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Sexual Violence against Dalit Women in India
Navigating discourses of honour, shame and marriage

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Sexual violence against Dalit Women in India:
Navigating discourses of honour, shame, and marriage

by

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Author's declaration

I, Sundeep Sunny Mangat, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

This thesis uses intersectionality, Dalit feminist theory and social constructionism inquiry to explore how Dalit women's experiences are shaped by India's sexual violence discourses in the context of their family and community and the state. The empirical research was undertaken through multiple qualitative methods to facilitate triangulation and examination via discourse analysis. All the participants were located in Delhi, India. The research began with participant observation and four focus groups (22 participants) that provided the researcher a 'way in' to various Dalit communities. Dalit women's experiences of sexual violence were then elucidated through 28 qualitative interviews with Dalit women who had been raped by men.

The project draws on Foucault's notions of resistance, regulation, governmentality, and subjectivity, with the women's narratives revealing the different ways in which Dalit victims of rape negotiated between 'talk' and 'silence' when describing their experiences of sexual violence. Their lived experiences of such violence suggest that their subjectivities were shaped by practices of regulation that were exercised through discourses of 'protection', 'honour' and 'shame'. Examining how the participants spoke about the 'self' in the context of their experiences also reveals how those experiences were shaped by socio-political institutions. The participants discussed two main social institutions in relation to their rape: caste and marriage. Being Dalit made them more vulnerable to rape, and the consequence of rape jeopardised their future marriage potential. This thesis argues that Dalit women's experiences of sexual violence transcend their 'spoiled identities' (as Dalit women), consequently experiencing further exclusion, humiliation and exploitation from their own families and communities. Consequently, Dalit women are extremely vulnerable to greater exploitation and regulation of their bodies.

Dedications

For my beautiful, smart, brave, kind, and energetic son Dillon Younes, you have taught to me so such over these last few years. While you are only three, you have taught me how to become a better human by teaching me love, patience and that I am so much stronger than I think I am. And I hope that I can teach and model this behavior for you the same. And to my beautiful nieces Mila, Jessy and Gia and nephew Jace – Each of you, alongside Dillon, have taught me to reflect and unlearn so many things that do not serve me, our families, and our communities.

I hope for a future where none of you will ever have to fight for respect because of the color of your skin, your gender, sex, class, race, ethnicity and/or sexuality. I hope that each of you will grow old serving not only your communities but also yourself and live a life with purpose, consideration of others and with love in your hearts.

May none of you ever doubt that you belong and that you always remember *and* believe that you are deserving of every chance and opportunity that this world has to offer. Moreover, if this world does not offer you space – then I hope I can teach you to *claim it*.

Love you always

Sunny (your momma, massi and bhua)

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Introduction

Since the 2012 gang rape and murder of 23-year-old physiotherapist Jyoti Singh Pandey in Delhi, sexual violence in India has been the subject of extensive study (Verma, 2013; Lodhia, 2015;Verma and Prakash, 2020). The case has been referred to as 'The rape that woke up India' (Brown and Agrawal, 2021), and Jyoti Singh has been described in the media as 'India's Daughter,' '*nirbhaya'* (fearless) and '*daminini'* (lightning), symbolically becoming a national treasure of India (Dutta and Sircar, 2013). The case elicited public outcry, nationwide protests wherein the police mounted a thorough investigation and her rapists were apprehended, convicted and hung in 2015 (Lodhia, 2015; BBC News, 2020). This led to demands for legal reform that led to the creation of the Justice Verma Committee report (Lodhia, 2015).

But in September 2020, a similar case occurred: a young 19-year-old Dalit woman was brutally gang-raped and murdered by four upper caste men in Hathras, India (CNN, 2020; The Hindu, 2020). The young woman died two weeks after she was gang raped, in the same Delhi hospital to which Jyoti Singh was admitted after her attack. This young woman's name was Manisha Valmiki and she was a relative of one of the participants in this research.

The police response and investigation for this case was strikingly different to the way in which they handled Jyoti Singh's case (CNN, 2020; The Hindu, 2020). For example, the family of the young Dalit woman was not given her body when they refused to have her cremated immediately. The police did not arrest the perpetrators until six days after Manisha's brother made a complaint to the police and directly named the accused. And medical examiners did not take place until eight days after, leaving little evidence that may have helped convict the rapists/murderers (Green, 2021). The police then took it upon themselves to cremate the woman's body without consent. The media also responded differently, as the young woman was

not referred to by her name and the case was identified in many media reports as simply the 'Hathras gang rape' or the 'Hathras Dalit rape case'. State officials reacted similarly, with one official insinuating that the woman had not been raped because no semen was found (CNN, 2020; The Hindu, 2020). Finally, the general public adopted a similar approach, with only a handful of Dalit advocates protesting outside the Delhi hospital (CNN, 2020; The Hindu, 2020). The police, media, state and Indian society all failed this woman; consequently, she and her family were denied access to justice.

In this particular case, it is evident that the victim did not meet the identity criteria to evoke a similar public outcry to that promoted by the Jyoti Singh case. Comparing these two cases leads to questions about why Indian society responds differently and selectively to rape cases depending on whether those cases involve middle-class women or Dalit women.

It has been argued that Jyoti Singh represents what has been called an 'ideal' victim (Christie, 1986), as she was a middle-class woman who was attacked by poor men (Roy, 2012; Hart and Gilbertson, 2018). Conversely, in the Hathras case, a Dalit woman was raped by upper caste men. Indian society has constructed Dalit women as impure, which denies these women access to justice and places them at a higher risk of violence (Ramkisson, 2020). Layers of caste, gender and class politics need to be unpacked here to understand the experiences of Dalit women. For example, the way in which Jyoti Singh was identified and spoken about as 'India's daughter' and 'fearless' contrasts with the portrayal of the Dalit woman whose identity was *fixed* to her caste. This suggests that greater Indian society identifies victims as those who are middle and upper caste and the perpetrators of criminal behaviour as those who are lower caste (Dutta and Sircar, 2013). This highlights the importance of an intersectional examination of Dalit women rape victims and their gender, caste and class status in India (Roy, 2012; Hart and Gilbertson, 2018).

Theoretical underpinnings and research methodology

When examining sexual violence in India, academia has primarily concentrated on middle-class Indian women and has consequently overlooked the experiences of Dalit women. While substantial research has been conducted on caste and gender in India over the last two decades, this research has *also* limited Dalit women's experiences to those of devadasi and *joginis* (sex workers) and/or the experiences of Dalit women living in rural India. Furthermore, very limited research has shared Dalit women's voices and experiences using the theoretical frameworks of intersectionality, feminist theory, social constructionism, and discourse analysis.

Including the concept of *intersectionality* facilitates a deeper examination of how the construction of caste, class and gender contributes to the identity of Dalit women, the targeting of rape victims and how the state responds to the sexual violence of Dalit women post-rape (Paik, 2018). This thesis draws on the concept of intersectionality to locate Dalit women's experiences by examining their social positions within India's social hierarchy. An intersectional lens identifies that Dalit women's experiences are very different from those of other Indian women (Paik, 2018; Arya and Singh-Rathore, 2020).

Feminist theory allows researchers to uncover misrepresentations of Dalit women and makes them aware of how they are interpreting the data. This thesis draws on postcolonial feminist critique to examine and reinterpret racialised and imperialist discourses that are interconnected with the data being produced (Pan, 2019; Arya and Singh-Rathore, 2020). In addition, this thesis uses Dalit feminism by centering Dalit women's experiences in the context of their families, their communities and the state.

A social constructionist epistemology informed my beliefs, the research aims and design, and how the research participants were identified and described. As the researcher, I thus

acknowledge that knowledge, or how we view the world, is understood through the different ways in which we express language as well as through our values and beliefs, which are constructed according to the societies and context in which we exist (MacKellar, 2020); I also recognise that it is through our interactions that knowledge is produced.

The research method of critical discourse analysis (CDA) complements a social constructionist epsitemology, as it aims to understood how language is employed in the everyday (Loutfi, 2019). This research thus examines the words and references that the research participants used in order to understand their social world in the context of rape.

Therefore, in response to previous examinations of Dalit women, this research adopts a different approach by considering how the experiences of Dalit women are shaped by India's sexual violence discourses in the context of these women's family, community and the state. By drawing on a multitude of theoretical frameworks, this thesis proposes that the interlocking of a complex set of patriarchal discourses, such those involving honour and shame, operates through various institutions of caste, marriage, and family to frame the justification and perpetuation of sexual violence against Dalit women.

Research aims and research questions

This project's broader research aims are to gain knowledge about the targeting and treatment of Dalit rape victims[1]; to co-produce knowledge with Dalit women and understand how they voice or name their abuse; and to understand post-rape sexual violence discourses in the context of family, community, and state. This thesis expands existing knowledge by referring to Dalit

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[1] Victim is used to reflect how the participants of this study preferred to be identified. This is further examined in chapter six.

women's specific social and cultural context. Drawing on postcolonial feminist critique, intersectionality and social constructionism can enhance one's knowledge in order to better understand how the experiences of Dalit women rape victims have been shaped by India's sexual violence discourses.

The subsidiary research questions are as follows:

1. What role do the family, community, and state play in the sexual violence narratives of Dalit women?
2. Are there any key terms or themes that are being raised by the research participants?
3. How does the intersection of gender, caste, class, and religion construct Dalit women's identity?
4. How do social structures, such as the caste system and the criminal justice system impact sexual violence against Dalit women in India?
5. What (if any) are the barriers limiting access to support and justice for Dalit women?
6. What do female Dalit sexual violence victims believe can be done to help them access social justice?
7. What influences the response of the public and the state to rape cases? How do the experiences of Dalit women differ from these responses?

Thesis construction

The thesis comprises four theoretical chapters, three findings chapters and a concluding discussion chapter. Chapter One begins by reviewing the literature on India's sexual violence laws, policies, and practices since partition in 1947. It introduces a Foucauldian framework to examine sexual violence laws in India, using the key concepts of power, governmentality,

discipline, and resistance. It then examines the sexual violence against women committed during the partition of India in 1947, which has shaped the construction of Indian women today in the context of their family and community and the state.

Chapter Two reviews the literature on the social construction of the term 'Dalit' with the aim of providing context for the historical social exclusion, exploitation, and subordination of the Dalit body. It details the Hindu caste system to explore the constructed and subjective Dalit identity.

Chapter Three locates Dalit women's experiences using an intersectional lens of caste, class, and gender. It reviews the rise of Dalit feminism and Dalit intersectionality and notes the importance of recognising a distinct version of feminism with which to situate Dalit women's experiences. It introduces the key concepts of Dalit patriarchy and Brahmanical patriarchy to provide context for the experiences of Dalit women. It ends with a review of current sexual violence incidents against Dalit women in India and the impunity afforded those who commit violence against Dalit women.

Chapter Four details the research design, which comprised three qualitative methods: participant observation, focus groups and semi-structured interviews. It explains the aforementioned epistemological and ontological assumptions that guide this thesis: intersectionality, feminist theory, social constructionism and CDA. This chapter also explores the transnational researcher's positionality and power.

Chapter Five examines the social construction of rape in speech. Through discourse analysis, it discusses how the research participants speak about their experiences of rape—specifically, the words they used to name and/or describe their rape. The chapter then explores what is *not* said

and what contributes to the silence, secrecy and cultural censorship of sex and sexual violence. It contextualises the women's silences and differentiates between being silenced and being silent.

Chapter Six analyses how Dalit women's experiences shape the social construction of the self. It addresses the following main themes: suffering, ostracism, responsibility, hysteria, and resiliency. It then reveals how patriarchal and caste discourses contribute to the different ways in which the participants construct the self post-rape. Next, it discusses the trend of referring to women who have been raped as *survivors* rather than *victims*, explaining that the word 'victim', used throughout this thesis, is how the participants preferred to be identified.

Chapter Seven investigates the women's construction of self within marriage and other relationships post-rape. It details how Dalit girls are socialised from a young age to become 'good' wives and mothers and how this socialisation intersects with Dalit women being identified as rape victims and contributes to how they construct marriage after rape. The chapter then explores how being a rape victim may or may not contribute to Dalit women being susceptible to other violence, specifically marital rape.

Chapter Eight discusses and concludes the research. It addresses the study limitations and details the four predominant themes in each chapter: shame, izzat, silence and the institution of marriage. It also highlights this thesis' substantive contributions to knowledge and offers recommendations regarding policy and the prevention of sexual violence against Dalit women in India.

Chapter One

India sexual violence laws, policies, and practices since the partition of India 1947

Sexual violence is a global issue that has shaped the lives of many women and girls (Kuo, Mathews and Abrahams, 2018; UN Women, 2019). In the specific case of India, since its partition in 1947, there have been reported cases of rape that have had an impact across the country (Mitra, 2018). Although there have been many reported cases since partition, many have also gone unreported and unpublicised, and these have also shaped the lives of Indian women and girls (Shanmugam, 2013; Sharma, 2015; Ghose and Mullick, 2015). This chapter deploys a Foucauldian framework to examine the history of sexual violence laws and reforms in India. It highlights how national, religious, and gendered discourses frame the justification of sexual violence. The chapter begins by examining recent sexual violence data to highlight the barriers to justice faced by Dalit women victims. It then provides a theoretical framework for understanding sexual violence laws in India in the context of power, governmentality, discipline, resistance, and intersectionality and how these factors relate to the state and to subjectivity. The chapter also examines how power operates through Indian sexual violence laws that restrict and restrain women's subjectivity to comply within the parameters of a patriarchal structure. Lastly, the chapter deploys a Foucauldian examination and analysis of the mass rapes that occurred during the partition of India in 1947 to examine how those experiences have shaped the construction of Indian women in the context of their family, community, and state.

1.1 Situating the current sexual violence climate in India

Violence against women is a global issue, irrespective of a country's per capita income, economic viability, and resource availability (Garcia-Moreno, Pallitto, Devries, Stockl, Watts and Abrahams., 2013; WHO, 2014; Bhattacharayya, 2016; UN Women, 2019). However, women who live in developing countries may experience higher rates of violence, particularly in patriarchal societies (Sardinha and Catalan, 2018; Muluneh, Stulz, Francis and Agho, 2020). This raises an important question: Are developing countries more patriarchal, and if so, why? While a country's GDP can contribute to gender inequality (Jayachandran, 2015), societal cultural norms also play a central role (Field, Seema and Pande, 2010; Jayachandran, 2015; Rammohan and Vu, 2017; Basu and Dastidar, 2018). For example, in the district of Sitamarhi, Bihar (which has a large Dalit population), the male-to-female sex ratio is 1000:899 (Kaushik and Kumari, 2015). Cultural norms such as child marriage can explain the disparity in this sex ratio as it has been connected with pregnancy termination and maternal mortality (Paul, 2018; 2019).

