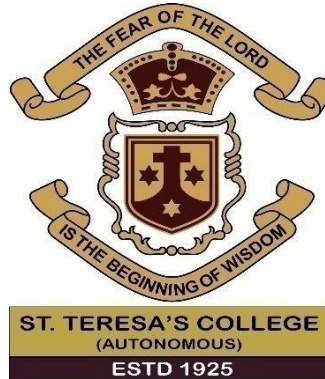


**TRAUMA AND COLLECTIVE VICTIMHOOD:  
A SELECT STUDY OF DALIT MEMOIRS**



*Project submitted to. St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) in partial  
fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS in  
English Language and Literature*

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled “Trauma and Collective Victimhood: A Select Study of Dalit Memoirs” is the record of bona fide work done by me under the guidance and supervision of Ms. Athira Babu, Assistant Professor, Department of English and Centre for Research, and that no part of the dissertation has been presented earlier for the award of any degree, diploma or any other similar title of recognition.

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## **CERTIFICATE**

I hereby certify that this project entitled “Trauma and Collective Victimhood: A Select Study of Dalit Memoirs” is a record of bona fide work carried out by Nayana Mohan under my supervision and guidance.

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An Abstract of the Project Entitled  
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Trauma is a disruptive experience that impacts the individual's identity and formation of their thoughts. Yashica Dutt's *Coming Out as Dalit: A Memoir* contains the History of the caste system in India and caste trauma in her life. Shilpa Raj's Memoir, *The Elephant Chaser's Daughter* looks into the trauma affected life of poor Dalits. The traumas of the two women Dalit writers are healed by education and exchange of experience. The first chapter delves into the theoretical framework of Trauma to understand the importance of trauma narration. The second chapter shows the lineage of the Dalits in India and their relevance in society. The third chapter analyses the first book to identify the author's trauma and her journey to recovery with the help of education and awareness of history. The fourth chapter deals with the second book, to identify the trauma of the author and how she recovered from it through trauma narration and education. The project aims to explore the idea of trauma in the life of the Indian Dalit women and their recovery to achieve self-identity.

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## Introduction

The study of the representation of trauma leads to the identity crisis of Indian Dalit women in the selected works of two contemporary Indian English Dalit writers - Yashica Dutt and Shilpa Raj. The study aims at understanding Dalit women writers' journey of life from trauma-induced life incidents to their self-discovery in the two autobiographical books. The first one is a memoir of Yashica Dutt's *Coming Out as Dalit: A Memoir* and the second is Shilpa Raj's *The Elephant Chaser's Daughter*.

Yashica Dutt's *Coming Out as Dalit: A Memoir* was published in 2019 and was chosen as the winner of the Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puraskar in 2021. The book is a memoir, A memoir as a word was first derived from Anglo-French *memoire*, which meant "written record". Here these Memoirs become the records of Dalit experiences. Through the book, *Coming Out as Dalit: A Memoir*, Yashica Dutt narrates her life journey as a Dalit woman living in the urban society of India, where she was forced to hide her caste, Caste in India is a social construct but is implemented in India for a long period. Yashica Dutt is a 'Dalit' woman. Dalits are known as "Untouchables" according to the Indian context, In the *Sanskrit* language Dalit means "divided", "broken" and "oppressed", they are the members of the lowest social group in the Hindu caste system. A Dalit is born below the caste system, which includes four primary castes: *Brahmins* (priests), *Kshatriya* (warriors and princes), *Vaishya* (farmers and artisans), and *Shudra* (tenant farmers and servants). Here Yashica Dutt in her book explores the journey of being a *Bhangi* a Dalit caste, and how she managed to cover her true caste identity to not get hurt by the casteist society because being a Dalit in India is only seen as someone who is illiterate and belonging to the lowest class possible. This notion of Indian mentality made the Indian Dalit suffer in a social setting. They were ignored and discriminated against in every stratum of society, people of India thus try harder to be like upper-caste people, to not get hurt by the casteist society. Yashica Dutt lives in such a place, she resides in Maharashtra, a part of northern India, where casteist tendencies to discriminate against the Dalits are alarmingly high in rate. She

recalls her memory from her childhood, in which she first learnt the caste discrimination from her family's experience with the outer world. The fragmented narration moves back and forth from her early childhood experience and the understanding of castes' importance in society to her college life in St. Stephen's where she managed to survive the casteism by concealing her true identity as *Bhangi*. Her life changed when she grabbed the Scholarship to Columbia University's Master's program in Journalism, from studying with a culturally diverse group of students she started to understand the reality that caste is "An artificial construct without logic or reason, and as accepted as normal was an unfair set of practices created so that the powerful could refrain their power" (Dutt, 135). Dutt later realized that she didn't have to be ashamed of her Dalit ancestors in a different social setting, surrounded by individuals who didn't think along racist/casteist lines. Instead, the 'upper castes' of India had responsibility for the humiliation and denigration of Dalits throughout to dominate their labour and thereby profit themselves. She connects her identity crisis by explaining the grass-root level identity issues. By analysing Dalit history in India, from understanding the introduction of the caste system in pre-colonial India to the abolition of the caste system led by several Dalit movements including Dr BR Ambedkar's legacy in creating a safe place for Dalits in India. She shares many incidents where Dalits were made victims of atrocities of their caste name, physical appearance and educational socioeconomic level. She also cites the Dalit women's movements. In the end, Yashica Dutt culminates in her book's epilogue, discussing her intention to write the book, and answering why Dalits hide their caste identity. She explains that *Coming Out as Dalit* is primarily an act of bearing witness to what it means to be Dalit in a grossly unfair society. A memoir, it details my own experiences, those of my family and goes deep into the areas of Indian society I am familiar with, as well as those aspects of Dalit society and living that I have been interested in and studied (180).

When Yashica Dutt dedicated the book to entire Dalit students who were Coping with the Dalit identity crisis. She talks about the Dalit situation in Urban areas where the power of money can secure a decent life for Dalits. Shilpa Raj's memoir *The Elephant Chaser's Daughter* as the title



implies explores the living experience of Dalit women who belonged to the poor class of society, where poverty and having trouble making ends meet. Shilpa Raj however doesn't criticise the upper-caste community for what they did to them in a greater deal. She explains: How Dalit lives matter by talking about their cultural, socio-economical, wholesome experience of life she shares her traumatic incidents and her struggle coping with trauma responses like anxiety and numbness which every Dalit woman can relate to. Her rural life in a joint family of Dalit Christians, who keep on following mythical traditions of Hinduism is a reflection of even if their caste is converted their true identity of being a Dalit cannot be changed.

The study is about the impact of trauma in shaping a Dalit woman's journey to the acceptance of self-identity, trauma can be a disruptive experience that impacts the individual's life, it affects the formation of their thinking process and their self-realisation. Trauma is a major term in psychoanalysis. The trauma theory studies the human psyche about the traumatic events which lead to the complex behaviour and lifestyle of humans and the destroyed identity by traumatic experiences which is often unaware. By analysing the traumatic past of the main characters, the character's motivation to outlive their marginalized life in society and trying to get a new form in the world where they can be seen. By putting the Dalit in the centre and their trauma resulting from the upper caste societies studied in a detailed manner. The only way for these Dalit writers to recover from their double trauma is by getting an education and narrating their experience, as well as being a part of a community that accepts them.

The effect of trauma in the life of a contemporary Dalit woman by analysing Memoirs of Dalit writers who are the representative of Dalit women from different parts of India, where the trauma faced by them are evolved mainly from caste and class distinctions. Dalit women are dominated by patriarchy and the caste system in India. The element of trauma is required to enlighten their self-actualization and self-consciousness of such women.

The idea of Traumatic experience resulting from the caste discrimination which affected the Dalit women's journey toward the acceptance of self- Identity is analysed by taking the text *Coming out as Dalit: A Memoir* (2019) written by Yashica Dutt which is based on the life of a writer residing in Maharashtra, India, and *The Elephant Chaser's Daughter* (2017) written by Shilpa Raj Dalit women in Karnataka.

Four chapters constitute this dissertation, The first chapter "Understanding Trauma" shows the theoretical framework of Trauma, and the various psychological and psychoanalytical aspects and theories of trauma are discussed. The second chapter "Dalits in India" analyse the various historical context of Dalits in India and provides details on the significance of relevance in discussing the Dalit community. The Third chapter "Trauma and identity of Dalit in Yashica Dutt's *Coming out as Dalit: A Memoir*" analyses the memoir by identifying the trauma of the author and its effect on her understanding of self-identity and evaluates how she overcame her trauma that is by education and being aware of her Dalit history. The role of Hinduism in inducing trauma is also analysed. In the Fourth chapter "Trauma and identity of Dalit in Shilpa Raj's *The Elephant Chaser's Daughter*" the memoir by elaborating on the effect of trauma on the author and which is mostly rooted in class base distinctions including caste and money. The several rural-based violence and Trauma are also analysed to understand their effect on her identity, and her recuperation from trauma through getting proper education and narrating her experience within the Memoir.

