and upper-class women contribute to the racism experienced by black people, while black men, seeking to uphold their status, further oppress black women. This positions black women at a unique intersection of suffering, as both racial and gendered dynamics in society marginalize them.

Furthermore, Collins's concepts of intersectionality and the matrix of domination propounded in her book *Black Feminist Thought* (2000) provide a comprehensive analysis, highlighting the interconnected nature of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age within social structures. These systems play a constructive role in shaping the experiences of black women, and they are, in turn, shaped by black women. Collins 'Matrix of Domination' analyzes the interplay of caste, patriarchy, and economic exploitation. Collins is concerned with how intersectionality generates various forms of inequality and how these intersectoral factors impact social transformation. Collins believes that intersectionality functions inside a matrix of dominance. An entire society's power structure is called the "matrix of domination'. Every matrix has two features. First, every given matrix has a unique configuration of intersecting oppressive systems. The historical and social context determines precisely what and how these systems work together. Secondly, the four interconnected domains of power—structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal—are how intersecting systems of oppression are explicitly organized. Social structures, including the legal system, political system, economy, and religion, comprise the structural domain; these domains set the structural characteristics that regulate power relations.

As the concept of intersectionality evolved, it was adopted to analyze other intersecting systems of oppression, such as caste and gender, particularly in the context of Dalit women in India. The institution of caste and patriarchy plays havoc in the lives of Dalit women. Indian society, recognized for its patriarchal orientation, is one of the leading causes of widespread violence against women (regardless of social status), as indicated by low literacy rates, high female mortality rates, deaths from domestic abuse, high female malnutrition, and so on (Agusti and Dewi; Arya; Paik). The patriarchal system drew paradigms for women and specific codes according to which they should work and conduct their living in a society, thus making them victims on multiple grounds. The experience of being a Dalit woman is unique and cannot be fully understood by simply examining their identity as a 'Dalit' or as a 'woman.' Dalit women are positioned at the bottom of India's caste, class and gender hierarchies. They experience gender and caste discrimination and violence as an outcome of severely imbalanced social, economic, and political power equations. "In all the indicators of human development, for example, literacy and longevity, Dalit women score worse than Dalit men and non-Dalit women. Thus, the problems of Dalit women are distinct and unique in many ways, and they suffer from the 'triple burden' of gender bias, caste discrimination, and economic deprivation" (Sabharwal and Sonalkar 44).

Unfortunately, the issues faced by Dalit women are often ignored by mainstream feminist movements and the Dalit literary movement, which has historically been patriarchal. As a result, Dalit women remain in the category of "outsider within." The concept of "outsider within" draws on Feminist Standpoint Theory and Black Feminist thought to highlight how the intersection of racism, sexism, and classism perpetuates social inequalities and injustices. In a 1986 paper for *Social Problems*, sociologist Patricia Hill Collins first used the term "outsider within." She further developed the idea in a 1999 piece for the *Journal of Career Development*. Collins created the idea to explain how the historical, particular context of racial, gender, and class inequalities may affect a social group's perspective on the world. For Collins, Outsider-within identities are situational identities linked to particular social injustice histories; they are not a decontextualized identity category distinct from past social injustices that anyone can adopt at will. The intersectional analysis of Dalit women's lived experiences reveals the intertwined nature of caste and gender oppression, shedding light on the unique challenges they face. It highlights how important it is to put laws and programs into place that deal with these related problems rather than viewing gender and caste as separate categories of discrimination. Advocacy groups and academics can more effectively support Dalit women's rights by using an intersectional approach, ensuring their unique demands are considered in pursuing social justice and equality.