India's patriarchal practices, beliefs and structures perpetuate the subordination of women, including inequalities in health, education, finances, religion, and caste (Jayachandran, 2015; Muluneh et. al, 2020); they also make women more vulnerable to violence (Chaudhari, Morash and Yingling, 2014; Datta and Satija, 2020). In turn, women who hold strong patriarchal values will be less inclined to seek assistance when someone close to them experiences violence or to report cases of violence, and they may even legitimise violence as a form of discipline (Sardinha; Catalan, 2018). It has been argued that in strong patriarchal societies, women believe that a woman should bear the abuse of her husband (Ragavan, Iyengar and Wurtz (2015). That is that gender-based violence has a place, but that place is within the family and thus behind closed

doors (Ahmad, Riaz, Barata and Stewart, 2004; Dasgupta, 2008; Shankar and Northcott, 2009; Chaudhari et al. 2014). Examining sexual violence and its place within patriarchal systems can facilitate further exploration of how Dalit women's experiences are shaped by patriarchal beliefs and values in the context of the family, the community, and the state.

The literal definition of patriarchy is 'the rule of the fathers', and it means that power is held by men and is passed down from fathers to sons (Biaggi, 2005). The universal ideology of patriarchy is understood as a system of male dominance over women (Dutt, 2018). Christ (2016) defines patriarchy as a male-driven system derived from warfare that legitimises violence through religion, whereby men dominate women by controlling their sexuality. However, patriarchy cannot be understood as a generalised experience, as such universal definitions fail to consider the socio-political history of different societies. Over the years, researchers have questioned the idea of universalising the patriarchal experiences of Eastern women or women of colour in general (Grewal, 2013; Bhopal, 2018). In particular, Chandra Mohanty (1984) argues that universalising patriarchy only further defines 'third-world' women as a singular and monolithic subject. Moreover, she argues that a universal definition of patriarchy constructs a polarisation of men versus women, which robs women of their agency. In the Indian context, the patriarchal experiences of marginalised women may also have been overlooked in the literature, as not all Indian women can be understood to face the same type of patriarchy (Chakravarti, 2018). A more nuanced approach to patriarchy must therefore be considered—one that allows for a more intersectional approach that decolonises and de-Brahmanises the assumptions of patriarchy (Chapter Three undertakes a critical examination of what patriarchy means to Dalit women). According to Bhopal (2018), patriarchy must be examined and derived from the context of women and what patriarchy means to them.

It is difficult to accurately quantify the levels of sexual violence in India because while global coverage may overestimate or sensationalise it, Indian coverage underplays it (Phillips, Mostofian, Jetly, Puthukudy, Madden and Bhandari, 2015). For example, India's media coverage of sexual violence primarily focuses on middle-class and upper caste women and overlooks sexual violence against lower caste and lower class women (Rao, 2014). The Indian National Crime Records Bureau (2019) reported that out of 656,288,184 million women there were 30,868 female victims of rape in India in 2019 and that those numbers had decreased by 9.15 per cent from the previous year. Feminist researcher Bhattacharyya (2013, 2015) found that Indian women face harassment in public spaces every 51 minutes and that a woman is raped every 22 minutes. However, according to India's official statistics, the country has one of the lowest rates of sexual violence globally at 8.5 per cent, affecting approximately 27.5 million women (Palermo, Bleck, and Peterman, 2014; IIPS and Macro International, National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) India, 2014). A careful review of these statistics shows clear discrepancies. They do not account for women's reluctance to report rape is a well-known issue—it is estimated that only one per cent of female sexual violence victims in India report sex crimes to the police (IIPS, 2014; Raj and McDougal, 2014). Moreover, the incompetence of police filing and/or completing sexual violence reports due to caste-based and patriarchal beliefs and social norms. It was found that many Indian police officers did not always pursue cases where they believed that the women were responsible for instigating 'rape' such as the way she dressed and/or based on the relationship with the perpetrator (Kaithwas and Pandey, 2018) and/or in inter-caste based struggles where sexual violence against lower casted women is used as a disciplinary tool (wherein lower casted women are raped as a form of punishment or retaliation during communal conflict) (Human Rights Watch, 2013). This means that the official statistics need to be

completely re-examined and a hybrid approach to data collection that includes qualitative methods should be considered and incorporated.

Some scholars contend that in South Asian communities, many women do not report sex crimes because they feel they will not be believed, and/or they feel betrayed and/or they do not feel that the assault constituted rape (Cowburn, Gill and Harrison, 2015). These feelings may well be connected to the fact that marital rape is legal in India and that most sexual violence cases in the country occur within marriage (Raj and McDougal, 2014). Research shows that most women in India are raped by intimate partners such as husbands or boyfriends (Kalra and Bhugra, 2013; Gupta, 2014; Bhattacharyya, 2015; McCleary-Sills, et al., 2016). Scholars have argued that this is because rape within marriage is often not acknowledged in the larger community and/or is seen as a 'private' matter (Cowburn et al., 2015; Edmunds and Gupta, 2016).

If we consider the hierarchical ordering of the patriarchal heteronormative[2] family, the internal inequalities and oppressions within the family are often overlooked due to the patriarchal separation of the private sphere from the public sphere: the private sphere is considered to have its own 'regimes of truth' and to be separate from the political and judicial world. Moreover, such research does not account for unregistered marriages because of the illegality of child marriage, suggesting that the data may be unreliable (WHO, 2016). Thus, when highlighting the complexity of sexual violence data, one must consider that quantitative data is limited to only a specific population of women who can, and who choose to, report their experienced sexual

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[2] Heteronormative is defined here as the belief that heterosexuality is the 'normal' sexual orientation of those in society (Bowling, Simmons, Dodge, Sundarraman, Lakshmi Dharuman and Herbenick, 2019).

violence. This means the data needs to be examined through various lenses. More specifically, the intersections of marital status, education, age, class, and caste must be considered.

1.2 Defining rape: Present laws and policies in India

This section defines the present sexual assault and rape laws in India. The rape law in India as per the *Indian Penal Code (IPC)* was amended by the *Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2013*, which specifically replaced the word 'rape' with 'sexual assault' and included in its definition of sexual assault penetration of the mouth, urethra and/or anus, and the vagina. It was also amended to include non-penetrative acts that violate the bodily integrity of women. The *IPC s. 375* also expanded the definition of female rape, stating that an offence of rape is committed under the following circumstances:

- against the victim's will, without consent
- with consent, if consent was obtained due to threats or fear of death or harm
- with consent and is not her husband
- with consent and the victim was intoxicated, under the influence
- with consent but unable to comprehend what is about to happen, or the consequences of such actions
- with or without consent if the victim is under the age of 16.

However, it is important to note that also under the *IPC s 375 exception 2*, in the context of marriage, forced sexual intercourse or sexual acts by a husband with his own wife are *not* considered rape unless the wife is younger than 15 years of age. Thereby, rape is defined as the act of penetration of any part of the body without the consent of the individual *unless* the act is carried out by the woman's husband. As per *s. 375 of the IPC*, a wife is assumed to have given indefinite consent throughout marriage to her husband when they married (Kim, 2018). The

language and construction of sexual violence laws and practices in Indian society are framed by an apparently male-centric, heterosexual, and patriarchal system (Dutt, 2018). Thus, rape is deemed equivalent to trespassing onto another man's property, thereby reducing women's bodies to sexualised property (Menon and Bhasin, 1998; Butalia, 1998; Philips, 2013; Brook, 2014; Chattopadhyay, 2018).

This reduction of women to objects enables the construction of difference between an 'honourable' victim and a 'dishonourable' victim (Patel, 2016). This is not a new concept, as it is reminiscent of Christie's (1986) work explaining that society constructs 'ideal victims' (those who hold certain socially desirable characteristics) more legitimacy in their status as 'victims'. For centuries, around the world, women have been reductively considered the property of men and their value has been measured by their chastity (Philips, 2013; Brook, 2014; Pathak, 2016). For Dalit women, this is of particular importance, as their intersecting identities of gender and caste status place them more often in the position of 'dishonourable' victims.

It is important to recognise the mechanisms by which reducing women to objects occurs, since this offers key insights when examining the laws and practices that impact women. For example, it has been argued that the law, and the amendments and practices of law, bring into question how violence, sex, agency, and consent are understood within society (Basu, 2011). Rape legislation in India must be viewed in the context of the systems of marriage, property, and exchange because women's sexual agency is managed by discourses that produce inequality in sexuality, and these are entrenched in both public and private administrations (Basu, 2011; Bhattacharyya, 2015). Until attitudinal changes take place, along with legal recourse, the inefficiency and enabling of the law in the context of sexual violence against women will remain (Tarafder and Ghosh, 2020). Tarafder and Ghosh argue that legislators are restricted in the

changes they can make to sexual violence laws (for example, marital rape) due to the conservative public response to such changes—that is, suggesting that the laws are produced through societal norms and values. This argument is consistent with the idea that the concept of rape is understood as fluid, and how it is perceived depends on the culture perceiving it (Freedman, 2013). This suggests that the Indian state's ability to criminalise marital rape is restricted by its hesitation to intrude into the private sphere, which further produces a regime of inequality. Yllo and Torres (2016) argue that both cultural and legal definitions of rape are shaped by the relationships and status of those involved, in that the ideologies of implicit consent are characteristics of the institution of marriage. This perspective points to marital rape as being both socially acceptable and aligns with the beliefs of other countries that have also not criminalised marital rape. Therefore, it is important to focus on how the law operates rather than on its role.

i. Family and sexual violence laws

Meanwhile, the institution of the family and family honour are held in high regard within Indian society. The family is one of the first agents of socialisation by which women become habituated to societal regulations and gendered roles (Sooryamoorthy, 2012; Hayes and Franklin, 2017). It is where they learn self-discipline and how to act according to societal standards, norms, and regulations, thus producing the 'docile body' through disciplinary and regulatory practices (Ghosh and Singh, 2017). This means that from a young age, the Indian girl child is trained by her mother in how to become a good wife (Rew, Gangoli and Gill, 2013). Gendered roles are fixed, and the patriarchal culture produces women who become responsible for family integrity and honour (Leonardsson and San Sebastian, 2017); with that responsibility comes sacrifice.

A national survey conducted by the International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and National Family Health Survey 3 (NFHS-3) in 2005–06 found that 54 per cent of Indian women believed a husband was justified in being physically violent towards his wife if she went out without informing her husband, neglected their children, argued with her husband, refused sex, was unfaithful or was disrespectful to her in-laws. This suggests that patriarchal socialisation is so deeply rooted in Indian society that many women come to believe that violence can be justified. Therefore, it can be argued that the exception to consent within marriage operates according to patriarchal powers vested in societal gendered discourses of the family and objectification.

Michel Foucault's writings on power and knowledge and their relationship to subjectivity and governmentality consider the many modalities of power. With respect to exploring how Indian women have been socialised to become 'good wives', we must first consider societal standards regarding women's sexuality. Foucault (1978) argued that each society has its own manifestations of sex, and, for some societies, sex has been reduced to 'its' reproductive function and matrimonial legitimacy (Foucault, 1978). This means that our everyday discourse helps to construct what we define as *sex* and what we define as *rape*. Accordingly, this suggests that culturally, socially, and politically, marital rape in India has been constructed as a 'right' for men (Kim, 2018) and that Indian women are expected to devote themselves to and submit to their husbands (Agnes, 2015; Kim, 2018). It can be argued then that this type of discourse shapes the way in which women experience rape, and in which married women embody 'good', 'devoted' and 'faithful' conduct, thus rationalising rape as a part of marriage. This also shapes marital rape as a discourse situated within the jurisdiction of the state to be classified and categorised as part

of the *normative* heterosexual family unit. Thus, the governing of women's bodies is deployed through the law and through social, cultural, and societal politics.

Foucault (1980) suggested that political order is upheld by the production of 'docile bodies', a term that refers to passive, subjugated and productive individuals. The idea here is that through various societal institutions—such as schools, prisons, family, and India's caste system—all avenues of our lives are brought under a governing gaze (Foucault, 1980). The discipline, surveillance and punishment of the body occur within these institutions, thus constructing individuals that become habituated to this regulation. For example, consider the Indian Ministry of Law rejecting the criminalisation of marital rape on the grounds that it would eradicate Indian family values (Mandal, 2014). The institutions of the state, family and law have produced discourses that enable both men and women to accept rape as a part of a woman's marital duty. Making marital rape an exception would distinguish between who can report rape (unmarried women) and who cannot (married women raped by their husbands). Thus, the regulatory function of law produces docile bodies that operate within and contribute to the greater society.

However, it must be said a Foucauldian analysis of sexuality and the body lacks acknowledgement of the woman's body being its own entity within society. McNay (2007) argues that Foucault desexualised women's experience of rape to a 'human' experience, which is problematic for feminist theorists because it constructs a monolithic model of power and a singular account of identity. Therefore, a conceptual framework of intersectionality is also incorporated in the analysis of this thesis to account for the *diversity* of women's identities within society. This is particularly important in the examination of Dalit women's experiences, as women are a marginalised minority group within India (Deshpande, 2011; Pan, 2019; Datta and Satija, 2020).

ii.   Intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality was coined by feminist Kimberle Crenshaw (1989a), but it has a longer history which can be traced back to Sojourner Truth 1851 (Smiet, 2020). Crenshaw (1989a) argued that women can experience multiple oppressions simultaneously that may not fall under the category of racism or sexism but rather a combination of both. Dalit women in India often experience triple oppression—sexism, classism and casteism (Rao, 2015; Paik, 2016; Rege, 2006; Datta and Satija, 2020)—that neither Dalit men nor Hindu women experience. For example, for Dalit women, the intersection of their caste, class and gender cannot be separated from their identity and experiences as Indian women. While intersectionality has profoundly transformed the way in which women's experiences are understood (May, 2015), it is also not without its challenges. Some have criticised intersectionality for depending on women of colour as its archetype as opposed to mediating all social positions (Nash, 2008). Furthermore, separating women based on various identities serves to divide them and neglects their shared experiences (Dietze, Yekani and Michaelis, 2018). However, these critiques fail to consider the fact that women of colour do not always have similar shared experiences, let alone shared experiences with white women (Chowdhury, 2009).