## Chapter 1

### Understanding Trauma

Trauma is a word that originated from 17<sup>th</sup> century Greek, which meant wound. It is a deeply psychological or physical distressing experience, it can also be termed as emotional terror which is resulted from a horrible experience like physical and mental abuse, Trauma may lead to long term neurosis (“trauma”). Trauma Theory is a psycho-analytical study first derived by Sigmund Freud, which analysed a new paradigm of conscious and unconscious functioning of the mind. Trauma theory emerged in the 1960s when atrocities against women and children were recognised for identifying the post-traumatic stress disorder in war veterans. The psychic scars in the mind of people as a result of genocide and torture was earlier under this theory, Freud diagnosed the internal conflict of the women to understand but turn down their experience of incest in the formation of trauma. Freud analysed the pathology like recurring nightmares and flashbacks due to traumatic war experiences (Mambrol).

To understand the relevance of trauma theory in society, it is important to access how trauma is inflicted upon by dominant people. Understanding the aspects of how an “Ideology” works are important, in the case of Dalit life, caste works as an “Ideology”. Famous French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser examines how the term ideology formed. In his essay, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” he says that Ideology exists to educate and practices particular to them. We are indeed entitled to say, ideology exists as devices and practices particular to them. He states “that ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (Althusser,1). Althusser in his essay examines how the ideology of ideology works, he talks about the two components of the state. A Repressive state apparatus, which includes the army, the police, the courts, the prisons and enforces class domination directly and the ideological state apparatuses (ISA) which comprises religion, family, church, sports, politics. Repressive indicates that the state apparatus in question “functions by violence” at least ultimately (since repression, for example, administrative

repression, may take non-physical forms). Repressive state apparatuses belong entirely to the public domain. The difference between the ISAs from the Repressive state apparatus is, that the Repressive state apparatus functions by violence, but secondary functioning by ideology. Ideological apparatuses function predominantly by ideology, but they function secondarily as Repression. This double “functioning” by violence and ideology, is provided in everyday life.

Althusser in his theory coined the term Interpellation. It is a way in which ideas get into our minds and have an effect on our lives, so much so that cultural ideas have such a hold on us that we believe they are our own. Interpellation is a process in which we encounter our culture’s values and internalize them. Althusser explains interpellation works in a way, that he calls interpellation hailing. Ideology “address” people and offer them a particular identity which they are encouraged to accept. They're not forced to accept by the way of violence, but they're mostly assigned by one’s culture that they're entitled to accept them. It acts as an invisible process. Interpellation is the idea that we reproduce to think, act and react in certain ways. Gender role interpellation is an example of this, it can be gender affirmative roles assigned to women like cooking, and taking care of babies, wearing feminine clothes. We are interpellated from birth, and assigned specific roles that society has created for us.

Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud's creation of psychoanalysis paved way for the theory of the understanding human psyche, for the therapeutic relief of mental illness and he gave a structure for the interpretation of culture and society. When he postulated the hysteria and its traumatic origins, he understood the sexual abuser’s impact on children. He held a view that sexual abuse was not harmful to the child unless it resulted in unconsummated excitation. Freud theorized that the effect of trauma from childhood will leave an imprint on the unconscious mind of children and that memories of being a victim will get activated when they’re confronted again with a similar traumatic incident in the past. He cited the term “repetition compulsion”, by this he means that repeated effects of trauma affect the ability to deal with challenges in everyday life of the victim of trauma. He believes that

repetition compulsion is an attempt to relive the passive traumatic experience, this kind of repetition causes more suffering and problems in the mind of people. Freud in his introductory lecture on psycho-analysis states that the childhood sexual experience of a person will not be registered in their mind at the first encounter as sexual trauma, but only after the second experience, after the puberty that gives a sense of the impact of the original experience. This happens only due to the child's inability to understand the original traumatic experience, which they later understand.

Gregory Bistoien et al in their work on Freudian theory, argue that the imprint of trauma is what Freud called "mnemic traces". This trace shows the connection between the original experience of trauma and the second experience of trauma, it's only when the subject experiences the second time, that they construct the "trauma". The connection between the second experience and the first experience makes the first experience stimulating or *cathected* as by Freud. This leads to the point that having a trauma narrative from the family or from understanding the scenarios around them makes the retrospective construction of trauma in mind. After world war I, Freud studied the role of trauma in hysteria by writing the book *Beyond the pleasure principle*, he made a comparison between the symptoms of traumatic war with hysteria's symptoms due to earlier ideas on the role of childhood abuses in hysteria patients. His ideas and studies on trauma are useful to study the individuals who faced the catastrophic experience of world war I. Freud elucidates the term "trauma" as stimulation from the outside that is powerful enough to break through the protective shield, the mental mechanisms can no longer prevent itself from being overwhelmed with a large amount of stimulus.

In the article "What is psychological Trauma", the author of the book *Multiple personality disorder from the Inside Out*, Esther Giller explains psychological trauma as by Pearlman and Saakvine "The uniquely individual experience of an event or enduring conditions, in which, the individual's ability to integrate his/her emotional experience is overwhelmed, or the individual experiences a threat to life, bodily integrity, or sanity" (qtd. in Pearlman & Saakvitne,60). According to Giller, trauma can result from powerful one-time incidents, natural disasters, crimes, surgeries,

deaths, and other violent events. Psychological trauma can also be a response to repetitive experiences like child abuse, neglect, combat, urban violence, concentration camps, battering relationships and enduring deprivation. Trauma is only defined by the experience of the survivor, the trauma survived by one person will be varied from another person's trauma. Giller explains single blow trauma as single shocking events, they're natural disasters, criminal violence like rape, homicide, and robbery. Single blow trauma-affected person can be experiencing the symptoms of mental illness for a long period. Giller also explains natural and man-made violence, natural stressors are natural disasters, while Man-made violence can be classified as human rights abuses, criminal violence, Rape, Domestic Violence, Child abuse and sexual abuse. Physical abuse is one type of trauma-inducing reason, where violence towards others like abusing children's self-injurious behaviour, suicide attempts and a variety of emotional problems. Witnessing the abuse can also be traumatic for people, for example witnessing their loved ones getting abused physically or mentally gives a stressful condition to the witnesses mostly children. Sadistic abuse is also an interpersonal violence calculated cruelty can be far more terrifying than impulsive violence. Trauma survivors are people who suffer the effect of violence, their coping mechanisms to abuse and neglect are different and complicated, interpersonal trauma doesn't discriminate on conditions like gender, race, class, size, or sexual orientation.

The effects of trauma on a person can be substance dependence and abuse, personality disorders, depression, anxiety, eating disorders etc. People who suffer from PTSD which is Post Traumatic stress disorder often got affected by a traumatic event. Doctors focused on the symptoms or behaviours without a context. Once the traumatic event is over, the person's reaction to it is not, the past comes in the present of the survivor who gets a re-experiencing, this is the main element of psychological symptoms and psychiatric disorders. This type of intrusion may come into the mind of the survivor in the form of intrusive memories, flashbacks, nightmares or overwhelming emotional states. The several adaptive coping strategies of survivors of early traumas are dissociation, avoidance

and numbing, they're only effective for a temporary period but they later interfere with a person's ability to live the life she wants. Giller in her article says that,

Chronic early trauma - starting when the individual's personality is forming— shapes a child's (and later adult's) perceptions and beliefs about everything. Severe trauma can have a major impact on the course of life. Childhood trauma can disrupt basic developmental tasks. The developmental tasks being learned at the time the trauma happens can help determine what the impact will be. For example, survivors of childhood trauma can have mild to severe deficits in abilities such as self-soothing, seeing the world as a safe place, trusting others, and organized thinking for decision- making avoid exploitation. disruption of these tasks in childhood can result in adaptive behaviour, which may be interpreted in the mental health system as “symptoms” for example disrupted self-soothing can be labelled as agitation, the disrupted ability to see the world as a safe place looks like paranoia, distrust of others can be interpreted as paranoia, disruptions in organized thinking for decision- making appears as psychosis and self-sabotage. (Giller,6)

The trauma can be divided into many types based on the traumatic experience, PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder is an effect of trauma-based violence, the symptoms of PTSD can make the patient's mental health, physical health, work and relationship into having an adversely negative impact. People with PTSD have trouble maintaining a job and are unable to trust people, they have difficulty controlling their emotions. People with PTSD are more prone to catch other mentally affected diseases like depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, and substance use disorders. Trauma affected people often deal with the problem of the inability to express themselves properly and sometimes their communicative skills, like organising and participating in particular activities often end up in failure because of their constant reminder of negative self-talk. People with PTSD might not be able to realise that they're struggling with PTSD until the symptoms become nearly unbearable. The many coping strategies of PTSD are mainly categorised into seeking group-based

support, community meetings and online groups, by spending time with people who understand their situation with empathy and respond mindfully will be making a healthy coping mechanism for people struggling with PTSD. Practising mindfulness through prayer, meditation can be helpful, exercising is helpful to people with anxiety to relieve their anxiety thoughts and ease the depressive mood. Talking with a therapist or professional counsellor creates a safe place for relieving the emotional issues of people who suffer from PTSD.