Dalit Women Reeling under the Caste-Patriarchy Nexus

Resembling the system of graded inequalities within the caste system, one finds "graded patriarchies" embedded within the Hindu society (Chakravarti 79). The upper caste Indian women might have some shared issues of gender inequalities with Dalit women; however, the women from the privileged class have better life conditions: "On the contrary, the lower social, political, and economic status of Dalit women makes them undergo the rigidities of double patriarchal oppression. One is intrinsic patriarchy, which is the

oppression of Dalit women by the men of their community. The second is the extrinsic patriarchy, which is the oppression and exploitation of Dalit women by the men of dominant castes" (Sharma and Geetha 3). Dalit women are most prone to violence due to caste (as untouchable), class (from upper-class laborers), and gender (men including their caste) factors. Among the Dalit community, despite living in different parts of India and having varied socio-economic backgrounds, the decision-makers for women are family, fathers, and brothers. The Dalit women have no active role in whom/ when they want to marry, what to study, where to study, and what career to choose. In *Coming Out as Dalit*, Dutt recounts the journey of three generations of her family, from her grandparents to her present. Very vividly, Dutt pens down the patriarchal pressure her mother had to undergo, both before and after marriage. Dutt explains:

> Mum's heart had been set on Allahabad University, arguably the best university in Uttar Pradesh at the time . However, Allahabad, which was farther from home, was unacceptable, especially after a distant relative, who was neither a fan of women's autonomy nor quality education, had informed her father that girls at Allahabad University smoked cigarettes and drank alcohol. He suggested that keeping Mum closer to home would make it easier to keep a check on her; unsurprisingly, that idea appealed to her father. (Dutt 4)

When it came to marriage, her maternal grandfather solely decided to marry her mother off to his friend's son without taking the pain of enquiring about the personality and habits of the groom. Her mother felt cornered and oppressed since the very day of her marriage. Dutt recounts that her mother had to spend winters shivering and shaking in a lack of warm clothes because she did not bring winter clothes from her paternal house among her marriage paraphernalia. Moreover, her mother's determination to study is taken as her arrogance; resultantly, she "spent most of her time in isolated corners of the house, as [Dutt's] Dad's family ostracized her for being 'too proud,' 'too outspoken,' 'too confident'" (5-6). Besides, her father escalated his alcohol consumption exponentially after marriage. Mainly, when her mother would sit to her studies after completing a plethora of household chores, he would find excuses to abuse and beat her. Dutt writes:

> He would start drinking early in the evening, and by the time Mum had cooked and served dinner and finished cleaning up, he would be intoxicated. When she returned to studying after he had passed out, Dad interpreted this as a taunt against his relatively low rank in the exam. She testified that he would drag her from the makeshift kitchen at the back of the house to their room, beating her all the while. One evening, when he slapped her, the impact punctured her eardrum. (6)

Dutt's mother tried to seek help from her family, but her father's family turned a deaf ear to her mother's complaints. On the contrary, they tried to convince her mother to linger on with the marriage as her spoiled marriage might affect the prospect of another daughter's marriage in the family. Dutt's mother dreamt of becoming an IPS officer, but her marriage, dealing with her father's drunken abuse, and early pregnancy led to the shattering of her childhood dream, and she ended up trying to kill herself. Dutt says, "She decided to kill herself. Seven months pregnant, she jumped from the roof of the house and shattered her left ankle, damaging it permanently. The pregnancy was declared complicated, and the doctor doubted the chances of her survival" (Dutt 6).

Education is seen as a powerful, uplifting instrument among Dalits and the most effective approach to achieving respectability, dignity, and identity. According to Dutt, many Dalits still endure discrimination once they are allowed admittance and face obstacles while trying to get into specific jobs or educational programs. Dalit children, for instance, are no longer required to sit on the classroom floor, although they are frequently "relegated to the back benches where they [can] be ignored" (79). However, despite severe financial constraints, Dutt's mother was determined to ensure her children obtained a top-notch education. She and her husband were able to finance the girl's education by selling property or pawning jewelry, even though her family and in-laws criticized them for what they saw to be excessive expenditure on education. She consistently prioritized knowledge over material possessions, which was evident in her unwavering belief. Rather than being constrained by ideas of patriarchy, Dutt had a better sense of self throughout her life. After graduating with honors from some of the world's most prestigious universities, Dutt led a fulfilling career. She travels to casteless other nations to convey their story on behalf of many voiceless Dalit women who continue to be suffocated by caste.