The need to incorporate intersectionality into scholarly and legal critique are apparent in a critical examination of the *1872 Indian Evidence Act*. Regarding the criminal proceedings for rape, in particular, there is a concerning exception clause in this act with respect to testimony in criminal proceedings. The *1872 Indian Evidence Act s. 155(4)* states that if a man is being prosecuted for rape, it is permissible to include evidence of the victim's sexual history to illustrate character; but this does not apply to the accused. As per the *Indian Evidence Act s. 54*, during judicial proceedings, the accused's character is irrelevant unless one can provide evidence

of 'good' character. In 2002, *s. 155(4)* was deleted from the *Indian Evidence Act* to remove prosecutorial powers to cross-examine a rape victim's testimony (Bhat and Wodda, 2013). However, this line of examination still occurs during the police investigation stage, wherein police question a woman's sexual history before filing a report. This can restrict women from filing charges against their accusers (Ranjan, 2013; Agnes, 2015; Brereton, 2017). This is especially salient for Dalit women, as research shows that the police and court practices routinely perpetuate Dalit rape culture through victim-blaming practices during investigations and by dismissing rape charges due to women's caste (Roy, 2016). For example, it has been reported that four Dalit women are raped every day in India (Dutt, 2018), which does not reflect the numbers being reported by the state. Diwakar (2020) also points to the gaps in the numbers when it comes to the rape of Dalit women because rapes that result in death are not recorded as rape but rather as murder. Diwakar (2020) argues that violence against women in India is regulated according to a woman's social position in society—and the perception of Dalit women's bodies being perceived as 'untouchable' is often the justification given to dismiss rape charges (Diwakar, 2020). Thus, the intersections of caste, class and gender make Dalit women in India more vulnerable to violence, socio-cultural discrimination, and subjugation and less likely to obtain justice.

1.3 Power, subjectivity, and governmentality

This section introduces the concepts of power, subjectivity and governmentality and discusses how they operate in the context of marital rape and the sexual violence that occurred during the 1947 partition of India. An examination of partition violence against women was chosen because it represents a unique experience for Indian women: they experienced targeted violence from various men, including their own family members and men from other communities. Indian

women were reduced to their bodies, and the burden of their family, community and national

honour was administered through their bodies (Butalia, 2000; Das, 2007; Tejero-Navarro, 2019).

i. Power

To begin with, an examination of the concept of power is necessary. There are different

definitions of power, but many conceptualise it in the form of the dominant

group(s)/individual(s) exerting power over a subordinate group/individual. Traditionally, many

academics have framed power using the perspective of critical sociologist Max Weber, who

defined it as 'the ability of one actor or group within a social context being in the position to

achieve their own goals despite resistance from others trying to prevent them from achieving

them' (Weber, 1968, p.544). From this perspective, power is understood to be either authoritative

or coercive. Weber argued that authoritative power is *accepted* power, which society generally

agrees to follow and that does not require coercion, whereas *coercive* power is forced upon the

general population. Conversely, Robert Dahl defined power as when one can make someone do

something they would not otherwise have done (Guzzini, 2017). He argued that when examining

social interaction, *power* is the central causation.

These types of approaches can explain why some understand sexual violence laws and practices

as a form of dominance that results in female subordination (MacKinnon, 1991). For example,

during the partition of India in 1947 (the division of British India into two separate and

independent countries: India and Pakistan) women were violated, marked, mutilated, and killed

by both Indian and Pakistani men (Butalia, 2000; Menon, 2006; Das, 2007; Gangpadhyay, 2015;

Tejero-Navarro, 2019). Furthermore, approximately 50,000 (no official count has been made)

Muslim women were abducted in India, and 33,000 Hindu and Sikh women were abducted in

Pakistan, by men of opposing sides (Butalia, 2000; Das, 2007; Tejero-Navarro, 2019). In

response, both India and Pakistan began recovery missions: 12,000 Muslim women were recovered in India and 6,000 Indian women were recovered in Pakistan (Butalia, 2000; Menon, 2006; Das, 2007; Tejero-Navarro, 2019). It has also been found that many of the women resisted the recovery mission, as they had constructed new lives after converting their religion, marrying, and producing children (Dey, 2016). However, many of the abducted women were forced to return and undergo re-conversion and purification processes. This included pregnant women having to abort their foetuses and other women being forced to leave their children behind (Butalia, 2000; Menon, 2006; Das, 2007; Tejero-Navarro, 2019). Considering the above definitions of power, one can certainly argue that the recovery missions are just one example of the state's ongoing exertion of patriarchal dominance towards women.

However, Foucault (1979) questioned the notion of power being understood as *a possession*. He argued that power should not be looked at only from a negative or coercive perspective—rather, it is also positive, productive, and necessary in society (Gaventa, 2003; McCarthy, 2017). He argued that power is diffused, embodied and discursive as opposed to being fixed, possessed and coercive. For Foucault, power is a fundamental source of discipline and conformity. He contended that in modern society, traditional forms of sovereign power that were once centred on coercion have been replaced by disciplinary power. Through his observations of modern administrative systems—in the Indian context, the state, the family, the community, and religion—he found that these systems exercised regulatory practices of power, such as surveillance and assessment, that did not require coercion through force. He noted that over time, members of those societies learned to discipline at the site of the 'soul' rather than at the site of the 'body'. The term 'discipline' for Foucault is a mechanism of power that regulates the behaviour of members of society through disciplinary practices. This could explain the state-led

recovery mission to recover the abducted women—as an administrative system, it situated itself as the *protector* of all Indian women, and this consequently increased *the regulation* of women (Basu, 2011). Thus, a result of regulatory power is that the discourses and practices of 'protection'—even by force, through recovery and through marital rape—become normalised. Over time, these practices possess their own specific regularities, logic, 'truths' and reasons (Foucault, 2000).

For Foucault (1979), both knowledge and 'truth' are vital aspects of understanding power, as power is represented by recognised forms of scientific beliefs, knowledge and 'truth'. Knowledge is an exercise of power and power is a function of knowledge, hence the term power–knowledge (Foucault, 1979). Moreover, each society has its own 'regimes of truth', and truth is produced through various forms of 'constraint'. Each society's 'general politics' produce discourses that function as 'truths' and that, through various techniques and mechanisms of power, hold the construction of 'truth' (Rabinow, 1997). For example, one element that stands out in the research on violence against women during partition is the decades-long silences of women's experiences. It was not until the 1990s that feminist historiographers began unveiling the trauma that women endured during partition and thus exposing the female-embodied experiences of nationalism and communalism (Menon and Bhasin, 1998; Butalia, 2000; Menon, 2006; Williams, 2019; Saint, 2020). Menon and Bhasin (1998), who were among the first to examine what women endured during this period, state that official records of women's experiences of rape during partition were absent and thus rendered invisible. Using Foucault's (1979) conceptualisation of 'truths' could help explain the initial silence around the violence against women during partition (Saint, 2020). It can be argued that the silence operated in two ways: first, to suppress the trauma within the body, and second, to reconfigure women's

experience and enable the construction of new identities and positions within their family, their community, and the state (Pandey, 2001). Foucault (1979) argued that 'truth' is produced by *constraints*. Thus, the *constraining* of women's experiences produces the function of 'rescuing' and 'saving' women as 'truths' produced from nationalistic discourse, thus limiting access to the knowledge of that truth.

On the contrary, Saint (2020) argues that deploying women's silence alongside patriarchal discourse is a tactical approach of intermediation. This means that silence itself can also be seen as a tactical strategy that is present, and it should not be clouded as a form of absence. Keating (2013) contends that often, both silence and force become folded into one instead of the focus being on the way in which silence is operated. For example, a 'silent refusal' can be seen as a function of resistance. Highlighting silence as a form of power that functions through resistance may also limit access to the knowledge of that truth. Conversely, examination of the violence during partition reveals that the silence surrounding trauma represents the female survivor as 'the other' (Nagappan, 2011; Dey, 2016). Trauma is difficult to define, as it is produced from an individual's subjective experience—what may be a traumatic experience to one may not be for another. However, it is argued that a traumatic experience is one that makes a person feel overwhelmed, threatened, violated and/or scared, and it involves a feeling of loss of power, loss of the self and loss of security (Haskell and Randall, 2019, p.12).

The silence surrounding trauma is in itself a struggle to maintain the boundaries of respecting that silence while also confronting political narratives guised in socio-political tragedy. Therefore, it can be argued that women *embody* the silence, and this can reproduce gendered power relations in which both nationalistic and communalist discourses operate within the patriarchal structures of power—and this justifies sexual violence against women.

The experience of the performance of nationalism on female bodies produces them as gendered, ethnic, and national subjects (Menon, 2013; Dey, 2016) —this transforms them into political artefacts, whereby women's bodies remain the symbolic political site of male, national, community and family honour (Chakraborty, 2014; Tejero-Navarro, 2019). Discursive power is a body of knowledge and behaviour that constructs what is normal and what is deviant within that society. Discursive practices operate through language and institutions such as family, community, religion, caste, and social media networks (Foucault, 1980). Thus, applying sexuality as a discursive practice through national and communal discourses and practices can present women as objects (Tejero-Navarro, 2019). This can both normalise and delegitimise the experiences of rape victims as positioning the rape itself as a sacrifice/punishment in the name of nationalism; consequently, it regulates women's bodies. It is through discourse that the 'reality' of the social world is institutionalised and transforms our understanding of that world.

Foucault's (1988) interpretation of power–knowledge challenges perceptions of sexual violence and rape trauma. For Foucault, the relationship between knowledge and power is one of fluidity. A single discourse can vary depending on its context, the speaker, the speaker's institution, their location within that institution and how the discourse is being deployed (Egan, 2016). It is not about seeking 'truth', but it helps one understand how the problem of sexual violence has been constructed and how it operates within Indian society. Therefore, it enables further insight into the social and embodied effects of the legal and judicial administrations. Foucault's understanding of rape is not without criticism from feminist scholarship, as Foucault suggested decriminalising rape as a sexual crime and punishing it as a physical crime (Cahill, 2000; Taylor, 2019). Foucault (1988) argued that rape is the equivalent of physical violence, only it involves different body parts—the penis as opposed to a fist. In Foucault's work *Discipline and Punish*

(1979), he explained that the 'body' functions as a site of power for conflicting discourses. He also proposed that desexualising rape would liberate people from the disciplining discourses that construct sexuality as a tool of social and political power (Cahill, 2000). Feminists have argued that Foucault's work on rape focuses on the perpetrator rather than the victim (Hengehold, 1994) and thus underestimates the trauma of rape victims and of women's experiences (Cahill, 2000; Taylor, 2019)—arguably, it further perpetuates the idea of the woman as object. Indeed, Foucault's trivialisation of rape as a 'punch in the face' can be construed as objectionable at the very least. However, his conceptualisation of power–knowledge, as discussed above and when combined with feminist theory, can yield an interesting examination of sexual violence.

ii.   Gendered structures of power

The rape trauma violence embodied by women during partition and post-partition can also reveal the gendered structures of power in the context of India and the way in which men privilege themselves within a population. The targeted violence of women during partition can be examined from a structural perspective by recognising the nation-state as a gendered space governed by religion, casteism, classism, family, and community structures (Chakraborty, 2014). The narratives of nationalism that are interlinked with cultural authenticity are how the state operates as a privileged site of moral regulation (Chakraborty, 2014). For example, some scholars have argued that the protectionist stance to safeguard women during partition shaped the lives of Indian women in many ways and arguably still affects their lives today (Butalia, 2000; Pandey, 2001; Kabir, 2005; Menon, 2006; Dey, 2016). During partition, the metaphor of *Bharatmata* (Mother India) was constructed (Dey, 2016): the land of India was symbolically referenced as the body of Mother India, which was violated and deconstructed by the separation of India and Pakistan. Dey (2016) argues that Indian women have since embodied the symbolism

of 'mothers of India' since they hold the responsibility for honour and nationalism. Roy (2018) posits that a connection exists between the trauma of partition violence and national identity. This could explain the 'Mother India' narratives that present all Indian women as the bearers of national identity.

However, the 'Mother India' metaphor also reveals socio-political structures of power that privilege men within the general population. The symbolism of 'Mother India' and the unjust and cruel practices of rape against women during partition, as a consequence of nationalist narratives, distinctly privilege men. It has been argued that discourses of women's bodies as a symbolic reference to the nation reinforce gendered divisions within society (Whiting, 2020). Furthermore, they locate women in the private sphere that ties them to their reproductive role in upholding the nation (Whiting, 2020). It has been explained that social-political relations are institutionalised through nations' gendered power regimes (Cornell, 2003; Celis, Kantola, Waylen, Weldon, 2013). Butalia's (2000) oral histories reveal the ways in which women were perceived as weak and unable to escape, fight or defend themselves against religious conversions, whereas men could. Thus, women were seen as needing to be 'saved' and 'protected' (Whiting, 2020). This can also explain why the targeting of women in communal violence has since been replicated further outbreaks of partition violence since 1947. For example, during the Delhi riots in 1984, the Bombay riots in 1992 and the Gujarat riots in 2002, women were also the primary targets for communal retaliation (Butalia, 2000; Menon, 2006; Kumar, 2016; Saint, 2020) and experienced similar targeted acts of violence as those that occurred during partition. For example, during the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, Sikh women were sexually branded and forced to parade around naked (Chakraborty, 2014; Kumar, 2016; Saint, 2020).