Mathew Tull in his Article “Coping with PTSD” suggests that “keeping a journal is another safe practice of relieving stress, Research has shown that people struggling with PTSD can find benefits in keeping a journal, including decreasing flashbacks nightmares and intrusive memories, helping them slowly reconnect to people and places that they may otherwise want to avoid”.(Tull) Tull says that people with PTSD often have problems in relationships as they can have stress from financial challenges managing symptoms dealing with crises loss of friends or loss of intimacy. Finding the trigger causing PTSD is important in the life of PTSD patients, people suffer from both internal and external triggers, feeling lonely, anger, sadness, feeling vulnerable, memories, Physical pain is an example of the internal trigger, while external triggers can be places that remind you of the traumatic event, certain people, smells, anniversary, holidays, news program. PTSD also paves way for coping with unhealthy behaviours that smoking, using alcohol, and drugs, inflicting pain on others, lack of exercise etc.

The article “Sexual violence and Trauma in childhood: A Case report based on strategic counselling” states that “The disclosure of the trauma is hard because of feelings of shame guilt and intimidation by the perpetrators and the wish to not burden the family. The stigmatizing response by the social environment influences the development of shame and guilt linked to sexual victimization as a result of sexual trauma is also connected to the feeling of being blamed or judged” (Saladino et al. 2). By this statement, we can understand that sexual trauma often results in the abusers escaping



from the legal punishment or shame because victims of sexual assault don't complain or react against such action only because of the mentally affected trauma.

Cathy Caruth is a pioneering figure in present-day trauma studies, in her *Unclaimed experience: trauma, narrative and history*, explains the experience of trauma in today's world, and how we can recognise the history not based on experience and reference. She understands that trauma is one emotional event which can destroy the psyche of human beings and their identity. Caruth states that trauma will have a huge impact on one's understanding and how one linguistically generates it. She states that internal changes to the psyche change one's identity. The understanding of one's trauma is beyond their comprehension as it's invisible. Cathy Caruth in her psychoanalysis literature theory understands the importance of trauma experience. Instead of formulating a thesis in the psychiatry of trauma from the trauma survivors, she analyses how the reflection on trauma and its effect on individuals are caught in the language of trauma and the trauma narrative by studying the narrative of catastrophic events in Hiroshima. Cathy Caruth in her traditional trauma model studies consciousness in relation to language. She elucidates Freud's theory on trauma further on from the pleasure principle. She discusses the major arguments of trauma theory from the beginning of its formulation of theoretical trauma. She also shows the connection between individual and collective trauma, on the importance of literature and theoretical aspects of trauma. Christa Schonfelder in her book *Wounds and words* looks back at the idea of trauma examining how a factual approach will elaborate the studies of trauma theory. In her book, she analyses Trauma studies and becomes relevant to literary and cultural studies. The important literary works from people like Cathy Caruth show how Trauma studies became an academic discourse in connection with general and media discourse. Literary texts and their fictional worlds allow for nuanced engagements with the subject of trauma, which is often personalized and metaphorized at the same time. Literary approaches to trauma, then have the potential to engage the reader's powers of emotional identification and sympathy on the one hand and critical reflection on the other. (Schonfelder,29)

Trauma fictions in literature thematize the repressed people, Trauma fictions, non-fictions and novels validate the self-narration and self-representation in literary structure, which allows the author to expound their self-reflection and different perspective on writing about trauma. “Trauma narratives raise important questions about the possibility of verbalising the unspeakable, narrating the unnarratable, and making sense of the incomprehensible” (30). She evaluates Cathy Caruth’s *Unclaimed experience*, which initiates theorizing trauma by giving a sceptical point of view towards narration. Caruth says that traumatic narration leads to the opacity of the “truth” of trauma leading to its ineffectiveness in showing the real trauma. For Caruth, trauma is represented in texts by gaps, silences, and the repeated breakdown of languages. She is more focused on the “new mode of reading and listening that both the language of trauma and the silence of its mute repetition of suffering, profoundly and imperatively demands” (9). Caruth in her studies explains a notion of transgenerational trauma and the transhistorical aspect, how a victim passes their trauma to others and that trauma can pass across time. Thus, we can conclude trauma and its transhistorical aspect that a cultural group’s traumatic experience in the historical past will be aligned with today’s individuals who belong to the same cultural group. she also says repetition is the main point in trauma writing. In the text she keeps fixating on the “repetition compulsion” referring to Freud’s term, it’s one of the features that makes the trauma a repetitive one. Caruth’s conclusion on traumatic ‘cure’ is the mixing up of experience into the therapy.

Understanding Trauma narratives is important to pave the knowledge of the relationship between trauma and traumatic healing. Caruth conceptualizes trauma as a “history of trauma” (18) and as a history determined by “indirect referentiality” (18) she uses trauma to portray the universal features of history, understanding it makes the trauma studies make way for understanding history. Caruth’s approach to trauma studies is through cultural diagnostics on trauma. Cultural trauma is mostly analysed and compared with individuality. Caruth in response to Freud’s theory states that trauma cannot be located in the body of the subject or their past, but only can be identified when

they're repeated. Caruth's questions of what trauma is "trauma as a figure of thought, an image, or a metaphor can reveal about literature, culture, and history respectively" (Schonfelder,36). The memoirs discussed the studies by analysing the Dalit trauma, focusing on the crisis of identity, and how the traumatized people reconstruct their life constituting the psychological study of trauma.

Racial trauma is another stress-based trauma affected racially, it is mostly affected by indigenous people, people of colour, who experience racial discrimination. Racial trauma in generic terms is affected mostly by African Americans, also by ethnic-racial groups, indigenous groups, this trauma is due to humiliation, shameful events, racist slurs by society etc. Racial trauma is a part of historical trauma as a result of genocide, colonization, and slavery. The symptoms of racial trauma can be identified as similar to PTSD, the recovery of racial trauma is achieved by psychotherapy, and group counselling and the effect of trauma may cross generations. As racial trauma affects a group of people who belongs to a certain category similar to racial trauma a new term like Dalit trauma can be identified in the Indian context, Dalit trauma is caste-based oppression and discrimination faced by the Dalit community, ranging from sexual abuse to microaggressions, it makes the community left behind with a broken psyche. Dalit community's trauma is passed from generation to generation as the particular traumatic event is continuing in the society. Dalit trauma symptoms vary from the racial trauma and psychological trauma, they face difficulties like unhealthy attachment styles, intra-community violence chronic anxiety etc. Often Dalit trauma isn't discussed vastly like racial trauma. The sad reality leaves the traumatized Dalits left unspoken. When Racial trauma is passed down to every other race, trans-generational trauma is often left unspoken.

The concept of transgenerational or intergenerational trauma originated in the decades after WWII. It was then that various studies proved that children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors demonstrated certain symptoms of trauma. Nightmares and emotional and behavioural problems showed that the original trauma of the grandparent or parent had far-reaching effects. (Sabater)

It is also stated that “The descendants of the person who suffered the original trauma will not necessarily develop the same disorders. They will, however, be much more vulnerable than other people to anxiety, stress, and depression” (Sabater). This proves that Dalits can develop certain traumas passing down from one generation to another without ever knowing.

In the light of Althusser’s ideology of Interpellation, where an assigned role is given to the submissive people in the dominant world, they’re assigned by the culture, they are presented in such a way that we are entitled to accept them. When analysing the personal experience of people from different ethnicity other than the dominant one. Kaima L. Glover represents the identity of the Caribbean ethnicity and shares her views on racial interpellation and expresses her experience of being called racial words in her life as.

Each and every one of us has a story that falls somewhere on the continuum of that denial—a painful moment of misidentification, dismissal, or (inadvertent?) insult. Racialized interpellation yes. We’re calling it “microaggression” these days, though the prefix feels oxymoronic. Insufficient. Whether we’ve made it through tenure or not (and this matters immensely, yes), we cannot help but know and *feel* ourselves to be singular, exceptional, and odds-beating—and not in a good way. Each of us remains largely in the footnote, well-aware of our isolation and precarity. (Glover)

Racial interpellation exists in the society, where the marginalized community is often thought with their assigned roles rather than understanding their true identity. People who in past were racially discriminated against are still being name called or falsely identified, this effect can be interpreted in terms of racial interpellation.

A National Family Health survey in 2006, showed that “The prevalence of violence is much higher against women belonging to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes as compared to women outside these categories” (Sujatha). In the article “Experiences of Dalit Women Redefining Domestic Violence” writer Sujata states that domestic violence occurs in all socio-economic and cultural

population subgroups, and all societies and there are countless studies on this subject. However, the domestic violence experienced by Dalit women has not caught the attention of social science researchers to date.

In the general discourse, the experience of Dalit women of violence in the family tend to be treated (i) as a legal issue by the law and order machinery; (ii) as a violation of her human rights by women's right groups, Dalit rights and human rights movements; (iii) as an insignificant issue compared to the violence that Dalit women face in the public spaces (for example violence by the dominant castes such as killings, atrocities, stripping). Even in the activism and discourse around domestic violence, the specificity of violence faced by Dalit women largely remains unrecognised. (Sujata)

This makes way for the understanding that Dalit women facing trauma will be highly alarming in rate than women from other communities. They face atrocities both in their household and in public, which makes their life traumatized and full of struggle, unable to raise their voice as theirs are unheard even in the current society.