The oppressive caste structure, combined with gender discrimination, suppresses Dalit women into abusive positions within the social construct. They are abused by upper-caste men, women, and men from their group. It is not about the household space; Dalit women are at the receiving end in the social caste-gender hierarchy as well. "Caste Hindu men in many regions consider Dalit women as sexual property. Access to a Dalit man's land comes with access to his Dalit wife is a familiar sentiment across the country" (7). Being Dalit women and economically dependent compounds the multifold marginalization of Dalit women, forcing them "on the margins of the margin" (Burke Qtd in Soundararajan xvi). Dalit women often remain in violent relationships due to a lack of financial empowerment. During marriage, girls must leave their own homes and relocate to their husband's home at an early age. This arrangement forces them to leave the security of their homes. Upper caste members humiliate and abuse lower caste members in educational institutions and workplaces. Dalits cannot receive the same level of respect as higher caste/Brahmin individuals. They must work hard their entire lives to gain such esteem. While getting a job makes reaching out to the city space

possible, their success is disparaged as being the result of reservation. "they are regularly challenged to prove their talent without using the 'crutch' of reservation" (Dutt 3). They are continuously gaslighted and induced with guilt for using the reservation ladder to compensate for their mediocrity and dumbness.

The Dynamics of Caste, Gender and Passing

"Hiding one aspect of your identity is like leading a double life. You don't feel like you belong anywhere. You create masks to wear in each of your lives and switch artfully between the two. Eventually, the two blur together and you no longer remember who you were" (xi), writes Dutt, who hid her caste and passed as upper caste for almost thirty years till she came out as Dalit in 2016 through a post on Facebook. Passing connotes to, "disguises of other elements of an individual's presumed 'natural' or 'essential' identity, including class, ethnicity, and sexuality, as well as gender, the latter usually affected by deliberate alterations of physical appearance and behavior, including cross-dressing" (Ginsberg 3). Among Dalits, 'passing' has been a resort to hide their caste identity for a long time. Dutt's narrative is embedded with a well-informed analysis of the trajectory of Dalits in India over the ages. By integrating personal with socio-political, she seems to espouse that personal is political and vice versa when it comes to Dalit activism. Like millions of educated Dalits, Dutt dexterously passed as the upper class. She recounts that since her childhood, her mother made all possible efforts to pretend that their family comes from an upper caste background. Her mother would counsel Dutt to copy the upper caste in her dressing, speaking, and other mannerisms so that Dutt could pass as Savarna easily. Having fair skin, flaunting religious rituals, and speaking fluent English were magic bullets that worked wonders for Dutt to pass as an upper caste. However, the fear of being exposed constantly haunted her; even a slight mention of caste and identity around her would make Dutt shudder. Dutt imbibed this hide-and-seek ecosystem to such an extent that it was a new normal for her. Even having a well-paid journalist job could not embolden her to live her true identity in India. She documents, "The fear that my Dalitness would be 'discovered' made me hate it all the more. I wanted to be like my colleagues who were not hiding, not scared, not Bhangi and therefore better than me" (Dutt xv). It was Rohith Vemula's suicide after Dutt's moving to the USA shook her to the core, and she decides to come out as a Dalit, not just only for her soul satisfaction but also for millions of those who have been living in the same quagmire of caste hiding and gaslighting.