Indian society has placed value on female virginity whereby men exercise power by regulating female bodies through discourses of protection, purity, and shame (Dey, 2018). Fear is constructed around the threat of the consequences a woman faces if she loses her virginity before marriage. In the context of the targeted sexual violence of women during partition, women's 'virginity' is sacred because it represents the nation-state (Whiting, 2020) and can thus explain the way in which power is exercised through surveillance upon female subjects by these regulations (Dey, 2018). This, in turn, furthers the 'protectionist' stance around women's bodies. It also shapes the way in which many women can adjust, adapt to, and internalise these patriarchal discourses as reasonable (Sur, 2015). Women's embodiment of these patriarchal discourses is evident in everyday practices such as covering their bodies, ensuring 'lady-like' postures and avoiding eye contact with men. They attempt to take up as little space as possible in order to avoid rape (Sur, 2015), thus highlighting the ways in which power is diffused and produced through societal discourse and knowledge. This explains why some women sacrificed their bodies during partition by committing suicide, while others committed to their rapists as wives. In response, society viewed these women as either martyrs or traitors (Das, 2007). Hence, the forced abortions and abandonment of their children produced with the enemy became symbolic acts of 'purification' in the name of national, communal, and family honour (Das, 2007). These 'purification' practices operate to construct effective gendered 'truths' within society. In addition, exposing 'bad' women is a way of blaming the bad women to restrict and contain the discourse around the female body and transform how all women should behave (Das, 2007).

iii. **Subjectivity**

However, this also raises questions of subjectivity. Subjectivity can be described as one's lived experiences within a historical and political context. It is through subjectification that the subject observes, analyses, interprets, and recognises the self as a source of knowledge (Stewart and Roy, 2014). Kapur (2012) asks whether the underlying fear on the part of those who perpetuate the patriarchy is not of women but rather of women's sexual subjectivity destabilising the politics of pain. The body impregnated by the enemy and the children produced through violent acts by the enemy can be seen as sites of pain, suggesting that the concern regarding women's bodies and protection of those bodies is a deflection of pain and trauma. Thus, while it is unclear how women's subjectivity can become stabilised and empowered, it is clear that identifying and naming the trauma of rape and its consequences are required in order to start the healing process.

In most patriarchal societies, even the threat of rape has placed women under panopticon surveillance (Parikh, 2018; Begum and Barn, 2019). Foucault (1979) borrowed the concept of panopticism from Jeremy Bentham, who argued that power should be observable but also unverifiable—meaning that power is exercised in a way that causes individuals to self-discipline under the gaze of those in authority. For example, the threat of rape can be considered a form of panoptic discipline, wherein women are the subject of the male gaze—consequently, women often self-regulate and police their own behaviour regarding how they dress, how much alcohol they consume, how they restrict their movement in the evenings and other factors to avoid being raped (Parikh, 2018; Begum and Barn, 2019). Essentially, the penetration of power transforms women's behaviour through panoptic discipline. Women have thus learned to govern their own behaviour by conforming to societal values, beliefs, and unwritten rules. This is not to say that women had no agency or did not resist during partition—many were also complicit in the

violence and have been in other communal riots (Menon, 2006, 2013; Butalia, 2000; Sen and Jasani, 2021).

The Abducted Person's Act 1947 stated that all Muslim women who were in India with a Hindu man between 1 March 1947 and 1 January 1949 were considered abducted. Moreover, a clause within the Act stated that any Muslim woman who had converted after March 1947 would not be recognised as Hindu and must be sent to Pakistan. The clause went on to state that the concerns and wishes of the abducted were irrelevant and would not be considered by the magistrates. (Butalia, 1994, p. 140; Das, 2006; Dasgupta, 2015). The clauses within the Act silenced women by denying them the voice and autonomy to make decisions as citizen subjects (Menon and Bhasin, 1998; Butalia, 2000; Mookerjea-Leonard, 2014). Moreover, it denied women access to their fundamental rights as citizens to decide whether they wanted to stay or leave and whether they wanted to convert or keep their religion (Chakraborty, 2014). It can be argued that denying abducted women's rights as citizen subjects is an example of the disciplinary and regulatory powers exercised by means of women's bodies, thus producing gendered subjects through various legal, social, and administrative functions that construct the citizen subject (Chakraborty, 2014). Consequently, these practices transform the notion of citizenship through women's bodies, suggesting that power does not stop with practices such as forcible recovery, as these practices are the result of a collective understanding and acceptance of these patriarchal discourses in society. In turn, this could explain why many Indian feminists argue that Indian women have been constructed to become martyrs and to sacrifice themselves for their families (Butalia, 2000; Menon J., 2006; Datta, 2006; Chakraborty, 2014). However, Dey (2015) points out that identifying and referring to women as martyrs during partition for sacrificing their lives to avoid being raped by the enemy is disempowering—it implies that these women voluntarily

chose death, when in fact they had very little choice, and thus denies them the power to make that choice. Those women who challenge or resist this idea are often met with shame and/or violence, which can explain why women *resisted* the recovery mission, highlighting the patriarchal system of power that operates within society.

In most societies, women are defined by their relationships to the men in their life (Khan, 2009). Those women who rejected recovery recognised and understood that their recovery would not lead them to any type of autonomy but only to further stigmatisation within their own country. Thus, they transformed and reinterpreted their abduction and rape experiences, recasting themselves as the wives of their perpetrators/saviours (Mookerjea-Leonard, 2014). Drawing on the work of Susan Bordo (2010), it can be said that women objectifying their own bodies is an action produced by historical discourses and narratives that have been *imposed* upon the female body and that have shaped and trained them to embody prevailing historical forms of selfhood, desire, and femininity. Consider Catherine MacKinnon's 'imposition account' as a way of understanding sexual objectification (as cited in Jutten, 2016, p. 28). She explains that sexual objectification must have a social meaning that is imposed on another being, and that the person upon whom it is imposed is being sexually exploited. Social meanings are constructed in discourse and in practice through the mechanisms of policies, laws, myths, media, and other forms that reproduce women as objects; this then translates to everyday practices (Jutten, 2016). Consider the many women who claimed that their 'recovery' brought up feelings of shame that then shaped further experiences of subjugation, oppression, and powerlessness over their own bodies (Chakraborty, 2014). The reactions of their own families and communities left many of them with feelings of impurity, of being unclean or of being 'fallen women' (Tejero-Navaro, 2019). They felt as though they had brought shame on their families and communities, and their

bodies served as constant reminders of what their family, community and nation had lost. In turn, the abducted women embodied these objectifications under the idealised notions of nationalism, communalism and purity (Tejero-Navarro, 2019).

This suggests that the Indian nation-state and the country's general population have been shaped by the experiences of partition and by the state, community and family responses to sexual violence committed against women. This signifies that the trauma of the violence during partition was so severe that the disciplinary practices of safeguarding women's bodies was how power operated to sustain national, community and male honour. For many Indian women, their status and place in the hierarchal ordering within the family contributes to their constant surveillance and discipline (Mogford, 2011). For example, several studies have found that women (particularly wives/daughters-in-law) occupy the lowest status in the Indian household (Bhattacharyya, 2009; Rew et. al., 2013; Cowburn et. al, 2015)

In some societies, women who break honour codes are punished physically, sexually, mentally and/or verbally (Gill, 2006). The Urdu word *izzat* (honour) is a cultural construct that can be generally defined as maintaining the reputation of oneself and one's family. Gill and Brah (2014) explain that the construct of izzat intersects with multiple layers of meanings for different people and in different contexts. Izzat refers to a person's assessment of their own self-worth as well as the community's acceptance of that assertion via affirmation of that person's right to pride (p.74). In Indian societies, husbands are often the heads of the family and the defenders of 'honour'. Women are understood as a form of property that holds the family's 'honour' (Cowburn, Gill and Harrison, 2015), and they must thus be 'protected'; consequently, women's bodies and behaviours are 'managed' by men (Gill, 2014). It is often the woman who can maintain or break family honour, and through the discourse of 'honour', is used to justify

violence (Payton, 2015). It can be argued that for both communal and family violence, it is the female body that becomes the site through which discursive and societal power is exercised. Tejero-Navarro (2019) posits that violence against women is produced by the intersection of family and communal discourses in which women become responsible for upholding their national and family honour. During partition, those women who were unable to retain their honour by 'avoiding' rape were often exiled from their families and communities: family members would drop off raped women at a 'recovery camp', where they were labelled 'fallen women' (Tejero-Navarro, 2019).

iv. **Governmentality**

This brings us to Foucault's concept of governmentality. In the literal sense, the concept of government is understood as the state; it can also be understood in the physical sense, as in 'to direct', or as relational, as in 'to control'. However, for Foucault, governmentality is more complex in that the state and government are not synonymous (Rabinow, 1997). Foucault suggested that the government is 'activity' and/or 'structures' and/or the 'management' of states that shape the conduct of people (Rabinow, 1997), whereas governmentality is the government of mentality through 'techniques of power' that guide subjects to act in line with societal norms (Dean, 2013). In the case of the recovered women who were forcibly removed and then forced to remarry or abort their foetuses, one could argue that this situation was a system of control placed upon women by the state through policy.

However, Foucault's concept of governmental addresses how those policies and actions came into place (Dean, 2013). For Foucault, governmentality is not about those in positions of power (state)—those that direct or apply coercive control—but is instead about how the norms of a population are unconsciously produced and reproduced by subjects. He argued that subjects are

objectified so that they reproduce norms because discourses are established by ordinary subjects in everyday practices. This is referred to as the 'microphysics of power' (Dean, 2013), meaning that the forced recovery was a by-product of nationalist, communal and patriarchal discourses that were already established in the general population. Indian women were already subject to practices such as sati, child marriage and marital rape prior to the recovery project. Moreover, during partition, many were objectified as symbolic representations of 'Mother India', and thus the recovery project reinforced those existing techniques of power.

Foucault (1991) referred to the 'conduct of conduct' as how everyday activities or techniques of power are the ways in which the conduct of subjects is conducted. The concept of government is separate from political structures and the management of the state. Instead, it is specified as the direction in which individuals or societal behaviour can be guided—that is, governmentality operates to produce a governmental subject (for example, the government of Dalit women, girl children, Dalit communities, etc.). However, in this case, the population that cannot be coerced can, over time, become regulated. Government operates by dispersing knowledge so that subjects will do as they should without force (i.e., regulation). This takes shape through societal norms in daily practices and hence through a process of normalisation. Thus, it can be argued that the female-sexed body is objectified through the political, health, medical, educational, legal, and judicial practices, wherein each of these institutions reproduces its own norms and discourses that establish the normalisation of sexual violence through everyday practices.

Here, we can begin to understand how Foucault argued that power is everywhere. It is diffused and productive throughout societal discourses in regimes of 'truth' and knowledge (Rabinow, 1997). Therefore, it can be argued that the objectification of the female body within society is produced and embodied in discourse that has constructed society's general politics of 'truth'.

This regime of truth is fluid and is constructed through accepted forms of power–knowledge, and this is highlighted by the historical amendments of rape laws that have been constructed within societal regimes of truth. From a feminist perspective, there are limitations to this type of analysis—there appears to be no recourse or accountability for those subject to oppression. Furthermore, Foucault minimised the experience and the effects of rape on women and almost rationalised rape through prevailing discourses and the normalisation of sexual subjectivity within society. The notion is that women are implicated within these discourses of power because the inscription of power occurs as soon as the body enters culture (Foucault, 1979). Expressed another way, Foucault implicated women in their own rapes just because they were 'present', and this is problematic. A Foucauldian framework for understanding sexual violence does not allow for practical solutions to free the female body from oppression and/or subjugation. Therefore, it is unacceptable and insufficient because it makes women susceptible to further vulnerabilities and leaves no room for emancipation. However, undertaking a broad analysis of governmentality can provide insight into the development and practices of oppression, which in turn can create space for change.

1.4 Space for change

If we consider the Indian sexual violence laws and the judicial and policing practices in the Indian context, it becomes apparent that this system is not as straightforward as criminality and punishment—rather, it is a set of mechanisms and techniques of power to resolve what have become constructed as social problems. For example, in the last 30 years, the women's movement in India has mobilised and exercised the power of women, who have advocated for the change of more than 50 separate legislative policies and legal reforms regarding violence against women (Ghosh, 2011). However, while legislation changes have taken place, the

implementation of these policies in society has been lacklustre (Sharma, Unnikrishnan and Sharma, 2015). For example, despite the illegality of child marriage in India, it remains a widespread practice (Paul, 2019). This illustrates the need for a Foucauldian analysis to understand sexual violence and to examine women's experiences in the context of the family, the community, and the state. For example, the state's response to women's rights activism through legal reforms needs to be re-examined. What can be understood is that the law plays a role in the distribution of power relations within society—it acts as a discursive space for competing narratives between the private and public realms of society and can legitimise or delegitimise these narratives on the account of justice (Tagore, 2019). For example, the Recovery Act was based on the good intentions of bringing abducted women home and seeking justice. However, it can be argued that the law becomes a place in which 'truths' are produced and knowledge of those 'truths' can become limited. The implications of this can be seen in the recovered women being objectified as possessions to be returned to their rightful 'owners': the needs and wants of the victims were placed behind the needs of the nation-state and their families and communities.

Foucault (1990) stated that power is everywhere and is exercised by people through discourse and day-to-day practices. In India, those daily practices included post-partition 'support' such as forced marriage or referring to the women who committed suicide as 'martyrs'. One of the central criticisms of Foucault's conceptualisation of power is that contrary to what he proposed, it is not necessarily experienced by all members of society. The oppressed and victims of sexual violence often feel powerless—therefore, to state that power is everywhere can be interpreted as a disservice and is offensive. However, it is only offensive if his conceptualisation of power is misunderstood. And *not acknowledging* the fact that the intersections of gender, status, class, age, education, and caste can also limit power is problematic. While it may be easy to

acknowledge this in theory, but difficult to recognise it in practice. Feminist Nancy Hartsock (1990) argues that Foucault's conceptualisation of power veils the systematic nature of gender oppression: 'power is everywhere and ultimately nowhere' (Hartsock, 1990, p.170). While it may seem that Foucault and feminism are at odds, a combined analysis may allow for greater insight and a more nuanced approach to understanding sexual violence.

1.5 The 'hysterical' woman in post-partition India

Historically, hysteria has been considered a female disorder, and it is derived from the Greek word *hysteria*, meaning womb (Dasen and Ducate-Paarmann, 2006). It has resurfaced in recent decades as a powerful diagnosis deployed in Westernised cultures during popular women's resistance movements and with the changing roles of women over time (Briggs, 2000; Tasca, Rapetti, Carta and Fadda, 2012; Micale, 2019). While many understand hysteria diagnosis as a Western concept, it has also influenced the regulation and disciplinary practices of women in India. Hysteria has been closely linked to the women who broke the silence regarding the sexual violence and rape they endured during partition—they were marked 'hysterical' to mute their resistance and contestation (Singh-Baldwin, 2000; Randall, 2014).