Trauma as the term was made aware to the common people by the inclusion of trauma studies in the literature. By giving more importance to trauma as a by-product of politics and history. French philosopher Catherine Malabou, who coined the concept of “Plasticity” in philosophy, studies the need to understand trauma, which will improve intellectual among people and she explains how critical trauma studies open up the way to analysing every social system, by reading a particularly traumatic event experienced by the author, the reader themselves are involved in the healing process of trauma.

Literary society most importantly studies the concept of trauma and its significance from the studies done by Cathy Caruth, J. Brooks Bouson, Suzette and Laurie Vickroy. The trauma studies incorporate the many foundational ideologies and approaches like postcolonialism, feminist theory, and ethnic studies are integrated and formed to study the various degrees of trauma in literature. J.

Brooks Bouston studies the effects of trauma and keeps focusing on the cultural experience and traumatic memory. Bouston's work *Quiet As it's kept* shows the trauma affected by the African American community in Tony Morrison's novels. Vickroy analysed the narratives of trauma in contemporary novels, pointing at the argument that an individual psyche of the character shows the collective emotional experience of the social group in *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*.

Understanding the effects of trauma on identity and memory as individual characters and their life, their culture created a link between the collective traumatic experience and the traditional model of trauma. Trauma's origin is also identified linguistically, to provide a view of the psyche and identity of people with the help of a narrative of traumatic memory. Understanding the cultural background of the individual or a collective group and their trauma gives the accounts of reality such as rape, war, slavery, racism etc. Thus, we can come to the point that trauma works in groups not only with individuals, the curing of trauma also happens within the safe place of a community or group.

## Chapter 2

### Dalits in India

The term Dalit is coined by India's most prominent and influential Dalit activist Jyotiba Phule, the founder of *Satya Shodak Samaj*. The term Dalit which means in *Sanskrit* 'broken' was later used to represent the whole community of outcastes and untouchables from the pre-independent India. They were one of the depressed caste people who were victimized by the upper-caste society through the archaic practice of religion. The Aryan invasion theory shows

The origins of untouchability can be traced back to the times when the Aryans invaded India around 1500 BC. They looked down upon the indigenous people as culturally and racially inferior. While some of the indigenous people escaped into the jungles, the rest of them were subdued and incorporated into the Aryan society as inferior castes. (Mondal)

This Aryan Invasion theory is now debunked but used to be a prominent theory upheld by European Orientalists. By the traditions of Hinduism, and the inscription of *Manusmriti*, certain classification of groups under the base of the so-called inferiority and superiority begins. In *Manusmriti* four varnas are explained as in Hinduism. *Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras*. Which led to the development of the caste-based system in India. Yashica Dutt in her memoir, which also recollects the historical aspects of Dalits shows how the hierarchy between Dalits and upper-caste emerged, by quoting Aloysius states that "To include ascriptive hierarchy, which unequally ranks different castes to create unstable power structures, and its overall validation by Hinduism, to explain the system of castes" (Dutt,13). The caste system considered the Dalits as people who don't have to enjoy any privileges of society and was pushed to slavery, by giving them no right to education, no entry to temples, their socioeconomic position was endangered due to the caste system, if they tried to come out of it, the upper-caste people who hold the power punished them. The Dalit conversion from Hinduism to Christianity began in the early 1850- to 1950. Dalits were already suffering from Hinduism and its practices of untouchability, by the process of converting to other

religions, they found a better spiritual life with the help of Christian missionaries. Even if they got converted, the conversion failed to curb caste identities among Dalits, caste continued throughout their life.

When talking about the history of Dalits, it's important to note the major reformation led by Dr B.R Ambedkar who was the eternal icon of Dalits in India. Ambedkar had a huge role in the abolition of the caste system in India. His speech which was later published as *Annihilation of Caste* the book is a remarkable success in providing powerful concepts on eliminating the caste system from Indian society. From 1924, onwards he led many reformations against untouchability, he organized various marches to assure basic human rights to Dalits, which were previously rejected to them, drinking water from public resources. Ambedkar and his fellow protestors led a march to the public water reservoirs and water tanks to drink as a form of protest because Dalits were denied drinking water from the public water tanks. Ambedkar was against all kinds of religious texts which showed the implications of caste, he led a march and burnt copies of the *Manusmriti* as a symbol of protest against Hinduism. His impact on having a separate electorate for untouchables was opposed by Gandhi as it would divide the Hindu community regardless of the opposition. Ambedkar agreed to the Poona Pact that "Scheduled caste got reservation of one hundred forty seats rather than seventy-one seats in the legislative assembly. Ambedkar's fight against the caste system made most Dalits from being freed from the untouchability and made them stronger to face the Indian society, through the implementation of proper education and reservation. Even if Indian Dalits got their freedom from the caste system, the invisible form of the caste system preserved through microaggressions still follows. They're not eliminated from the dominant society where upper-caste still got the power, the cases of atrocities against Sc- St people are the evidence of this.

The formation of Dalit Panthers made a mark in the literature of India. In Indian literature, the voice of the upper caste Hindus is often heard, and Dalits remained silent this was changed by this union of social organization. The formation of Dalit panthers broadened the Dalit poetry and stories,



where traumatic experiences and caste-based discrimination were often the major important subject. Autobiographies, poems, songs, and memoirs, by Dalit writers, created a new literary study in Indian society. Dalit literature's ultimate aim is not to create hatred among caste, but to make them aware of their history and problems which are useful for their exploration of identity from a voiceless to an opinionated community.

There are many theories which focused on the origination of Dalit literature tracing from Buddha to Mahatma Phule and the icon of Dalits, Dr B.R Ambedkar's literature. "Arjun Dangle's *Poisoned Bread: Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature* and Sharankumar Limbale's *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature*, Gangadhar Pantavne's *Sahitya; Prakurti aani Prawruti* (Literature: Nature and Form) Dr Sada Karhade's *Dalit Sahitya Chikitsa* (Dalit Literature: A Critical Study) are important books that provide a deep insight into Dalit literature. There are also other books by eminent Dalit writers that help to study the nature and history of Dalit literature" (Jamdhade, 87). Anna Bhau Sathe is a Dalit writer who portrayed the contemporary Dalit life through his novels, his protagonist was an embodiment of protest and reformation towards all kinds of discrimination. Dalit woman autobiographical narrative holds an important place in Dalit literature, it shows the status of Dalit women who had to face the double oppression of being a woman and being a Dalit is put into the writing of heart-wrenching experiences, Dalit woman writers like Bhama's *Karukku*, Shantabai Kamble's *Majhya Jalmachi Chittarkatha/ The kaleidoscopic story of my life*, Urmila Pawar's *Aaidan/ Weave of my life*, Kumud Pawade's *Anthaspot/ Thoughtful Outburst* and Vijila Chirrapad's *Adukala Illatha Veedu/A home without a kitchen* and *Amma oru Kalpanika Kavitha Alla/ Mother is not a poetic figment of our imagination*, shows this double oppression and inequality faced by Dalit women. Through Dalit literature, the Dalit authors discuss the religion and Identity, and give hope to the Dalit community through their writings, by the way of narrating their trauma, grief, aggressions from the society and the way of communication through their texts they created a progressive stand to revolt against all kind of dominance inflicted upon them.

## Chapter 3

### Trauma and Identity of Dalit in Yashica Dutt's *Coming out as Dalit: A Memoir*

Yashica Dutt is a New York-based journalist who writes on gender, identity and culture, her book *Coming out as Dalit: A Memoir* shows a critical account of how the caste system affects Dalits. Yashica Dutt's *Coming out as Dalit: A Memoir* is a historical account of Dalit atrocities and discrimination faced in Indian Dalit communities. The book also shows the life experience and memories of Yashica Dutt from her childhood to the present. The book is an open invitation to Dalits to come out as their true identity because they were dealing with traumatized experiences in their life and fear of judgement from the upper caste people in India. She answers why she hid her caste identity by pointing out her life experiences facing micro and macro aggression and discrimination from the upper caste community. In the book, the traumatic experience which is prevailed and followed in the Dalit households as per the author's memoir is due to the racial trauma which was in effect controlling the thinking and narrative of the author's mind. Dalits in India were facing racial trauma, which can be shown as “caste trauma”.

In the article “Racial Trauma: Theory, Research and Healing: Introduction to the Special issue”,

Racial trauma is a form of race-based stress, which refers to People of Color and Indigenous individuals' (POCI) reactions to dangerous events and real or perceived experiences of racial discrimination. Such experiences may include threats of harm and injury, humiliating and shaming events, and witnessing racial discrimination toward other POCI. Although similar to a posttraumatic stress disorder, racial trauma is unique in that it involves ongoing individual and collective injuries due to exposure and re-exposure to race-based stress. (Diaz,1)

Racial trauma here affected the life of Dutt from early life, she explains that as a Dalit kid “I had to work harder so ‘they could overlook my 'inferiority’, I couldn't pause to recognise my ‘triumphs’ or take it easy now and then because then I would fall behind and they would still

respecting me” (Dutt,54). Dutt was conscious about her image outside and how she was perceived by the upper caste people because if they found out if she was a Dalit she would be marginalized and had to face discrimination from her peers. Even after Dutt was appointed as paid fashion journalist her inability to believe in herself due to her poor educational background and her poor living condition was mentioned in the book. “I wanted to do a good job and prove to my editor that she had done the right thing by assigning that piece to me. But as I started working on it, it became clear that I neither had the experience nor the vocabulary to tackle it” (97).