The passing among Dalits pertains to a process of 'Sanskritization.' Dutt represents the journey of many Dalits who have chosen to adopt the customs and lifestyle of higher castes to assimilate more effectively due to the prevalent caste system during the 20th and 21st centuries. This process, known as "Sanskritization.", was first conceptualized by M N Srinivas in the 1950s and revised and reused for decades. He propounded Sanskritization as a conglomeration of a set of practices through which lower caste/tribe willfully conform to the "twice Born" caste way of life. "Sanskritization, also known as Brahminization with some reservations, describes a process of mobility among the lower castes when they try to raise their status in their respective caste hierarchy by adopting Brahminical cultural ideals" (Dwivedi 1). Many found that adopting a new identity was their only chance to escape the generational shackles placed upon them and, more crucially, provide much-needed economic stability. Dalits are motivated to accept Sanskritization for two main reasons. First of all, it provides a way of surviving and a glimmer of hope for escape from the vicious circle of oppression, dominance, and exploitation that characterizes their daily lives. Second, many Dalits might not think that what they are doing is making them feel more oppressed. Ideologies that normalize power dynamics and present the habits and practices of superior groups as the pinnacles of behavior and way of life contribute to this lack of awareness. This is the situation with Dutt and her family, who have tried to conceal their caste to evade persecution. Her description states that it was a "curated performance intended to . . . transcend our lower caste" (Dutt 20). They changed their last names to "get jobs and rent houses" (181), but they had no option. Dutt clarifies the never-ending fear that accompanies it: the worry of being exposed, of losing friends, of being disrespected, and of losing job opportunities (15). Pretending in these situations may seem pointless, but it is a no-win situation because people are penalized for not displaying enough 'upper-caste' features and for refusing to do so, either for being disrespectful or overstepping (11).

Dalit existence can be viewed as a struggle for self-worth and dignity in a caste-based society. Upper castes have consistently robbed them of their sense of self-worth and dignity over the years. Dutt tells how his grandfather dropped their real Bhangi second name 'Nidaniya' when he was forced down of a mare in his marriage procession, how her mother would tell people lies about how she, who hails from a Brahmin family, had been married to a man from Dalit community without her knowledge. She adds that her parents mimicked upper-class habits even though they could not afford it. The performance was to break out from the lower caste. The most embarrassing parade of the year for young Dutt was her birthday party with fairy tale cake, decorations, and invitations to classmates she hardly spoke to. Dutt recalls the incident as "an assertion that we were the 'equals' of the upper castes" (20). Another hurdle to passing as an upper caste was speaking perfect English: "To talk in perfect English with no trace of a regional accent remains the mark of wealth, pedigree, class, and even intelligence in modern India" (21). Sanskritization is not limited to one's personal life. Dutt's experience serves as an example of this phenomenon because, at the age of seven, she was sent to boarding school, where her mother recommended that she should conceal her Dalit identity and adopt upper-caste behavior from her peers. For a large portion of her life, she considered herself a Brahmin

and felt ashamed whenever caste-related issues arose. Living with females from higher castes would expose her to their speaking patterns, hairstyles, and even methods of making beds (26). Dutt's years of pretense caused her to question her value as a student and journalist: "For years after that, this sentiment persisted – no institution that accepted me could be all that good. I was never good enough for anything, and once I became good enough, it stopped being good enough for me." (36).

The Sham and Subtleties of Caste Identity in Urban Space

"'We are post-caste,' we are told. 'Casteism is over.' We are chided for addressing the inequality our Dalitness saddles us with and are sharply reminded of the 'unfairness' of reservation" (xii). The statement, as mentioned earlier by Dutt, sheds lines on the subtle legacy of caste in the so-called modernized-urbanized-egalitarian-post-independent-constitutionally governed India. In *Coming Out as Dalit*, in addition to disclosing the lifetime hiding of her true identity, Dutt explores the intricacies of caste dynamics in the context of urbanization and modern employment. Dutt considers how caste has influenced her perception of the world, even when ignorant, to the extent that she "had stopped feeling its weight or recognizing its presence" (Dutt 13). Caste inequality is still so prevalent in India that Dutt admits she did not click on the Facebook post when she first saw it on the death of a Dalit PhD student named Rohith Vemula because "He was not the first Dalit boy who had died and he was not going to be the last" (13). The text portrays the normalization of casteism and its entrenched presence in the psyche of younger Dalits, exemplified by Dutt. It underscores the persistence of caste-based discrimination against Dalits, even after their transition from rural to urban areas. In shaping identity, urban areas play a crucial role in society, culture, and the societal framework and economic landscape, serving as catalysts for social and economic advancement. However, they are equally vulnerable to the physical divide of caste that results from it. Doubtlessly, urban regions are crucial in forming our economy and society and advancing both socially and economically. They are, nevertheless, equally susceptible to physical segregation that keeps caste differences intact.