The concept of hysteria was a colonial influence that became popularised with the British integration of the medical jurisprudence that was significant in sexual violence and rape cases during colonial rule (Kolsky, 2010; Mitra, 2016). Medical experts in colonial courtrooms particularly pointed out the 'hysterical' nature of female claimants (Kolsky, 2010). This can also be identified in India's judicial system and police practices today, especially in the context of testimony, where a woman's previous sexual history is given as evidence to support the innocence of the perpetrator and the victim's testimony is treated with scepticism (Gavey and Schmidt, 2011; Thompson, 2017). A rape victim's testimony is further held up as symbolic

evidence: they are often framed by the medical establishment, the media, the public, the police, and defence attorneys as manifesting 'hysterical' characteristics and are thus perceived as unstable due to their alleged experience (Kabir, 2012; Thompson, 2017).

Thompson (2017) argues that rape victims are typically represented as either broken, hysterical or irrational subjects, or their rape trauma is minimised, and they are framed as vengeful, angry, hurt, bitter and uncontrollable. Both narratives highlight how power is exercised to silence women's testimony. When examined through this lens, the rape victim is placed under surveillance and in doubt through the medicalisation of women's experiences. Howes argues that it is not necessarily the experience of rape that is unspeakable, but the legal system's constructed limitations of what is 'permissible speech' within the law, medicine and society that make rape unspeakable (Loney-Howes, 2018). In turn, the victim's own knowledge is reduced to insignificance. The significance of this is that the location of 'truth' and women's agency is lost (Gray-Rosendale, 2018), thus exposing the deployment of patriarchal structures of power that run through the various institutions that subjugate women in patriarchal societies. While it is difficult to explain what can be done to reform the structures of power, it can be argued that relocating a rape victim's truth and the knowledge of that truth to the self can be the start of that change.

This analysis offers insight into how power and knowledge can both produce and restrict new ways of thinking about subjectivity. Butler (2004) expands on the productive role of power in subjectivity, comparing the non-sovereign mechanisms of power and examining sovereign power in the modern world—she argues that sovereign authority cannot be understood as singular and/or sanctioned authority of the state. She reasons that the modern world is under the rule of 'petty sovereigns' (p. 56) who lead within bureaucratic institutions that use techniques of power

they do not control. This modern version of sovereignty becomes a tool of power where law is used tactically and citizen subjects are regulated, interrogated, and monitored throughout their daily lives. Similarly, Foucault argued that administrative institutions' technologies operated through what he referred to as the 'microphysics of power.' For both Foucault and Butler, it is the constitution of the body that becomes the object of concern (Mills, 2003). Drawing on Foucault, Butler explains that the subject comes into being through the process in which ideology is embodied through the performative knowledge constructed from social institutions and daily interactions (Butler, 2004). From this perspective, 'modern' power can explain the various tactical strategies deployed to silence the sexual violence against women during partition—such as the diagnosis of hysteria, the forced remarriages and religious conversions, and the discourses of martyrdom for those who committed suicide—in which these 'petty sovereigns' interconnected between various institutions, such as the family, the community, and the state, to manage the way in which women experienced rape. It is sophisticated and complex, with governmentality produced through the exercise of sovereign power that is established through law, medicine, policies and administration, all techniques that hold value but are not forced. Both Butler and Foucault recognise that power is productive and constitutes the subject and that resistance is also deeply connected to power and shaped through the process of deconstruction.

These types of examinations of power and governmentality raise important questions of subjectivity. How does power penetrate the self? For Foucault, subjectivity includes an inner gaze that entails an open-mindedness on the part of the self. From this perspective, the subject is shaped by operations of power. Thus, how is it that women have become regulated objects of power? And how can women challenge and resist these positions of objectification? As

mentioned above, this is where many of the feminist critiques of Foucault's work come in, as it appears to offer no agency and no room for change. For someone to challenge or resist subjugation, they need to understand how they have been constructed by the system and how to critically analyse it from a place of subjectivity (Ettlinger, 2011). According to Cooper (2006), the complexity of Foucault's construction of governmentality and subjectivity may explain why it could be perceived that the norms and regulations within society cannot be challenged.

However, further investigation of Foucault's analysis reveals that norms and regulations are often challenged but may not be successful in creating change or transformation. Power has multiple effects that are constructed around new frameworks of knowledge in which apparatuses shape the mechanisms of objectification but are also instruments of subjectification (Foucault, 1979). From this perspective, it can be argued that the law, or the lack of laws and social practices, shapes the objectification of women through discourses of sexuality, nationalism, and communalism in society. However, Indian women also simultaneously gain subjectivities through governmentality. If the argument is that the construction of the heteronormative family unit is produced through nationalistic, communalistic and sexuality discourses that operate by regulating heterosexuality, sex, and marriage, then there is also room for resisting and challenging these discourses that produce idealised notions of women as objects while simultaneously recognising that the outcome may not always be just or fair.

If we consider the mass marriages forced upon the recovered women, or the lack of a marital rape law, the recognition of subjectivity appears to be denied to women when it comes to their sexuality. For example, many women who were approached to participate in partition research began sharing their experiences, reflections, fears, and anxieties that were a result of partition violence (Butalia, 2000). The historiography research of partition violence created a space for

them to access and express their subjectivity (Abrams, 2010). Furthermore, the very sharing of their stories and experiences is an act of healing, resistance, and an exercise of agency (Dossa, 2009; Ahammed, 2019; Chioneso, Hunter, Gobin, McNeil Smith, Mendenhall and Neville, 2020). Resistance does not have to be grand and extreme in action; it can also be subtle or quiet, and it can occur at any time. It was during the sharing process that discussions arose of some women committing suicide to avoid rape, or rejecting the mass forced marriages, or making conscious decisions to stay with their abductors and rapists, or hiding from recovery officers (Butalia, 2000). However, one of the central components of Foucault's understanding of power is that it transcends politics and constructs power as an everyday phenomenon and that discourse can be the site of both power and resistance (Gaventa, 2003). Thus, women choosing to commit suicide and resist recovery reveals that power is diffused and discursive and is also a source of conformity and discipline. While women's subjectivity may often appear to be lost and/or hidden in official records and amid their own trauma, careful examination and qualitative research can allow for those subjectivities to surface.

Summary

This chapter began by establishing the context regarding the impact of sexual violence against women in India at the present time. The NCRB (2019) reported that 30,868 women had reported being raped in 2019 and that this number had decreased by 9.15 per cent from 2018. This chapter also situated the current law and policy of sexual violence within the current climate of sexual violence issues within India. Overall, this first section focused on the Indian government's refusal to criminalise marital rape. The Indian government has argued that criminalising marital rape would diminish Indian family values and is thus reluctant to administer laws and policies around marital rape. However, many have argued that this highlights the objectification of

women, who have been reduced to the property of men and valued according to their chastity (Philips, 2013; Brook, 2014; Pathak, 2016). The chapter then introduced the Foucauldian framework, which it then used to examine women's experiences of sexual violence during the partition of India in 1947 in the context of the family, the community, and the state. This section introduced key concepts that are deployed throughout this thesis and defined the concepts of power, governmentality, and subjectivity.

The chapter also focused on partition violence, as it can be argued that the violence inflicted on women during partition has shaped the ways in which women have become targets of sexual violence today. Although sexual violence during times of conflict is not unique to India, the extreme violence that occurred during partition is. The targeted rape and sexual violence of women influenced the lives of many women across the country. Moreover, many female victims of rape were abducted by enemy men and forced to marry, to convert to a different religion and produce children. In response, both states developed recovery missions to return those women. Then, to purify them after their rapes and their marriages to enemy men, the women were forced to convert to their original religion, abort their unborn children, abandon any children that had been born from partition violence and marry men from their own country. Examining partition violence using a Foucauldian analysis unveils how the administration of sexual violence discourses produces and diffuses power within society, thus highlighting how national, religious, social, and gendered discourses frame the justification of sexual violence against women during partition. Moreover, it demonstrates how power operates through Indian sexual violence laws and policies that restrict and restrain women's subjectivity to comply with the parameters of a patriarchal structure. All of this illustrates how deeply the various institutions and ideologies of

the state, family and community are interconnected in producing the heteronormative,

misogynistic, and patriarchal discourses that shape the experiences of Indian women.

Chapter Two

Social Construction of the 'Dalit'

Currently, of India's 1.353 billion population, approximately 200 million people live under the

titles of The Scheduled Castes/Dalits,[3] formerly known as the 'untouchables', and the number of

Dalits has increased by 30 million since 2011 (Akhtar, 2020). The Hindu caste system is an

ascribed, complex social structure in which, at birth, people are hierarchically arranged based on

their parent's occupation (Abraham, 2014). The system is maintained through the practice of

endogamy (marrying within an ascribed group), which reproduces a homogenised system of

power (Abraham, 2014). One of the central principles in the government of the Hindu caste

system stems from the discourses of purity and pollution (Paik, 2011; Muthukkaruppan, 2017;

Virmani, 2020): those at the top are constructed as pure and those at the bottom are constructed

as impure. This polarisation shapes the interactions and overall organisation of society, which

operates through the disequilibrium of power (Nelavala, 2019; Parmar, 2020). The upper caste

Hindu bodies are viewed as symbolic beings of power in society, while Dalits are viewed as

those on the bottom of the hierarchy (Paik, 2011; Muthukkaruppan, 2017; Bapuji, 2020).

Dalits have faced widespread discrimination, exclusion, exploitation, and violence (Patel, 2016;

Muthukkaruppan, 2017; Nelavala, 2019; Ps, 2020; Tamgadge, 2020). Consequently, they are not

always able to meet their basic needs, such as water, food, education, and state protection

(Virmani, 2020). This chapter draws from aspects of Goffman (1963) concept of stigma and

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[3] The name of 'Dalit' is used to reference only those who were once known as the 'untouchables', but I acknowledge and understand that not all Dalits will identify with the name. Many prefer to use their caste name, such as Matang, Charmakar or Dhor, or they may refer to their religion or their nationality as their identity. (Paik, 2011; Mandavkar, 2015). I specifically choose to refer to them as 'Dalit', and when referencing their past, I sometimes refer to them as the 'untouchables' to highlight their past identity and to show awareness of Dalit history. I avoid using generalised terms such as 'scheduled caste'—many do not identify with such terms, which ignore historical injustice.

explores the constructed and subjective identity of Dalits and the intersubjective Dalit transformation of identity. A Foucauldian approach is used to analyse the social construction of the Dalit identity. The chapter begins by examining the construction of the Hindu caste system and then presents the history of the Dalit renaming process to unveil the transformation of the Dalit identity over time. Part of this renaming process involves Dalit contestation of names assigned to them by the nation-state. Examining the issue from this perspective also facilitates an understanding of the exclusion, subordination, and exploitation of Dalit bodies. This chapter concludes by examining two popular Dalit social movements that occurred after India won independence in 1947: the Ambedkar movement and the Dalit Panthers movement. These were chosen for analysis because they mark the time when communal identity became popularised discourse within the general politics of Dalit society (Rajesh, 2016; Ps, 2020; Virmani, 2020).

2.1 Hindu caste system

It has been argued that the caste system emerged out of the Varna, which is described in detail in many Hindu scriptures (Shah, Mander, Thorat, Deshpande and Baviskar, 2006; Paik, 2011; Muthukkaruppan, 2017; Nelavala, 2019; Singh, 2019; Ps, 2020). The Varna is a divinely authorised belief that humanity is organised in accordance with a four-tier system (Paik, 2011; Muthukkaruppan, 2017; Nelavala, 2019; Singh, 2019; Ps, 2020). According to the Hindu religious scriptures, society is arranged by the hierarchical ordering of the Vedic system of the Varnasharma Dharma[4] which is an ascribed system that refers to the social ordering of society from an ascribed code that refers to different classes that are derived from occupations. The caste system classifies people by two measures: their occupation and their status in society

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[4] Duties that one must perform as per the varna system (social division of people into four main tiers) and four ashrams (the segmental division of Hindu society into the four tiers) and the dharma (duty of the individual) (Rajkhowa, 2019).

(Muthukkaruppan, 2017; Nelavala, 2019). A popular hymn in the Rigveda (an ancient Indian collection of Vedic Sanskrit hymns) states that the various castes have been created from different parts of the supreme being's body (Nelavala, 2019). It is from the body of the Brahma that the four main tiers of the Hindu society were born: the Brahmin (priest) was born from the mouth of the creator, the Kshatriya (warrior) from the arm, the Vaishya (merchant) from the stomach and the Shudra (servant) from the foot. There was also a fifth category: those once referred to as the 'untouchables'[5], who were thought to have been born outside the body. Since their entry into the divine body was unimaginable, they were equated with animals (Nelavala, 2019). This fifth category within the Indian Hindu society is still considered so low that its members do not have a place in the social order; they are understood as outcastes[6] (Shah et al., 2006; Garalyte, 2019; Singh, 2019; Majid, 2012; Singh L., 2015; Singh, 2019; Nelavala, 2019).

The production of an ascribed caste system suggests that it has become normalised by being deeply embedded in society through the process of assigning bodies to a caste (Chakravarti, 2012; Bapuji, 2020). This was not forced and did not occur overnight, but over time through societal discourse and in practice—for example, endogamy—with reference groups, institutions, and authorities (Bapuji, 2020). Simultaneously, it is through social discourse and interactions that subjects also come to recognise themselves as their caste category. Bapuji argues that caste is part of the Dalit identity, as is their skin, their mannerisms, and their work, because they are born into it and maintain it through their everyday societal interactions. Thus, through the social process, individuals come to understand themselves as having a place within the system.

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[5] Presently identified as Dalits (Kumar, 2005).
[6] Outcaste is defined as an individual and/or group who is rejected by their home, community and/or society because they refuse to accept them and/or they do not have a place in society (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021).

i.   The pure and the polluted

The Hindu caste system constructs the Brahmins as the purest and the untouchables as the polluted (Paik, 2011; Muthukkaruppan, 2017; Bapuji, 2020). The discourse around the concepts of purity and pollution produces inequality between the different Varnas that assign one's social identity at birth (Paik, 2011; Thorat and Joshi, 2015; Muthukkaruppan, 2017; Virmani, 2020). The notions of purity and pollution are sacred to Hinduism and are integral to the practice of Brahmanism (Vaid, 2014). Muthukkaruppan (2017) reasons that the untouchable category was constructed, and continues to be upheld, because Brahminism cannot survive *without* the practice of untouchability. For example, the Brahmins are understood as supreme because they are connected to their occupational role of priests, which makes them closest to the 'gods'. Their 'job' is to create a pure environment, whereas since the untouchables are the furthest down the hierarchy, they are furthest away from the 'gods' (Muthukkaruppan, 2017). It can be argued that the societal role of Brahminism would be obsolete if there was no 'impurity' for them to 'clean'.