As a Dalit identity, the Trauma experienced by Yashica Dutt is paralleled with the historical trauma which can be found in Indian Dalits, in her accounts of historical incidents she states about the inability of Dalits to accept the mere privilege of drinking water is traced in her memoir. She states the incident of *Mahad satyagraha* “The *Mahad* municipality, where the conference was underway, had also passed the same resolution, opening its *Chawdar* tanks to Dalits. Despite the legal order, Dalits were hesitant to use the tank for fear of harassment” (9).

Domestic violence and the effect of trauma faced by Dalit women were discussed in Yashica’s book, where her mother was a constant victim of such atrocities by her alcoholic father, and their effect on her life already ruined her identity. The alcoholic consumption of men in the family was majorly affected by women. Dutt’s mother whose only demand for a husband is being a teetotaler was broken, learning her dad’s fondness toward alcohol after their wedding engagement. She just adjusted herself to accept him as her husband, which later resulted in the almost separation of their marriage due to dad’s drunken abuse, along with the collapse of childhood desire to join IPS which almost made her mum decide to kill herself when she was seven months pregnant. She tried to jump from the roof and shattered her ankle, leaving permanent damage. She says this Domestic violence in Dalit households was common.

She often faced discrimination from her mother due to the thought of how the outside people see her as Dalit. Dutt’s mother was ostracized by the Indian standard of beauty and way of life that

made her force her daughter to live like an upper caste, who look fair-skinned and have Eurocentric features. Dutt explains her facing the colour discrimination from her own mother “I was born a light-skinned child who grew up to be progressively darker until my skin tone was the same as Mum's. This became a constant source of anxiety for her” (30). This skin colour discrimination not only persisted in her house, but it was also the standard norm in the Indian beauty industry like in the world of fashion, modelling, and film. Dutt got appointed as a fashion model only due to her Indian look shows how Indian patriarchal society looks down upon Indian Dalit women and their indigenous features. She says “While u never confirmed to Eurocentric standards of beauty that help with entry into the world of modelling, fashion and especially films, I turned out to be useful for events that required more ‘Indian’ looking girls” (67). She also states that the reason behind her mother's motive to make her look stylish so that she can be fit into the ideals of prestigious women. She states “In a culture where Dalits are still attacked for flaunting a moustache or wearing jewellery, having style is also a subtle code for being upper caste. It was only during the years of covering fashion that I understood that Mum's stubborn emphasis on looking stylish was so that we would look upper caste” (98). She said she was poor-fitting into the group of upper-caste children, in their manners, physical appearance and lifestyle, to be like the upper caste, she wanted to be like an upper-class woman and neglecting her own Dalit identity is shaming Dutt's own life. She recollects a memory from her childhood where she and her brother were shamed for being the daughter of a menial worker.

Looking back, there was no shame in our parents working hard to feed and educate their children. But at that time, my siblings and I felt ashamed. The internalized shame forced my sister and me to hide what my parents did or lie about it. And when people like my brother's classmates found out and teased him, we didn't defend them. We had been transcending caste most of our lives, but now that we no longer had the armour of being middle-class, we felt vulnerable. Even more than not having enough money to buy food or clothes, losing that seemed like the biggest tragedy of our lives. (54)

The Dalit inability to express their selves and emotions can be a result of racial trauma, in her life she expresses the constant inability to express her joy in her childhood she also cites another experience of facing discrimination from the society and how her trauma led her to believe she's useless and not good enough only due to her Dalit caste identity.

“Even when I became the secretary of the school council (I became its president the following year, something Mum had hoped for) I hid it for weeks— I didn't feel like I deserved to be congratulated or celebrated” (57). This rigid insecurity of being a Dalit grew with Yashica as she went to study at St. Stephen's College, she explains her experience of school life and how she associates with classmates. “I grudged them their easy lives. I never managed to make friends with them, mainly because of my insecurities and issues with self-worth. My frustration welled into a deep sadness and ultimately became what I now realise was a dark depression. This darkness persisted until I took a job in a call centre after my first year (Dutt,62). The trauma following throughout her life from childhood to younghood is an example of how Dalit women's Trauma is a non-ending one, and how the trauma grew as they age.

“Ideological State Apparatuses” a term coined by Althusser in this framework shows how certain Ideologies work in society. ISA works as a consent among individuals. By ISA the major ideas and norms practised in a society like traditions, religions, institutions, and politics made an impact on the individual mind by conditioning certain attitudes and behaviours. The propaganda of many firms and ideological institutions is provided within this device. For example, women behaving in a certain manner like wearing feminine clothes, bearing a child, and being pretty always is an ideology spread by the system, which shared the dominant idea of patriarchy. In Dutt's life, we can see this ISA, she states that women in India were made to believe that their skin colour and beauty must be made like “whites”, to dupe make them fit into the European beauty standard. The history of colonialism which led to the European standard of beauty is instilled in Indian society, along with the caste system the upper castes praised this European standard and started discriminating against the Indian ethnical

quality. These ideas were made to create a foundation of thinking. This foundation led by upper caste people was made to discriminate against the Dalits who couldn't afford the same lives as them due to their economic condition and caste system.

Dutt's mother has an important role in deciding her into feeling inferior due to her caste, her mother was passing down the transgenerational trauma. "It refers to a trauma that is passed from a trauma survivor to their descendants" (Marschall). Dutt's mother passing down her insecurities and traumatic projection toward her daughter is one example of how transgenerational trauma works in the Dalit household. "Trauma transmissions involve subjective and familial experience of trauma, in which shame, fear, anger and other affects reinforce a sense of being bound to a body and subjectively and socially confused within it" (Atkinson,9). By this statement, we can see that the shame and guilt invoked by her mother created trauma in the mind of Yashica, which made her adopt the psyche of her mother, she believed that to be accepted in society one has to be an upper caste and should leave all the traces of Dalitness from their body and mind. Dutt's mother was ostracized by the Indian standard of beauty and way of life that made her force her daughter to live like an upper caste. She only wished for her daughter to not go through the same emotional trauma which was experienced in her life, to make her devoid of that miserable life, she unknowingly created the same complex psyche in the mind of her daughter. Throughout the memoir, her mother's adoption of certain habits of upper caste can also be a parallel with the today's Dalit people who adopted the Hindu way of life in India.

The ideology of Althusser here can be used as a paradigm to correlate with the ideology of the West and Indian ideology. While the dominant ideology of the Europeans or the West is still centred on the racial background of the community, generally, whites are considered the dominant race who ideologically rule in the existing post-colonial world. While in India, the dominant ideology is instilled by the upper-caste. The dominant caste enjoys the power of economic strength, political power, and ritual purity as their religion is based on purity. Upper-caste is numerically less numbered

when contrasted with the Dalit population, but still, they convey their ideology by the way of ritualistic and religious - traditional models. These further make the submissive castes from being subjected to their ideology of upper castes being superior and the submissive caste as inferior. As the world revolves around this caste dominant ideology, the Dalits have no option other than choosing to live like the upper caste by striving hard within their limited economic system, at the same time facing problems from the caste system in their professional - educational and religious strata.

The trauma affected by the Dalit people can only be retrieved from themselves by sharing their experiences in groups who understand their real problems, who can recognise the same problems or as adversely affected by the same problem will be the cure the existential trauma which lingers in the mind of affected persons. Dutt recollects her first memory of sharing the most secret information in her life that she's a Dalit to a friend as follows:

If there was anyone, I was going to tell my secret to, it had to be her. But in those few minutes as she waited for me to tell her what it was that was making me so nervous, I was fifteen again, back in that moment when my friend's parents had asked me about my caste. I was back on that school bus where my friend who had found out my caste was refusing to look my way. I was worried: what if Parul turned away too?

Hesitantly, I told her I was from a lower caste. I still couldn't say the word '*Bhangi*'. 'This is your big secret? You sounded like you had killed someone.' She called me crazy, laughing uncontrollably for a few minutes. As my shoulders relaxed and I saw that Parul's feelings towards me hadn't changed, it occurred to me that maybe not everyone was going to hate me for my caste. (132)

Althusser's idea of interpellation can be traced to this traumatic event of Yashica, from the example we can see Yashica was almost traumatic about her caste identity, and she fears being called by her caste '*Bhangi*'. Because her caste is mostly appointed with the definition of non-valued human in a casteist mind. Her own lower caste identity was subjected to the state apparatus, in this

case, the upper caste became the dominant ideological construction. To explain the traumatic event of Dutt, we need to know how one becomes a subject. Althusser gives an example of interpellation. The police officer shouted out “Hey, you there!” in public. Upon hearing this exclamation, an individual turns around, and “by this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*” (Althusser, 174). By realising that he is the one being addressed, the person recognises his subjecthood. It’s worth mentioning that he has a dual subjecthood: the law considers him as a social subject, but he is also subordinated to the law.