This problem is best illustrated by urban relocation, where Dalit families leaving rural communities for greater chances experience new types of caste-based discrimination and exclusion as well as new forms of humiliation. However, as Dutt argues, Dalits still rely on landlords' goodwill to rent their houses. Although it was impossible to forbid Dalits from moving into upper-caste neighborhoods when democracy was established, at least not publicly, Dalits, in Ayyar's words, are "socio-spatial peripheries" (226) because they are caste-bound and frequently confined to impoverished neighborhoods. They were also allegedly refused housing, rental accommodations, and employment prospects. Dutt departed from India to hide her caste identity. Even though she lived in the vibrant and colorful metropolis of Delhi, she feared that her already complicated life would become unstable and that chances may be lost if her low caste was discovered. As Dutt puts it, she said she was "too worried, too weak, too tired, to face the fallout" (Dutt 135). According to Dutt, the problem has shifted from preventing Dalits from going to schools, accessing water from upper-caste wells, or preventing them from entering non-Dalit homes to insidiously holding them back from receiving the affirmative step recommended by the constitution. As a result, casteism has metamorphosed into a more subtle form that primarily operates in social circles and marriage relationships, which are non-binding environments (18). However, as evidenced by the increase in gang-related rapes, lynchings, and honor killings, it has escalated its reprisal against Dalits (44). Dalits have historically been denied opportunities, which prevent them from achieving professional success even in situations when they are not subjected to active discrimination because of their low caste. Dalits continue to face discrimination in one form or another, even after acquiring a job. Dutt notes that Dalits cannot take advantage of the same opportunities as upper cast members due to their lack of connections, especially in the private sector, where networks are crucial to job placement (103).

After the suicide of Rohith Vemula, a Dalit PhD student at Hyderabad University, due to casteist harassment, Dutt openly proclaimed herself a Dalit in 2016. Since then, she has established a forum called 'Document of Dalit Discrimination' where Dalits can share their experiences with caste persecution. Dutt argues that casteism has a pervasive impact in universities. She says, "Application forms get lost in the mail, theses are not approved in time, and scholarships remain stuck in the back offices for months and even years" (70). It is also common for educational institutions to experience allegations of intimidation and discrimination. As a result, many Dalit students commit suicide as a result of institutional bullying, ragging, and lack of assistance, which deters other Dalits from applying (75). She asserts, "This sends a clear signal to young Dalit aspirants that these prestigious colleges have no place for them" (76). Thus, "they should be grateful for whatever crumbs they are thrown" (70).

Seeking Solidarity with Resistance and Resilience

Coming Out as Dalit is a remarkable book confronting prejudices and biases about the Dalit minority in India. It encourages better understanding and empathy for marginalized people, emphasizing the importance of breaking down stereotypes. She discusses the terrible reality of being a Dalit in India and how it impacted her life. Dutt's work strives to raise awareness of India's chronic issue of caste prejudice while also promoting more understanding and empathy for marginalized populations. Dutt started a Tumblr page, a social media

platform where all Dalits hiding themselves through passing could come on a platform to reveal their pains and perils of hiding their caste. She pulled out *Documents of Dalit Discrimination* as her first independent journalism project. Dutt affirms that until she was hiding her caste, it was her weakness; however, the moment she decided to reveal it, she felt empowered. She says, "In a way, I was turning my Dalitness into a gold medal of ancestral pride and suffering. I was going to proclaim openly and proudly that I was DALIT" (xviii). Her platform, along with sharing trials and tribulations of Dalit identity, has been primarily meant to "hear stories of pride, history, and ownership against the emotional, personal, physical, and mental toll of the caste system" (xix). It is a platform to make her fellow Dalits feel and realize that it is possible to be Dalit and proud. Even when she wrote *Coming Out as Dalit*, she asserts, "But I didn't want to tell just my story. I also wanted to tell the stories of all those Dalits that the media and society at large had ignored" (ix).