While there is extensive research on casteism, caste is often combined with, or understood as, a feature of class (Sabharwal and Sonalkar, 2015). A class system is understood to be partially open and is constructed according to individual success and social factors. Individuals of a particular class often share similar relationships and access to similar resources, land, occupations, and technologies that produce their class status (Little, et al., 2016). There is a strong relationship between caste and class, as those in the upper caste are more privileged—from birth, they have access to occupation rights, private education, health, food, shelter, and employment, as opposed to those of the lower caste, such as Dalit. This makes it more difficult for the lower caste to gain upward class mobility (Vaid, 2012; Sakaran and Von Hecker, 2017). However, the relationship between caste and occupation is beginning to be deconstructed in

urban India (Vaid, 2012)—although it is still important to recognise caste as a separate identity or social category, especially for Dalits. For example, a person of lower class, as opposed to a person of middle or upper caste, might be deprived of financial resources; however, they do not face the same social and cultural exclusion as Dalits do (Paik, 2011; Sabharwal and Sonalkar, 2015; Aruna, 2018). Some research shows that since the 1990s, market reforms have reduced discriminatory caste practices (Kapur, Babu and Prasad, 2014). It is argued that Dalit capitalism is the ability of Dalit casted individuals/entrepreneurs to construct equal space for purchasing power as a solution to emancipate Dalits (Teltumbde, 2020c). However, many argue that an increase in Dalit capitalism is unusual, particularly when examining the labour markets across India (Desphande, 2017; Shah, et al., 2018).

The practices of untouchability are shaped around three dimensions: exclusion, humiliation-subordination, and exploitation (Shah et al., 2006). The term 'social exclusion' has been defined as a complex process in which several different types of exclusion work simultaneously to leave a group or persons out of the larger group (United Nations, 2016). Types of social exclusion include economic, religious, social, and political; combined, they deprive Dalit communities at both micro and macro levels (Shah, et al., 2006; Ram, 2016; Coffey, et al., 2016). Dalits are socially excluded from public places (Virmani, 2020; Jogdand, Khan and Reicher, 2020), and if they are in the public eye, they are humiliated (Virmani, 2020). This humiliation can be understood as a disciplinary tool of oppression and subordination (Virmani, 2020; Jogdand et al., 2020). Over time, the performance of collective humiliation on a group produces a collective mindset that is characteristic of untouchable consciousness (Arulnathan, 2016). It is argued that there are different layers of consciousness that have been observed in the Dalit social world. Firstly, is the *untouchable consciousness* wherein some Dalits have a self-contempt because of

their caste status, and it is perceived that the only way to reach liberation is through the upper caste. Subsequently, Dalits are also simultaneously empowered through resistance and therefore producing *Dalit consciousness*. Wherein Dalit consciousness is defined as a collective consciousness that is both a socially and culturally constructed reality that is empowered through social protest as a form of emancipation (Arulnathan, 2016).

Historically, Dalits' polluted status marked them for occupations only as sweepers, scavengers, disposers of animal remains and gravediggers (Thorat and Joshi, 2015; Sharma, 2017). Moreover, they were often forbidden to touch or expose their bodies (even their shadows) in front of an upper caste individual (Rao, 2017; Sharma, 2017). The fear of the polluted Dalit body was so extreme that at one point, Dalit bodies were required to tie branches to their backs so their footprints would be swept away, and/or they had to hang clay pots around their necks to collect any potential droplets of saliva that might disperse as they were breathing, speaking, or moving. (Jayasri, 2015; Rao, 2017; Teltumbde, 2020a). They were also forbidden to drink out of the same water wells as the other castes (Jayasri, 2015; Rao, 2017; Virmani, 2020). These restrictions on Dalits' physical bodies also excluded them from entering public locations, such as temples, hospitals, and schools, thus furthering their isolation and their disadvantaged position in society (Singh, 2007; Rao, 2017; Virmani, 2020).

Although some of these isolating practices, such as exclusion from entering public places, are no longer in place, the isolation of Dalits remains an issue today in more invisible ways and continues to have serious consequences for Dalit women. One being that it makes Dalit women more vulnerable to sexual violence. For example, the practice of devadasi involves Dalit parents devoting their young girls to Hindu temples as servants of God, whereby they are forced into isolation and into prostitution for the priests (Dutt, 2016; Mandloi, 2018). This isolation of Dalit

women forces them into less public places (inside temples) and, consequently, the violence against them remains invisible. Thus, it can be argued that such tools of humiliation and exclusionary disciplinary practices produce the general body politics of *difference* by virtue of Dalit bodies being considered 'polluted'. Samuel (2020) explains that it is through the social construction of the 'other' and the power of 'untouchability' placed on the untouchable body that the Indian caste society sustains itself.

However, it has been found that the caste system is more than just about cultural exclusion—it is more complex than this. Mosse (2018) examines the political-economic institutions, such as banks, schools, and caste policies, that highlight status and occupational mobility through caste and class status. He argues that caste is driven by competition, pointing to research showing an increase in caste violence directed at Dalits as the standard-of-living gap between this group and the upper caste has narrowed. Caste power is exercised by limiting Dalits' power to connect and to work together, and it is used to annihilate and/or prevent the possibility of change (Mosse, 2018). Thus, we can see how power operates through the polarisation of purity and pollution by constructing boundaries of physical, visual, economic, and locational separation. And while individuals' various experiences of humiliation, exclusion and exploitation are not the same, they illustrate the many ways in which the manifold forms of exclusion take place.

ii.   The institution of caste

Many scholars have argued that the caste system in its entirety needs to be understood as an *institution* (Javaid, Majid and Zahid, 2014, Chrispal, Bapuji and Zietsma, 2020). Institutions can be understood as systems for establishing patterns of administrated behaviour that can classify, govern, and constrain individuals within society (Little, et al., 2016). For example, institutions

such as the family, religion, education, prisons, and others will have certain goals, rules, rights, and privileges that may be distinct from those of individual members (Little, et al. 2016). Alternatively, Tuomela (2013) argues that institutions should be understood more as organised normative 'expectations' that guide, as opposed to control, how people should act to bring about a collective benefit. This definition allows for a more nuanced approach by recognising that society is made up of agents and those agents can make room for change.

Further examination of the caste system reveals that it is deeply rooted in Indian society because caste norms and practices are evident in everyday social practices and interactions and in the operation of spaces (Rao, 2015; Vandana, 2020; Virmani, 2020; Chrispal, et al. 2020; Bapuji and Chrispal, 2020). Thorat and Joshi (2015) argue that for Hindu men and women, caste rituals of purity and pollution are embedded into every aspect of their lives, from the moment they wake up to when they go to sleep. For example, the requirement of ritual purification baths by the Brahmin caste after being touched by or being in the presence of a polluted being, not allowing those of the untouchable caste near their food or in their kitchen and/or using the everyday language that ensures compliance with the caste system, such as the word 'untouchables' (Thorat and Joshi, 2015). They also argue that these rituals are more exclusive to the upper caste because these rituals of 'cleansing' are linked to their identity and their feelings of superiority. Drawing on Foucault (1979), this means that caste-based purification practices can then be understood as a form of disciplinary power in which oppression is a consequence of the regulatory practices that are diffused and produced through societal discourses and knowledge, which become normalised over time.

Little et al. (2016) argue that culture is essentially three things. First, culture is learned—we are taught to behave in certain ways through the norms and regulations of society. For example, as

discussed above, the caste system is important to the Hindu way of life. It manages who people marry, their occupation, how and when they eat and with whom, and how they communicate and interact. Second, culture is innovative, meaning that society is fluid and can change depending on circumstances. For example, the concept of marriage reveals the way in which the Indian society finds solutions to maintain the caste system and to organise familial structures and society; Little et al. highlight that these solutions are not always just. Third, they argue that culture can also be restraining when societies attempt to retain traditional practices over time— for example, using the practices of untouchability and endogamy to maintain casteism. Following Little et al. (2016), it can be surmised that the construction of the caste system is how power is exercised to set societal rules, values, and norms, which are also constraining and restricting. However, the system was simultaneously produced through innovation—that is, to sustain culture. This suggests that it is fluid and therefore can change to address the issues of discrimination and subjugation. Nonetheless, that fluidity can also perpetuate, rather than disrupt, the cycle of learning and restriction.

Indian society has yet to eliminate this harmful social system. While its practices are not as explicit as they used to be, they do present themselves in new ways. For example, although the practice of untouchability has been illegal since independence in 1950 (Cotterill, Sidanius, Bhardwaj and Kumar, 2014; Dasgupta and Pal, 2020)—the *Constitution of India, Article 15(2), 17 and 29(2)* declared it so, and a reservation system was implemented to allow for equal opportunity among the lower castes (Chatterjee, 2014; Adur and Narayan, 2017)—many Dalits continue to face inequality and discrimination, even with laws and policies in place to address this. Many Dalit students are often referred to in daily language as 'Government Brahmins,' which highlights the way in which Dalits are perceived in other spaces as 'privileged' because

they receive a benefit from the government (Virmani, 2020, p. 9). Sabharwal's (2020) research on caste relations in higher education settings found that lower caste students primarily formed relationships with those of the same caste due to the fear of exclusionary behaviour from others. It also revealed that school administrations did not support an equal opportunity environment. These types of stereotypes and interactions are produced through the structures of power when an 'imitation' of respectability is constructed within the larger society (Virmani, 2020). This illustrates how the caste system is embedded into Indian society and creates restrictions for Dalits.

However, by contrast, the reservation system can be understood as a mechanism that can be used to reshape discourses and thereby provide access for Dalits at the socio-economic and political levels. It is through these processes of innovation and how they are implemented that the liberation of Dalits from discriminatory practices can perhaps begin. This also suggests that in the context of the caste system, fluidity reinforces the cycle of learning. Thorat (2016) argues that for transformation to begin, a process of 'unlearning' unjust values and then 'learning' egalitarian values is necessary. This means that the very tenet of 'untouchability' requires exclusion under a religious justification, and this has cultivated a lack of interrelationships within society and in every aspect of life (Thorat and Sabharwal, 2015).

When institutional disciplinary practices become normalised within society, two things happen as these practices embedded and reinforce one another. First, they become normalised in society's collective consciousness, producing conformity; second, as a result, they become normalised in the minds of individuals (George, 2020). As mentioned above, Foucault (1979) argued that when institutions become normalised within society, that extend government over the masses. Thus, it can be argued that in terms of purity and pollution, the exclusivity of purity

remaining exclusive to the Brahmin caste and pollution remaining exclusive to the untouchables (Thorat and Joshi, 2015) constructs a system of inequality (Gupta, Coffey, and Spears, 2016) that reinforces the power of the caste system. It then follows that the social structures produced by institutions, such as the caste system, shape the collective representation of societal norms, values, ethics, beliefs, and expectations (Little, et al., 2016). From these shared beliefs and behaviours, culture is produced, and it shapes the ways in which individuals interact with each other in society (Little, et al.). Therefore, it is imperative to recognise that the institution of *caste* is a form of government that serves *to sustain hierarchy and manage society*.

As discussed above, the public humiliation and exclusion of Dalits are interlinked (Shah et al., 2006; Virmani, 2020; Jogdand et al., 2020). These types of Dalit disciplinary practices are justified based on the binary of the pure and the polluted. Dalit bodies become the symbol of 'pollution' and are constructed as the 'other': 'polluted' and even criminal (Chakrabarty, 2018). Furthermore, this produces an environment in which a panoptic presence of caste exists within society that preserves and maintains the social hierarchies (Kumar, 2017). For example, in many villages across India, traditionally and even now, Dalits are forced to live on the outskirts (Majid, 2012; Subramanyam, 2015; Anandhi, 2017; Saranya, 2017; Virmani, 2020). Different disciplinary practices, such as managing how and where people can live and which spaces they can and cannot enter, are examples of techniques of power being produced by 'difference': by limiting access to, and limited positioning within, societal spaces (Virmani, 2020). This production of power and management of the population conceptualises bio-power (Foucault, 1979). Gorringe (2016) contends that the arrangement of villages—placing the Dalit population on the outskirts and the Brahmins in the centre with all the shops and schools—puts Dalits under the watchful gaze of the Brahmins. Over time, the caste hierarchy, and the exclusion of the Dalit

as the 'other' become normalised within society, and these disciplinary practices are no longer

visible forms of punishment (Waghmore and Contractor, 2015). This suggests that the exclusion

and humiliation of Dalits has become a ritualised form of behaviour within greater society.

Some argue that even Dalits accept the caste system as a mutual belief system held by all the

tiers within it (Cotterill et al., 2014). Conversely, others have argued that Dalits are more likely

to appear to 'accept' their status through discourses of '*karma*' (fate) or '*dharma*' (one's duty

due to one's social position) because their sense of agency is constrained (Sunam, 2014). Roy

(2016) posits that the practice of untouchability is also exercised *within* untouchable

communities, wherein Dalits recreate the hierarchical caste system for themselves. Dalit leader

Ambedkar referred to this as the '*infection of imitation*': where many Dalits aspire to *be*

Brahmin, they will discriminate and humiliate those below them (as cited in Roy, 2016a, p.51).

This suggests that many Dalits are vested in sustaining the caste system and that it is a mutually

held belief system.

However, such arguments have been strongly criticised on the basis that replication does *not*

equate to consensus (Still, 2017; Jain, 2017). Rather, it is argued that replication may symbolise

the deep-rooted power of the institution of the caste system within society and that replication

may simultaneously act as a form of resistance *and* as a form of accommodation rather than as

consensus (Jain, 2017). According to Still, implying that imitation equates to acceptance is

speculative and outdated, as it assumes that an entire marginalised group is indiscriminately

adopting or replicating the behaviour of their oppressor. She argues that Dalit people are

transforming, not adopting, and that while they may 'adopt' certain normative symbols, they are

doing so in their own way—a way that is useful to them, which is reminiscent of Foucault's

concept of resistance (Still, 2017; Jain, 2017). For Foucault, *where there is power there is*

resistance, and that resistance comes in different forms that will interlink, proliferate, and grow (Foucault, 1978).