Dutt recollects her first acceptance of being a Dalit among a group of people during her studies at Columbia University, during her coursework of breaking down the frameworks of male dominance and white superiority in movies and popular culture. The black, Latino and queer classmates of Dutt often talked about their experience of racism, discrimination and abuses, their openness and their response instead of reacting to it Dutt found herself comfortable in sharing her identity, she shares her experience,

But as I began talking about how the caste system affected my life and the lives of millions of others, my classmates were shocked They did not understand how I had not seen that this was a deeply unfair system As I spent my life trying to be as upper caste I could, questioning why my caste was considered lower didn't even occur to me. But the horror and righteous anger of my classmates helped me see that I had been cheated— into believing that my caste was ‘low’, that being lower caste was shameful and, most importantly, into accepting that the only way I could progress in life was by pretending to be upper caste. (135)

From this moment onwards Dutt realised how the caste system is a made-up construct with no logic or rationale, she shared only when she moved to New York, that made her learn to accept her own identity as a Dalit woman. Writing as a way to cope with trauma-affected life is also an insightful way which made Dutt realise her own identity is not inferior or demeanour, and by writing ‘Identity Essay’ for her application to Columbia Journalism School.



I wrote about my caste, about growing up *Bhangi* and learning to hide it. The shame I had carried around for twenty-seven years slowly started to vaporize with each click of the keyboard, I chose my words cautiously, running through a list of excuses and explanations in case someone I knew were to read that essay. But by writing what I had buried all these years, somehow, I wasn't all that ashamed of my *Bhangi* caste anymore. As I read what I had written about the struggles of my grandfathers, I even felt a little proud. Maybe it wasn't so bad to be *Bhangi* because people in my family had not only stood up to discrimination but also somehow managed to move past it. For a few precious minutes, I felt an unfamiliar combination of triumph and self-worth. (131)

After spending a year at Columbia, the same institution Dr B.R Ambedkar studied, she learned more about race, class, and colonialism, and understood that it was her time to accept herself as a Dalit. Learning about Ambedkar and the history of annihilating the caste system, she considered Ambedkar an icon for Dalits. Dutt says that the inability to accept the Dalitness due to the notion that upper caste as the superior one is similar to white supremacy dealt by Black Americans, she states that it's parallelism between internalized racism and internalized casteism. The life of Dalit women, as represented by Yashica Dutt in her Memoirs explains how she recovered from her traumatized experience and livelihood in India and how she embraced her true caste identity without considering it as a lower caste, but a social construct which was given by society, in this Ideological perspective, her caste becomes a part of her identity. But in the end, she believes in that identity not by blaming its assigned lower status, but by claiming it as a sign of her pride as their community revolted against the cruel caste system. As mentioned above, she became proud of her identity as a '*Bhangi*', taking a different approach to seeing caste as an embodiment of self-worth. As she dealt with most of the micro-aggressions and Interpellations associated with caste, her understanding of history made the traumatic past interrelated with herself but positively in the end. She recovered from the early trauma of her childhood by the way of education and constant effort to chase her dreams. This proves the fact

that Dalits' life in India can only be liberated from the casteist society by the way of learning their history and getting a proper education. They had to live inside the system and survive to fight against the system. The act of narrating her own story will also give way to her recovery from the trauma, and by conversing with the community through the medium of writing she shares her traumatic experience and through this narrative, she takes control of her own identity.

At the end of the book, she states how she managed to move out of the trauma and find herself being Dalit, and accept her identity by understanding Dalit history by the way of joining Ambedkarites groups and how she identified her own Dalit culture that was often not portrayed in the Indian society. She answers the question of what made people like her hide their Dalit identity, Dutt at the end of her book, states that

We leave behind our food, our songs, our culture and our last names, so we can be 'better' and 'purer', more upper caste and less Dalit. We don't leave our Dalitness behind just so that we can blend in more easily. We do it because sometimes that's our only option. We change our last names so we can get jobs and rent houses. We lie about our caste so our friends, classmates and teachers don't think we are lesser than them. We learn their habits so no one can use our Dalitness to make fun of us. (181)

by answering the question, she finally accepts herself as Dalit as her true identity by overcoming the trauma by acknowledging, educating, agitating, and expressing their true identity as Dalit. With the help of trauma narration, Yashica Dutt found her safe place in sharing the traumatic stories and experiences, also by including her trauma-affected thoughts she explained the mind works of Dalit women. She found her way out of the microaggressions and being a Dalit in a congested society, through her therapeutic way of explaining her traumatic experience with the other community who shared the same psyche of trauma. This happened only due to her composition in the educational area. She used to struggle to make an impact in journalism but made an impact in society by writing this memoir. Narrating her stories made the people understand her trauma. Here trauma acts as

collective trauma, a term more articulated by Cathy Caruth. In this, she shares that collective trauma works in a group where they share the same trauma within a transgenerational and transhistorical domain. Here Yashica shares her trauma by implicating the trauma affected by Indian Dalits in general through her memoir, which eventually led to the resharing and recovery of trauma, which eventually leads to a shift in perspective in moulding her identity.

## Chapter 4

### Trauma and Identity of Dalit in Shilpa Raj's *The Elephant Chaser's Daughter*

Shilpa Raj is a Dalit author who began her career in writing at the age of sixteen. Through her book, she offers a first-hand account of what it is like to be a member of India's social underclass today. During the writing of this book, Shilpa Raj became interested in human suffering and how it may be alleviated. She hopes that through writing and documenting the bitter truth of the lives of individuals who are often neglected or overlooked in our society, especially Dalits will share the harsh reality faced by them with others. This book contains Shilpa's detailed description of the 'Two Universes'. The first is her life at *Shanti Bhavan*, where she learns, lives, and dreams of a good future. And from the other part, she paints a society in which people like her father, grandfather and grandmother are expressed through a Dalit narration which was depicted in trauma, yet it showed the beautiful life of being a Dalit person. The book offers an optimistic outlook on the life of a traumatic Dalit girl, who got departed from her family to a care home where she can learn and get better life rather than suffering from the discrimination, poverty and sexual abuse which was often faced by Dalit women in rural areas.

Shilpa Raj's Memoir is filled with the effects of the trauma-based life of a Dalit Christian from a place called *Thattaguppe*. As a Dalit Christian, her narrative of trauma is slightly different from the life of a Hindu Dalit in urban areas. She discovered her Dalitness from her lineage from her maternal grandfather who was considered *Shudra*. She talks about her origin as a Dalit from her family's ancestors her grandfather, He earned his living by doing jobs like skinning animals, making shoes, and burying dead bodies. She learned the way of casteism by learning it in her school, and the landlord implemented casteist prejudices. Although they were affected by casteism as reflected in their poverty-driven rural life, Raj talks about a childhood full of freedom. The Dalit journey of Raj takes another path when she was deported from her village life to *Shanti Bhavan* school for children who couldn't afford proper living, they were nurtured and educated by the school authority. Her early

traumatic incidents stem from her departure from her family. She constantly talks about the feeling of her mother who couldn't let her go but was hoping to get a living because in her rural village it was almost impossible for a girl child to be independent and educated to pursue a life that they could dream of. But her family was unconcerned about the kind of future that holds their child's happiness and future, but they were relieved to hear the children will be taken care of, and study without paying any fees. Her departure to the school created a terrific feeling for her mother, she picked up her daughter and tried to run out of the gate of the interviewing place, but was defeated by the resistance of her father. She recollects her memory of departure from her family:

Seeing Amma heading his way, he snatched me from her arms and rushed back to the hospital, Amma struggled to keep pace with Appa, pleading with him. She wept in desperation, trying to tear me from his grasp. He was too strong for her even to slow him down by pulling at his shirt from the back. When nothing worked, she yelled at him, accusing him of indifference to me in the past. I was her love, her life's greatest pleasure, and she couldn't put me at such great risk if what the other women were saying was true. Appa was in no mood to listen to what he considered merely the usual talk among foolish women. (Raj,20)

This is the first traumatic incident in the life of Shilpa Raj. She suffered painfully, she didn't even understand what was happening to her mind, she explains her early traumatic experience as "I was frightened to be alone, and longed for the security of my mother. I would have given up all the dolls in the world to be with Amma again. I banged my fists against the wooden door and yelled at the top of my lungs, 'Amma! Appa! Get me out. Take me home!'" There was only silence from the other side. No one came to open the door" (38). The separation trauma which is implicated here impacted the life of every Dalit child who had to leave their home at a younger age, for child labour, and being with a relative's family, here in Raj's life she was taken to a care home. In his article "The impact of traumatic separation on a child's developing brain". Hasbrook says that the Caregiver

attachment relationship and have a huge importance in the child's development which results in their adult functioning.

She is frightened to be alone, struggling to contain her sadness and loneliness is shown in her recollection of her memory of her crying and banging her fists against the wooden doors. These major incidents decide the relationship between the father and mother to the child. This early departure from the family made her behaviour change into something terrible; she became more angry and violent. She became referred to as the hot-tempered girl child in *Shanti Bhavan*, Raj talks about the identity that gave by the caretakers "Miss Christina, a tall, fair-skinned Anglo- Indian woman whose gentle nature had won our hearts, joined us. She had nicknamed me the 'fighting hen' because of my reputation as a feisty, hot-tempered girl who constantly got into fights with classmates" (56). Trauma affected children reacting negatively is often a major problem in their identity-making process. When Shilpa's mother went to Singapore for doing a job as a maid, it struck her hard that her mother went away from her without saying any words, this was another turn in her traumatized experience. She says, "As days passed, I turned quiet. I was often immersed in thoughts of Amma, hardly speaking to anyone or asking for anything. The mere mention of my mother's name triggered an immediate burst of anger. Even kavya, as little as she was sensed my moods and kept away from me whenever I was upset" (62).