Therefore, Dutt uses her life story as a testimony to protest the mistreatment of Dalit women under the confines of caste and gender, either glorifying or opposing their gendered presence in public and challenging various stereotypes and biases associated with the Dalit community in India. She shares her personal experiences and those of other individuals who have faced similar struggles to break down these stereotypes that Dalits are naturally dumb and lack skills. Dutt shares her experience of being an educated Dalit woman who worked as a journalist in some of the top media organizations in India. She endeavors to strengthen the belief that "Dalit literature is an emblem of strength, resilience, support and, most importantly, hope" (Dutt 125). To exhibit the power of resistance and resilience in transforming the lives of Dalits, Dutt touches upon the success stories of Dalit political leaders, business tycoons, entrepreneurs, sports persons and social reformers. She closes her narrative with infinite hope. She writes, “I hope that by hearing the voices of those who have to bear its brunt, and those who are putting their lives and livelihoods on the line to fight against it, we can all begin to understand this unequal system and work towards becoming truly post-caste” (Dutt 183).

Conclusion

The study has appropriated the intersectionality approach to unravel the perils of Dalit women in India by incorporating insights from Yashica Dutt's memoir. Dutt's memoir is a compelling illustration of the challenges that the Dalit minority in India faces, with particular mediation of the journey of an educated Dalit woman in the post-independence era. To effectively address the issues plaguing Dalit women, we need a comprehensive approach that acknowledges the interconnected nature of gender, caste, and other social factors that contribute to and worsen these disparities. The paper begins by setting the background for the study by tracing the roots and inspiration of the Dalit literary movement, which was recognized as Dalit Panthers in 1960. Furthermore, it examines the need and rise of Dalit feminism, especially the popularity and role of Dalit women's autobiographical narratives, bringing to light the complexities and dynamism of multifaceted factors such as caste, class, and gender to provide an informed peep into lived realities of Dalit women. This section has prepared the ground for the imperative incorporation of intersectional insights to light the gray area of Dalit women's lives. The second section introduces the concept of intersectionality, its critical thinkers, and the essential concepts. Along with documenting the traces of existing intersectionality studies in the Dalit world, it focuses on churning out the relevance of understanding the interplay of caste and gender with the methodology of intersectionality in Dutt's memoir. The methodological section is followed by detailed discussions picking arguments and inferences from Dutt's narrative under study. These sections pertain to the graded subjugation of Dalit women by the alliance of caste and patriarchy, the passing strategies among Dalits and their repercussions, and the subtle and insidious politics of caste segregation in the so-called modernized space of cities, respectively.

The last section examines the role of solidarity, resistance, and resilience in transforming the lives of Dalit women. Dutt's open activism, mainly through the appropriation of social media space, has been able to bring Dalits all over the world under a shared roof. In this space, they can release their pent-up guilt, hidden identities, and vision for a change. The study finds that *Coming Out as a Dalit* calls for social change, highlighting the importance of campaigning for the Dalit community and using all possible platforms to spread awareness and encourage positive change. Through her memoir, Dutt talks about her path of self-discovery and how she overcame discrimination to embrace her Dalit identity. She encourages more empathy and understanding for under-represented groups—especially Dalit women. The narrative essentially highlights that improving the lives of Dalit women requires tearing down systems of discrimination, questioning deeply rooted social conventions, advancing education, generating jobs, and enforcing legal rights. True social justice and equality can only be achieved when we address the issues of caste and gender together and work to uplift everyone, regardless of their background. In all, Dutt's memoir adds a golden chapter to the Dalit movement for dignity and human rights by transforming invisibility into visibility, silence into speech, shame into pride, acceptance into resistance, helplessness into resilience, and individual suffering into community solidarity.

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