It is through various institutions, such as the family, religion, schools, medicine, and the state, that disciplinary practices are produced, and these operate by regulating the subject (Foucault, 1978). As argued above, the normalisation of the Hindu caste system was produced by various cultural, religious, and social narratives and disciplinary practices. Therefore, it can be argued that over time, the Hindu caste system has become a regime of 'truth' for Indian society in which the various types of discourses and practices are accepted and function as 'true'. This can be evidenced by examining the Hindu caste system's influence on Sikhs, Muslims and Christians adopting and/or replicating caste-like systems in India (Mohapatra, 2015). This suggests that while the caste system originated from the Hindu religion, it needs to be identified as an institution of its own, as its influence transcends religion and reaches into social, political, and cultural life across India. This is imperative because the representation of Dalit bodies as 'untouchable' shapes the way in which these bodies are understood in addition to shaping the relationships between groups and, ultimately, their sense of belonging (Gupta, 2012; 2015).

2.2 The social construction of Dalit

In the 1920s, Dalit activists began to publicly challenge, resist, and reconstruct the Dalit identity for themselves (Teltumbde, 2020c). To understand and locate Dalit women in the Indian context, one must first understand the socio-political history of Dalits. This section examines the social construction of the 'Dalit' name to explore how identity construction affects the exclusion, subordination, and exploitation of Dalits. The naming process has been characterised as a powerful instrument for identity construction (Dzimiri, Runhare, Dzimiri and Mazorodze, 2017). According to Eshert (2016), our names shape our identities and represent our history, traditions,

and location and who we are as individuals and as groups. This section begins by examining the historical constructions of Dalits through the process of naming and renaming and how these constructions have been shaped by the perceived social identity of Dalits today. It also yields insight into Dalits' deconstruction of the subjective 'Dalit' identity. The social construction of Dalits *today* can be understood by reviewing the names produced by the politics of society including the untouchables, the harijans, the depressed classes, and the scheduled castes. Dalits have been shaped by an embodied transformation of identity (Vyas and Panda, 2019). For transformation to occur, social action and agency must also be present (Foucault, 1997). Foucault posited that identities are not fixed but fluid and are mediated and transformed through our everyday discourses and practices (Foucault, 1979; 1980). Thus, this section proposes that while Dalit bodies may be rendered docile by 'accepting' practices of untouchability, they also resist and deconstruct those practices by questioning their very existence.

i.   What is in a name?

Examining the naming and renaming of 'Dalits' over the years provides insight into Dalits today. Charsley's (1996) book '*What is in a name?*' examines how the concept of 'untouchables' was constructed. It is important to understand that while the Dalit identity is not homogenous, it is contingent upon discourses of suffering and emancipation (Still, 2014; Paul and Dowling, 2018). The examination of Dalit history and the discursive practices of activism is fundamental to this thesis, as it reveals how power, subjectivity and ideology operate through the construction of the Dalit subject.

Over the years, Dalits have been referred to by many different titles. However, it has been argued that it was through colonialism that more formal names were constructed (Paul and Dowling,

2018), wherein the British employed quasi-scientific racial theory to identify the various Indian

subgroups (Metcalf and Metcalf, 2006; Chairez-Garza, 2018). This type of racial theory operated

according to the notion that the caste system originated from the differences between the Indo-

Aryans and the Dravidians (Chairez-Garza, 2018), with the Indo-Aryans recognised as the

superior race. Ultimately, this can be understood as a colonial interpretation that further

produced the hierarchal structuring of society through the caste system (Metcalf and Metcalf,

2006; Paik, 2011). Over the years, many have argued that the power of colonialism and the way

in which untouchability was constructed restrained the fluidity of identities and produced an

imperial single entity of classification of Indian people (Muthaiah, 2004; Paul and Dowling,

2018). However, in relation to caste struggles and violence, these types of colonial frameworks

neglect to consider pre-colonial caste history because the caste system *precedes* the colonisation

of India—to ignore this exonerates upper caste violence and excludes Dalit history (Da Costa,

2019).

In 1903, the nationalist reform movement began, in which 'educated' Indians (English-speaking)

began addressing the caste system. As part of a resolution to reform and elevate the

'untouchables', this group was renamed the 'depressed classes' (Kumar, 2005; Dhanaraju, 2015;

Fuller, 2016). The process of naming and renaming is imperative for understanding the

oppression of the Dalit people, as the very practice of naming is one in which people can begin

to negotiate their various subject positions and the relations between the self and others within

society (McLaren and Giroux, 2018). However, it is also important to understand the

implications for the subjective identity of a group and its connection to an identity that has been

constructed *for* it. For example, in 1931, Ambedkar passionately rejected the name of 'depressed

classes' on the grounds that it was humiliating and offensive (Paik, 2011). He argued that names

are essentially labels that represent people and offered suggestions such as the 'excluded-castes' or 'exterior castes', names that highlighted their oppression. But these were rejected by the state (Paik, 2011; Ambedkar, 2014).

This suggests that the name changes being imposed on Dalits by the Indian government did affect their subjective identity and how they understood their place in society. Over the next 30 years, different renaming processes began, and because of Gandhi's humanitarian campaign against 'untouchability', the name of 'Harijan' (children/people of God) was introduced (Paik, 2011; Sikka, 2012; Mandavkar, 2015) to counter discourses of inequality. However, Gandhi's revised version of 'equality' was widely critiqued on the grounds that he was attempting to reconstruct modern-day discourse to *maintain* Brahmanical hegemony (Biswas, 2018) and that reconstructing the Dalit body as a 'child of God *too*' was a veiled attempt to regulate society through an apparent authorised caste system. Later, the name 'other backward classes' was introduced and accepted; this was then changed to 'scheduled castes', which is still used today in the context of government administration (Muthaiah, 2004; Paik, 2011).

What also stands out in the renaming process is that Dalits were excluded from it; the process was imposed upon them through political discourses of equality and reform (Parmar, 2020). Yet socially, Dalits were still easily identified as the 'other' through residential segregation, occupation, and exclusion from public places (Parmar, 2020). Given that the politics of the reform movement were constructed around the discourse of *empowerment* for the untouchables, the question becomes: Why were they not included in the process? This line of questioning brings to light other layers of examination and the question of *identity politics*—the politics of *difference*. The politics of identity can be understood as a concept that applies to any kind of political movement that deliberately focuses on a specific group with shared characteristics (such

as caste) with the perceived objective of gaining advantage for that group (Younge, 2018). Interestingly, when examining groups that have been historically oppressed and the intersections of their multiple social identities (caste, class, religion, gender, etc.), the politics of identity can result in either opportunities or oppression, or it can result in both (De Silva, 2020). This can explain how renaming Dalits was a highly complex process; while it afforded new opportunities for potential representation, it was also oppressive. Arguably, constructing politics around issues of identity came at the expense of Dalits, keeping the newly identified scheduled castes at the periphery and disempowered. This also opened doors to *other* forms of exclusion and humiliation.

It can be proposed that two identities emerged through the renaming process: one perceived by those who did the naming and the other perceived by those who were named. *Imposing* the renaming of caste categories does not suggest the deconstruction of a caste hierarchy but merely the same hierarchy that has been 'reimagined'. This is because the deconstruction of caste hierarchy can only be 'realised' if greater society is open to the notion of constructing a space for equality wherein caste categories do not exist (Ambedkar, 2014). Thus, this suggests that deconstruction cannot be understood as the construction of a double identity but rather as an extension of disciplinary power that still imposes categorised identities. Name changes that are *imposed* only mitigate the notion of caste oppression, while the diffusion of power that has been produced through power–knowledge continues to be maintained.

ii.   Dalit self-identification

To understand the history of Dalit *people*, it is imperative to understand the experiences of Dalit *women* today. Chapter Three undertakes an in-depth critical feminist analysis of the intersections

of gender, caste, and class. This section reflects on the historical renaming of 'Dalit', which raises the question: How has this shaped Dalit people's politics of belonging in India?

In the 1970s, Dalit transformation began with another name change in which Dalits attempted to deconstruct their own identity (Paik, 2011; Sikka, 2012; Rawat, 2015). The Dalit Panthers movement deployed the term 'Dalit' (Shah, et. Al., 2006; Sikka, 2012; Rawat, 2015; Pankaj and Pandey, 2019; Satyanarayana, 2019a). The translation of Dalit from Sanskrit is 'broken' or 'oppressed' (Sikka, 2012; Gupta, 2014; Mandavkar, 2015; Mosse, 2018), and the idea was that all those who had been oppressed would come together under a collective identity and spread awareness within society regarding those who had been affected by the caste system, pollution, karma, gender and/or classism (Ciotti, 2010; Sikka, 2012; Ashok, Pankaj and Pandey, 2019; Satyanarayana, 2019). However, from a sociological perspective, and for many Dalits, this well-intended attempt at inclusion did not reflect their shared experiences of historical and political oppression (Paik, 2011, 2017). This new identity was political and understood as a movement meant to empower and deconstruct the negative connotations of impurity and shame attached to the Dalit body (Paik, 2011, 2017; Bhaumik, 2018). Kumar (2005) called it the 'awakening of self-respect amongst Dalits' Zelliot (2001), stating that the revival of the term 'Dalit' was symbolic of change and revolution. Identity (re)construction is complex, particularly when those who undertake it have a historical consciousness of subjugation (Sikka, 2012).

The very contestation of naming and renaming is a sign of people who have been oppressed. For the Dalit people, it has been very difficult to find or imagine a new collective identity that reflects their shared historical, political, and personal experiences and aspirations (Ciotti, 2010; Bhaumik, 2018; Pariyar & Lovett, 2016). On the contrary, Hardtmann (2009) points out that the term 'Dalit' is still ascribed and is an identity acquired through the process of 'becoming' aware.

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It can be argued that while the self-identified name of 'Dalit' was chosen by Dalit people, Hardtmann asks the question: Which Dalit people does this term represent? It has been found that increased access to education can generate the process of 'becoming' aware, as Dalits are then able to reinterpret and rename their history (Ciotti, 2010; Pariyar and Lovett, 2016). Nonetheless, while it can be agreed that the Dalit label was self-identified and constructed, it can also be argued that it was the politically charged Dalits who constructed this identity for other Dalits, who may or may not identify with it and who often do not designate themselves as Dalits (Hardtmann, 2009; Pariyar and Lovett, 2016).

This could explain why Dutt (2019) describes what she calls '*coming out as Dalit*' as so difficult, since she had been posing as a Brahmin since childhood. She explains that the 'Dalit' identity is *not* shared by all, but the *experiences* derived from their caste represent an apparatus with which they can all identify. Paik (2011) supports this claim and contends that even 50 years later, the ex-untouchables are still confused about how to identify themselves. However, recently it has also been observed that there has been a strong rejection of the term *Dalit* by many young people and the newly emerged Buddhist middle class of the scheduled caste asking, '*who wants to be called Dalit*?' Arguing that the name itself implies inferiority (Paik, 2011; Narayan, 2021). So, they prefer to be known as *Buddhists* or *Indians*. Thus, for many, the name Dalit is not one with which they connect, as it does not resonate with their everyday life experiences (Paik, 2011).

This could explain why many Dalits today have opted to drop their surname altogether. Parmar (2020) explains that in many cities in India, Dalits are not as easily identified by appearance as they once were (dress, skin color, residence and last name). However, surnames are an important identifying marker of caste, which is why many Dalits are choosing to change their surnames to 'pass' as upper caste. This notion of 'passing' as someone else is reminiscent of Goffman's

(1963) work on stigma[7] and impression management: he refers to the act of concealing a spoiled

identity[8] as 'passing for normal' (p.87), wherein the act of 'passing' is about power and

managing the information others know about us. It can be argued that Dalits dropping their

surnames is a form of impression management that 'replicates' or 'imitates' the upper caste so

they can fit in. Goffman's (1963) approach to understanding the social construction of stigma

and stigmatized identities is interconnected with the construction of the Dalit identity. Goffman

(1963) recognizes stigma as being produced out of societal discourses of how society expects of

a person and or group and how they view themselves and who they are. Stigma is a socially

constructed category of an individual and/or group and given the social context stigma can be

experienced in a number of different ways, which means it can also shift through discourse.

However, further investigation suggests the necessity Dalits concealing their identity as a

strategic response to bypass the stigma of the caste system. Parmar (2020) found that many

Dalits are being denied career opportunities despite their qualifications and that they were also

being denied entry into the rental market. This supports findings of research into segregated

caste-based rental markets in urban settings (Thorat, Banerjee, Mishra and Rizi, 2015; Dasgupta,

2017; Parmar, 2020), which essentially construct city slums that are spatially represented as

'Dalit colonies' at the peripheries of cities (Roberts, 2016), thus reproducing the same exclusion

of Dalits within cities as occurs in rural villages. This suggests that the Dalit identity is not

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[7] Goffman (1963) referred to stigma as the anticipation of a discrediting judgment of oneself by others in a specific context. Society categorises people according to different attributes through language, and this is exercised in social settings. These attributes construct the notion of what is 'normal' and what is 'not normal' within society.

[8] A spoiled identity is a term coined by Goffman (1963) wherein a person's identity causes them to experience stigma.

homogenous, nor is it accepted across the Dalit community. While some have accepted and are proud of their 'Dalit' identity, others reject, avoid, and hide it.

2.3 Dalit resistance

While the caste system constructs a system of division and operates to shape the politics of difference (Mio and Dasgupta, 2018), it is also understood that where there is power, there is also resistance (Foucault, 1978). This section examines two popularised social movements that coincide with the transformation of the Dalit social identity: Ambedkar's movement and the Dalit Panthers movement. While this chapter extensively covers the oppression and subjugation of Dalits, this section specifically explores the different ways in which agency, resistance, and the contestation of Dalitness operate by examining these Dalit social movements. Specifically, it addresses the way in which these movements have transformed the identification of the Dalit people in the context of name, religion, laws, and social change.

i.   Ambedkar's untouchable movement

Dr BR Ambedkar (2002) argued that a positive identity from a history of 'untouchability' could not, and cannot, be constructed; thus, he advocated for the annihilation of the Hindu caste system. In his book *Annihilation of Caste*, he contended that the very name 'Hindu' was constructed by the Muslims and that consequently 'Hindu society is a myth' (Ambedkar, 2002, p. 59). Similarly, he posited that the caste system is a socially constructed institution developed for the government of the masses. He pointed out that a society cannot be transformed when one group is treated as 'untouchable' because if there is no consciousness of shared aspirations among society members, no change can transpire. Ambedkar's reasoning was reminiscent of Foucault (1979; 1980), who described power in governmentality as sovereign, discipline, and

government powers. According to Ambedkar (2014), for Dalits to change their outcaste position in society, they needed to reconceptualise and represent themselves. For society to relinquish the caste system, there had to be a greater understanding of caste dynamics, and Dalits had to begin by contextualising caste interaction. Foucault (1997) emphasised that the interaction between agents underlies the embodiment of individual and collective subjectivities.