She explains another mood change in her:

The anger towards her spilt over to everyone around me, I transformed from a cheerful, friendly and curious girl to an enraged, rebellious, and defiant child. In the dorm, I often fought with other girls over simple matters like having a seat right in front of the television during video classes or insisting that I get to wear the clothes I liked best. My temper became impossible. Former friends didn't want me on their soccer teams or in their debate groups. No one did. (79)

“Hurt people, hurt people” is a statement that can be used to analyse the situation and this sudden behaviour change in Raj, she was hurt by her mother's departure without her knowledge, to induce the hurt she got, she spewed the same hurt to the people who did nothing to her. She later says that her identity crisis of who she was started from here, and she decides to accept her identity as perceived by others.

Trauma from Domestic violence is mentioned all over her memoir, from her father's and mother's life and also from her own experience dealing with domestic abuse. She learnt her first witnessing of domestic violence when she was a child, her family pursuing a life by making *sarayam*, (a distilled alcoholic drink). Domestic abuse of her people from policemen and others was common to her mind, she cites an incident of her father being a victim of domestic abuse. “Any man who was taken later by the police would not be seen for a month, and only after he returned would the village learn what had happened to him. He would have only grave cautions to share with his neighbours. Continue making *sarayam* and you will spend your nights in a cold cell. You'll stay warm from the thrashing you get” (Raj,13). When taking this instance in the light of the Althusser's 'Ideology'. The constant force of the Repressive State Apparatuses is by the way of dominant force implied in this case of Shilpa Raj's father getting thrashed by police and also her entire family was the victim of being subjugation of police force who used physical violence as an act of power to control their lives. They had no other way to live, rather than depending on the alcohol business. From this example, we can understand that the police force is using physical violence, but never goes to the extent to file a case, this proves that the police force as RSA shares the 'ideology' of the dominant caste, who managed to keep the Dalits under their state of despair and poverty by inflicting physical abuse and not acting as an agent of service to provide the welfare of the Dalits. Here in this form of RSA, Dalits merely become the 'outcast' subjects of the state ideology. They became the submissive community who are made to be subjugated by the dominant class or caste in India. This proves the fact that the

upliftment of Dalits is not going to occur as they're being the subjects, and their assigned role as lower caste is the only thing that makes them part of the society.

The domestic abuse her father got from illegal alcohol making cites as an example that her father was a victim of substance abuse at an early age. Her father shares his first using substance from his childhood. Shilpa asked, "Appa when was the first time you drank? When I was five", he replied instantly. Five? I bent over my notebook. "Yes. My uncle wanted to see me drunk. He promised to give me a piece of jaggery if I gulped down a whole glass," he said, laughing" (99). To Shilpa Raj the *sarayam* making and selling was a common job of her family. She didn't understand anything that her family was run into trauma from substance abuse, and domestic violence, for them their caste and poverty made them do the illegal and self-destructive jobs, it was a common job for her community as well making it a part of her traumatized identity.

For being a mischievous child at *Shanti Bhavan*, Shilpa Raj had to face much domestic violence, which was acknowledged late, it was common for children to get mistreated and physically abused by their parents which made them feel they were entitled to get punished if they're behaving badly, Shilpa Raj says about the domestic violence she faced from her caretaker. "Aunty Shalini dealt with my bad behaviour by slapping me. The official school rules didn't permit staff to hit children, but none of us ever complained, since we were used to our parents beating us with belts and sticks. "I deserve this, I told myself every time I received a hard slap on my face or was banned from watching the Sunday night movie" (80). Shilpa only realized her domestic violence when the caretaker was removed from *Shanti Bhavan* by Dr George. When she found out she had been verbally abusing and doing corporal punishment to children, even if she understood that she was being a victim of violence and had deep hatred towards her she couldn't believe that Aunt Shalini was gone from her life, she was emotionally attached to the abuser.

"The departures of Mrs Law and Aunty Shalini were hard to fathom. For the next several days, it was the only topic of discussion among staff and children. We were afraid that no one



was experienced enough to fill the void. These two women had been in my life ever since I entered the school at the age of four and, however, complicated the relationships, I would miss them”. (197)

Domestic violence which was faced by her mother was a trans-generationally handed trauma to her by the family. In her family, the husbands can beat their wives without any hesitation, they will not be seen as bad people, as they had the upper hand in marriage. This domestic violence in the family often left with trauma in the mind of women facing it, she cites her experience understanding the trauma which leads to suicidal thoughts, and Raj cites her experience. From Cathy Caruth’s view of trauma about how the victim of trauma passed down the same effect of trauma to others. Cathy Caruth had said that trauma can proceed along with generations and certain historical events leave behind the main imprints of traumatizing a whole community to the coming generation as; “history, like trauma, is never simply one’s own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other’s traumas” (*Unclaimed experience*,24). In the case of Shilpa Raj, her mother was affected by domestic violence, before her mother, her grandmother was the one who was the victim of domestic violence in the family. In their family, where they believed that husbands had the right to slap and rule their wives, she has learnt a new perspective of trauma from these words from her grandmother. Shilpa Raj recollects her family history, who was the victim of domestic violence from the patriarchy. This can be a possibility that led her to be a victim of sexual abuse from her uncle Naresh and kept silent about that incident because she didn’t know it was wrong. In her book, she shares an experience of domestic violence faced by her mother and her mother’s constant coming of suicidal thoughts and attempts, Shilpa Raj’s mother was a victim of these trauma caused by domestic violence.

The conflict between my parents was the worst part of being home. They simply could not get along with each other, fighting over everything. On several occasions, when their quarrels turned ugly, Amma threatened to take her own life. Once she tried to hang herself from the wooden rafter of the guy but was stopped by Grandmother who came running when I yelled

for Francis to fetch her. Another time, she folded the few series she owned into a bundle and screamed that she was going to run away and if Appa managed to track her down she would kill herself by jumping into a well. It was clear she had lost all hope for the kind of life she thought she might be able to lead after working abroad. I was living with the constant fear of when the next crisis would erupt. (210)

Her mother's suicidal thoughts stem from domestic violence as a result of man-made trauma. The trauma dealt with her mother was trans-generationally transmitted mentally into the life of Shilpa, from her early life. She says "Like my mother, I desperately wanted to escape. When she was very depressed, she tried to kill herself. The first time I felt the blade against my wrist, the pain was quick and sharp. The sight of blood felt real and something in me began to feel real too. I wanted more but was frightened" (151). This suicidal thought and inflicting pain on themselves as a result of psychological Trauma that in the case of Shilpa Raj was also a transgenerational trauma. Trauma from sexual abuse was the main problem faced by Dalit women and all Indian women in rural India, they constantly became a victim of sexual abuse from upper-caste men, and their households, educational institutions, workplaces etc. Shilpa Raj's trauma from facing sexual abuse was from her uncle Christ Raj without any consent, her traumatized numbness from facing a traumatic experience like sexual abuse was stated in the book. She explains the feeling after getting sexually abused as follows

My body turned numb. The sound of his heavy breathing overtook all my senses. I couldn't think. Suddenly a streak of light shot through the room. He quickly pulled away and settled in his original position on the cot. I looked up to see Divya standing at the door with a kerosene lamp in her hand. I exhaled with relief. I didn't know whether I was more anxious or ashamed. For the moments, I just hoped Divya hadn't seen us. I didn't know what she would think. (136)

Shilpa Raj couldn't express her complaint of this sexual abuse she faced without any consent, because it was a family member who abused her. The inability to express her traumatic incident was the main problem Shilpa Raj faced in her household. The effects of trauma come as different sets of symptoms often as flashbacks, dream form, and sudden numbness when facing the reality, Shilpa all over her memoir talks about this constant flashback she had when she was confronted with a similar traumatic experience in the past, and also when she was facing bad life due to the effect of trauma. Bad dreams and flashbacks were the main symptoms of trauma in the life of Shilpa Raj, when her mother left for Singapore without informing her, she dreamed of bad things. She says her caretaker told her that she woke from nightmares on several occasions calling for her mother. She also suffered from a dream when she was at her own house, when her father was thrashed by goons, she dreamed severe bad dreams. She says that. "That night I dreamt of ruffians entering our house, throwing plates and pots out onto the road, and scattering Amma's faded saris all over the floor. I woke up screaming, and Grandmother had to hug me tight and place a wet cloth on my forehead to cool my fever" (119). The memory of being traumatized as she was getting a feeling of abandonment is her first experience of trauma, but the trauma was getting repeated in a sense that it made the trauma a permanent one in her psyche. "The experiences of the past that break through the protective layer of the mind and ruptures the psyche re-enacts itself through repeated nightmares and dreams" (Narayanan,31). This can be validated by taking the study of Cathy Caruth a theorist of trauma who mentioned trauma as "An overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, the uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (11). The memory and flashbacks are the after-effects of trauma in the mind of the traumatized people, they formed in the unconscious mind to attempt a recovery of trauma from the original experience, this is the mind's technique to heal the traumatic incident by trying to give a clear insight of trauma. Caruth says that "For the survivor of trauma, then, the truth of the event may reside not only in its brutal facts but also in the way that their occurrence defies simple comprehension" (155). Caruth also says that this form of trauma recapturing will allow the wound to

heal, but she prefers the transformation of the trauma from an unclear memory to a narrative memory that will heal otherwise. “The transformation of the trauma into a narrative memory that allows the story to be verbalized and communicated, to be integrated into one’s own, and others, knowledge of the past, may lose both the precision and the force that characterizes traumatic recall” (153). This proves that writing about Shilpa Raj’s journey from childhood to adulthood, made her recover from most of the trauma.

The self-identity crisis which was resulting from the trauma was strugglingly overcome gradually by the efforts of peers and her father figure DG of *Shanti Bhavan*, school gathering conducted by DG was filled with emotional yet optimistic life lessons, his speech always inspired the students. Shilpa Raj also was influenced by DG. She says DG reminded her of Atticus from her favourite book, *To kill a Mockingbird*, she says he educated her “To remain strong and fight for what is right, but never at the risk of violence” (218). DG’s affirmation of a beautiful future for the hopeless children residing in *Shanti Bhavan* has influenced Shilpa Raj in her journey of discovering her self-identity. She explains “The upbringing I had in *Shanti Bhavan* brought me self-confidence and self-worth. I could not even consider walking out through the gates of *Shanti Bhavan* without saying to myself, I shall follow the lessons I have learnt here all through my life. I will not entertain the thought that I am intrinsically inferior to anyone else” (227). Shilpa Raj’s upbringing in *Shanti Bhavan* made her a product of dual identity as a Dalit woman, she was urbanised in *Shanti Bhavan* learning the English language, getting educated and facing the real world with hard work and determination, while her rural life in a household was mostly hounded in violence and abuses, the little things like her relationship with her sister Kavya and Father made her look at the positive aspect of living as Dalit, the trauma-induced life was challenging to Shilpa, but her culture as a Dalit Christian living in a rural area with the immense amount of love and relationships with grandparents, cousins, and sisters and her wandering to the forest with her father made her more optimistic towards life that, It made her realize that it's not bad to live as a Dalit. Living with *Shanti Bhavan* children and

having a positively influencing teacher like DG made her forget caste discrimination. She says from an incident when she was told by her father to not enter the kitchen of an upper-caste man, her attitude towards that was different, she says “I knew what he meant, that lower castes were not allowed to set foot inside, but I ignored his warning. While my father waited on the doorstep, I walked through the entire house. I wanted to know everything about the landlord’s lifestyle. My courage stemmed from what I had learnt at school — that everyone is created equal” (227).

Even when she recovered from the trauma of childhood to become an independent woman, her life did not become the same after the unnatural death of Kavya, her sister’s death was the major traumatic event in the life of Shilpa Raj, says “I was frightened. I had seen my friends in the neighbourhood lose family members to murder, suicide, and illness. But in my own family, I had never seen death up close” (5). The book begins with the situation of her sister’s death, Kavya was a fourteen-year-old teenage girl who fell into the trap of bad men, who in her grandmother's words got tricked into the acting in ‘backyard movies’, and eventually committed suicide by hanging herself. However, the real truth regarding her death, whether it was a murder or suicide remains a mystery. The inability to communicate their feelings and function normally after a traumatic event is an indication of a trauma-affected life, Raj’s father who had lost a sister to a strange death, was saddened deeply by the pain of their own daughter’s devastating death. The experience further made an identity problem for Shilpa Raj and her brother Francis. Shilpa is attempting to recover from the trauma of her sister’s death, while Francis is still suffering from grief. Shilpa talks about her struggle to recover from the trauma of her sister’s death “I have finally gained the inner strength to resume my studies in college. Ms Denny and Ms Jayantha Shree take care of my needs, ensuring that I follow a steady routine and do well in college” (Raj, 239). She also talks about the influence of DG in recovering from the traumatic past.

Shilpa Raj’s journey to her acceptance of dual identity as an urbanised Dalit from a rural family by recovering from a traumatic past was well explained in the book, her trauma is mostly caste

induced trauma even when she left Hinduism, she still suffers from the early casteism. The trauma in her life shaped her into writing her Memoir, *The Elephant Chaser's daughter*. The Memoir is a nod to her acceptance of being a Dalit woman who was influenced by her community and familial relationship. As a Dalit woman, Raj was ostracized both by the caste dominant society and patriarchal society. Even if she was affected by poverty, her main issues of trauma stem from the patriarchal values upheld by her family, her grandmother's stories about their family background and the struggles of women which includes the amount of suicide, including her deceased aunt and her sister shows the reality of Dalit women who are both oppressed by the caste system and also the patriarchal system, both of the suicide was attempted as a result of cruelty like physical abuse and shame from society. When Shilpa's journey shows the successful life of Dalit women, who overcame their struggles and insecurities with the help of education and support from a community, the other Dalit lives like Kavya's shows another reality of Dalit women who faced problems from the family and the society. When Shilpa Raj was able to afford an education, kavya hoped for it, but never got it and her life ended up in a disaster leading to her early death. The double effect of trauma from the caste system as an ideology and the male-dominated society's Ideology disrupt the lives of Dalit women in general. As a Dalit woman, Shilpa was both ostracized by Dalit men and casteist society, which is evident in the Memoir. As this Memoir shows the real lives of rural people by picking their experiences. It is evident that rural Dalits live in danger from both the casteist and patriarchal world. The double trauma as resulted from this shows the reality of women like Shilpa Raj. Moreover, their identity as Dalit Christians also shows the double marginalization faced by them in society. As Dalit Christian, they converted to Christianity in the hope of salvation and a safe place, but their life only changed in their ritualistic and traditional practice, but the imprints of caste trauma and the assertion of insecurity as a Dalit remained the same. The poverty-driven life of Shilpa is an example of the problem faced by people who got marginalized in the community.

## Conclusion

The impact of trauma on the lives of Dalits varies according to different cultures such as being a Hindu Dalit and a Christian Dalit, their geographical and regional differences, such as being a rural or urban Dalit. Yashica Dutt's story reveals the trauma that indirectly runs through her entire life, she embodies the sufferer of urban Dalit trauma. The psychological trauma that deepened from her childhood upbringing like facing discrimination from her family members, being forced to look like and behave like someone they're not, witnessing domestic violence and substance abuse created a mentality where she couldn't believe there is a world where she can breathe and be happy in her skin. The several transgenerational-trauma passed down from her parents and dealing with daily news of traumatic incidents of Dalits across the world devastated the mentality and identity of Yashica Dutt. It is through understanding the outside world where caste is not practised that she learns the caste system is a construct of people who believed that they had superiority over others. She is in the community where she was accepted as herself and communicating and sharing their experiences of discrimination and trauma have the main role in making her understand her self-worth and acknowledging that her caste is not as bad as other people portray.

Shilpa Raj's Memoir depicts a different Dalit experience, which is hidden in Traumatic occurrences such as mysterious death, witnessing and facing domestic violence from early childhood caste-based crimes, and isolation from family, these traumatic incidents contribute to Shilpa Raj's discovery as a woman recovering from trauma. She investigates the trauma of her forefathers and father, as well as their decision to pursue a life of quality even if they're having trouble meeting two ends. But the optimistic outlook of Dalit society cannot always end in happiness as they had to witness a fateful event of death or cruelty from the discriminating cruel society. Her delight in learning at school doesn't allow her to forget about her life in the village. Shilpa Raj's transformation from Dalit to trauma survivor was solely due to her having the benefits of education, which provided her with a place to vent her trauma, by being in a community where everyone is treated as equal, and

getting a space to write, narrating her traumatized experience to the outer world to relate and understand. But her brother's inability to achieve the recovery is a mirroring today's Dalit life, who fails to understand their trauma-induced life and protests against it only due to a lack of recognition and opportunities and the neglect from society, by not providing basic rights like the right to education and right to live.

By examining the suffering felt by both urban and rural Dalits, a face of woman's Dalit agony emerge, Yashica's mother is the true representative of women who face the perilous condition of women in India. Trauma generated anxiety in the lives of Dalits leads to oppressed women being obedient wives to their husbands and exploiting their children's lives to make their minds feel better. But Shilpa's mother's journey from a domestically abused woman to an employer who earned money and has the guts to fight against her domestic violence is another set example of Dalit women in India. Thus, the two memoirs depict the reality of Dalit's woman trauma and elaborate on their suffering which can be seen as normal and micro to the outward society, but in reality, is a devastating experience to the victim/ survivor of trauma. The transgenerational aspect of trauma is a fact that all over the world Dalits experience their collective trauma as being a part of the Dalit community. It is only by the availability of education and having a space to narrate their traumatic experience that they healed from their traumatic wounds. We can see this by analysing the two Memoirs of Dalit women, and their journey from being "broken" to a powerhouse of wisdom and quality is a true survivor story of these authors.



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