One of the most interesting forms of resistance taken up by the Ambedkar movement was the rejection of Hinduism and the promotion of religious conversion (Zelliot, 2005; Taylor, 2014; Jilova, 2019; Ghadage, 2020). He challenged all his followers to convert to Buddhism, or to any other religion they could, to deconstruct the caste system and achieve emancipation (Pandey, 2006; Hardtmann, 2009; Kumar, 2019a). Religion has been described as one of the most influential institutions that shapes and connects societal social systems, especially for minoritised groups (Roberts, 2016; Broo, Kheir and Sarkar, 2019). Ambedkar deployed religious conversion as a means of reconstructing the way in which society interacted with Dalits (Ram, 2012; Ghadage, 2020). He specifically called for 'action-oriented Buddhism' (Contursi, 1993, p. 323), which involved two interconnected objectives: the annihilation of caste and the reconstruction of society around the principles of equality, liberty, and fraternity. Ambedkar particularly pointed out that this was a rejection of Hinduism and *not* of Indian society. Thus, mass religious conversion to Buddhism was an attempt for Dalits to reclaim space in that society (Ghadage, 2020). Moreover, it called for an alliance among non-Brahmanical society members and Dalits *against* oppression and the Brahmanical hegemony (Ghadage).

Dalits have continued to convert religions where it is estimated that approximately 20 million Dalits have converted to Buddhism since Ambedkar did so in 1956 (as cited in Mukerji, 2020). However, religious conversion has not steadily risen since 1956. However, it has been observed

that mass conversions of Dalits to Buddhism taking place after events of caste-violence. For example, in after the gang rape of the Dalit woman from Hathras, a mass conversion of 300 Dalits took place in protest of the gang rape (Venugopal, 2020). Ambedkar's religious conversion can be recognised as an exercise of resistance and agency through the rejection of Hinduism and discriminatory practices in the hope of reconstructing Dalit identity (Gupta, 2015). It should be noted that religious conversion was not an entirely new phenomenon for Dalits: in the 20th century, both Christianity and Sikhism persuaded some, not all Dalits to convert to dispose of their caste identity (Zelliot, 2001; Gupta, 2014). Although little research has been conducted on the impact this conversion had on Dalits, it has been argued that the technique of converting to Buddhism allowed them to constitute their own subjectivity, reconstruct their history and transform their selves (Paik, 2011). However, Mosse's (2020) findings on contemporary beliefs about caste among Dalits show that while extreme untouchable practices have changed, Dalits still feel discrimination within society; and while religious conversion may be aligned with those changes, Dalits do not attribute those changes to religious conversion. Moreover, Mosse's study reveals the one fundamental transformation that has not occurred for many Dalits: their 'inferiority complex'. Most of the participants in his study argued that they could not imagine a world without feeling disrespected and stated that they often hid their caste identity when they could. Furthermore, they often placed blame on the state and argued that even with conversion they could not escape casteism. Singh (2019) supports this contention, explaining that the history of untouchability and inequality has made Dalit people feel 'inferior'. This suggests that Dalits believe the continuation of caste power is maintained through the state and larger society and not necessarily affixed to religion. These reflections are tied to the lived experiences of those who converted and yet still face discrimination. For example, it has been

found that discriminatory practices are widespread among Dalit Christians in the church (Kumar, 2020). This examination of the transformation of Dalit identity through conversion thus implies that discrimination did not shift on a societal level.

However, several studies over the last two decades have examined how religious conversion impacted the lives of lower caste women and found that conversion made room for the discourses of 'respectability' and 'agency' amongst Christian Dalit women, even though conversion did not result in liberation from caste or from patriarchy (Kent, 2004; Bauman, 2008; Roberts, 2017; Kapadia, 2017). This indicates that a more intersectional approach to examining Dalit experiences would enable a more critical examination of the transformation of Dalit women's identity rather than the generalisation of social identity (examined in Chapter Three). Foucault argued that power can be experienced in the smallest of details in our everyday life and that incorporating an intersectional approach will allow power to reveal itself though everyday discourses and practices. For example, Gupta (2014) asserts that conversion legitimised Dalit women to aspire to negotiate their subject location, which was once bound to religion through fashion—that is, they employed religious conversion to contest their value and location in society by changing their style of dress upon conversion. Christian missionaries encouraged Dalit women to cover their breasts, and this change in clothing separated them from other Dalit women and aligned them with upper caste women.

Gupta found that this not only changed their sense of dress, but even the way they walked—they were embodying their elevated status. This suggests that religious conversion operates as a 'technique of the self' in which practices (such as dress) help transform the self, and this can be represented in different ways (such as the way we carry ourselves) (Foucault, 1978). Similarly, Paik (2016) notes that during the Buddhist women's conference in 2005, the Dalit women who

had converted to Buddhism also changed their style of dress and wore white saris; some even wore sleeveless blouses to announce their newly transformed and modern selves. This implies that while conversion itself did not result in 'realised' changes within the greater society, it did make room for an implied identity shift of the self. These lived experiences make the Dalit worldview unique in that Dalits can view the world in two ways: how they want to see the world and how they experience the world. That is, while the conversion process can be viewed as more of a symbolic move, it nevertheless provides a perceived shift in Dalits' subjective identity. Paik (2011) claims that many Dalit women converts experienced a 'secondary socialisation' of self-emancipation through Buddhist women's organisations. Thus, it can be argued that religious conversion enables Dalits in general to see the potential of a casteless world.

However, it has been argued that many Dalits do not actually convert to Buddhism; they simply adopt the Buddha as their god, a god that could exist alongside their Hindu deities (Shah, et.al 2006; Paik, 2011). This can also explain why the Ambedkar movement was criticised for attempting to speak on behalf of *all* Dalits, universalising their experiences under common terms (Teltumbde, 2020a), whereas many did not want to convert or to reject Hinduism. From my experience as an insider[9], I observed Buddhism being adopted as an 'addition' to an existing Hindu belief system and often deployed as 'motivation' and/or a 'hope' for change. I primarily observed this via the material possessions of many Dalit women: some had trinkets or pictures of a 'Buddha' on a keychain or attached to a bracelet, almost like a good luck token. Similarly, Paik (2011) found that many Dalits added Buddha and Ambedkar deities to the Hindu deities in their homes. While Dalit women continued wearing the mangalsutra (a necklace worn by married Hindu women), overall, there still appeared to be a strong fundamental influence and practice of

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[9] Chapter four and eight will include a thorough examination of my insider/outsider status.

Hinduism—many of the Dalit women still practised morning pujas (Hindu prayers), participated in Hindu festivals, and attended the Hindu temple. Upon reflection, these Hindu practices may have been more of a cultural influence due to their everyday experiences and interactions with others revolving around the Hindu way of life. This could explain why Mosse (2020) stated that despite Ambedkar's qualifications and religious conversion, his lived experiences in India still exposed him as 'untouchable'.

As explained above, many Dalits hold the state responsible for the perpetuation of casteism in society (Mosse, 2020). This location of blame can be explained by examining the state's response to mass conversion. With the large number of Dalit people converting religions, some Indian states began introducing anti-conversion laws (Bauman, 2008). In 2020 Uttar Pradesh introduced a new anti-conversion law that restricted mass conversions. The ordinance defined mass conversions as two or more people and punishment as up to ten years in prison and minimum fine of Rs 50,000 (Venugopal, 2020). The states' response over the years is interesting, as it is masked as a *protection order* for Dalits: to protect them from force and/or deception (Heredia, 2004; Mittal, 2019). According to Heredia (2004), the caste system essentially denies Dalits upward mobility, making religious conversion illegal puts Dalits in the position of 'no entry, no exit' (p. 4543). Furthermore, in 2015, the Indian state also did not allow Dalits who had converted to Islam and Christianity to be given the status of scheduled castes to which Hindu Dalits had access (Mosse, 2020).

Mosse argues that the construction of laws that exempt converted Dalit Muslims and Christians from scheduled status is a strategic law to manage the Indian population, thus exemplifying bio-power. This highlights the interconnection of caste, religion and the nation-state and can be used to explain how the state deploys caste as a disciplinary tool to manage the population: the state

requires caste to be included with religious identity, which privileges the Hindu identity over others (Mosse, 2020). Moreover, this could also explain why many Dalits may not outwardly present themselves as having converted religions, as they want access to the benefits provided to Hindu Dalits. Nevertheless, while it has been argued that Ambedkar's Dalit movement had many successes, it was unable to annihilate the Hindu caste system. According to some, conversion had the opposite effect, constructing another oppressive category within the caste community that further grounded the system of hierarchy among Dalits (Christopher, 2017).

ii.   Dalit Sahitya (literature) and the Dalit Panthers

The Dalit Panthers were inspired by Ambedkar's political action and are considered to represent a more radical version of his movement (Contursi, 1993; Shah, et al., 2006; Rao, 2017). The educational reservation system for Dalits produced the first generation of Dalit-educated youths who began to make their voices heard and challenge the Dalit politics of oppression (Pankaj and Pandey, 2019). The Dalit Panthers primarily comprised of poets and writers who held literary protests, which shaped the little magazine movement that was held on par with upper caste Hindu literature (Ciotti, 2010; Sutradhar, 2014; Mandavkar, 2015; Pandey, 2019). However, Dalit literature was more than mere writing about art or leisure; it was a movement of *recourse*, advocating for human rights and motivating Dalit people (Sutradhar, 2014; Mandavkar, 2015). It has been argued that through Dalit literature, Dalit consciousness was awakened to rejection and revolution and to exposing Dalit 'truths' (Brueck, 2014). The authors tended to document and share every experience—whether it was good, bad, traumatic, or painful—to reveal the life of the Dalit (Mandavkar, 2015). For Dalits trauma is multidimensional and it is intergenerational, that is experienced at the individual and interpersonal level (Ahammed, 2019). It ranges from everyday microaggressions to targeted attacks of sexual violence. And these experiences shape

the way in which they view the self but also their community (Heering, 2013), altering their future identities in fundamental way.

The movement aimed to expose social behaviour and make space for transformation to occur that channelled embodied experiences of humiliation and shame into a dignified, self-constructed identity of freedom (Mandavkar). However, Rao (2017) argues that Dalit literature represented more than this; it sought to compel readers *to confront* the ethical implications of casteism and its power to produce inequality and oppression within society.

Dalit women were also active during the 1970's, and they used their pens as tools to make space for themselves in the Indian women's movement (Mandavkar, 2015). While simultaneously carving out space for themselves within the Dalit Panthers movement, Dalit women writers pointed to the marginalisation of Dalit women inside and outside Dalit communities by highlighting the multi-intersecting identities of gender, caste, class, religion, job, education, and location (Haldar, 2019; Wessler, 2020). However, they kept both caste and gender at the centre of their discourses and attempted to formulate a voice for all Dalit women (Haldar, 2019) to highlight that 'Dalit women talk differently' (Guru, 1995 p. 2549). An interesting example of what Dalit literature could achieve was its highlighting of what *separated* Dalit women from non-Dalit women: their labour (Wessler, 2020). Most Dalit women contribute to their household income through outside work; consequently, this exposes them to more violence as they typically work for the upper caste and this places them into positions to become more vulnerable to violence (Wessler, 2020). They are also stereotyped and verbally assaulted with names such as 'Kaminey' (untrustworthy), a name attached to Dalit women who were employed as bonded farm labourers (Paik, 2011). However, Dalit women writers argue that these same experiences make them more assertive than middle-class women and that despite their lack of education and

their need and ability to work, these characteristics also allow them to negotiate and be assertive (Wessler, 2020). Consequently, they were labelled 'Kaminey'.

Similarly, in the US, Black women since the 1990's have also pointed to the 'angry Black woman' trope that is utilized by white men and women as a form of oppression in their everyday life (Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood and Huntt, 2016). Black researchers argue that this type of narrative is connected to Black women's socio-economic status, which requires them to be part of the workforce alongside men, unlike upper class white women (Walley-Jean, 2009). Again, those experiences allow them to develop an ability to claim space. It has also been found that Black women (similar to Dalit women) are often made invisible and dehumanised in the public space because society does not recognise their trauma. When Black women exercise voice as a form of redress, they are assigned the identity of 'angry Black woman' and criticised for not knowing 'their place' (Jones and Norwood, 2017). Thus, Dalit literature made space for Dalits to express, share and reconstruct history and their sense of self. But it was also a place to confront injustice without fearing who might be present and without the physical implications of such a confrontation.

Due to their combination of relatable experience, education and globalisation, the Dalit Panthers are said to have drawn inspiration from the Black Panthers in the US (Sikka, 2012; Slate, 2012; Mandavkar, 2015). However, globalisation also allowed Dalits to transform cross-cultural knowledge into the space of a new 'self–other' through national and transnational advocacy (Saxena, 2014). This was evidenced by the Dalit Panthers' expansion of the term 'Dalit' to include all those who were marginalised and oppressed by poverty, such as working people, poor women and all those identified as scheduled caste and scheduled tribes, as they wanted to increase their alliances and their visibility within the society (Sikka 2012; Satyanarayana, 2019).

It has been argued that this inclusion of other oppressed minorities was to challenge nationalist and capitalist discourse within the context of caste and religion to transform the politics of difference (Satyanarayana, 2019).

This raises the concern of whether the inclusion of other oppressed minorities changes the identity of *who* a Dalit is, since the shared experience and history of subjugation can become lost, and then so does identity. Moreover, the concept of 'caste' identity can become integrated within a discourse of 'class'. Satyanarayana (2019a) questions where the Dalit identity comes from and whether it is rooted in caste or in the history and experiences of subordination. However, in whatever way it is examined, the caste factor arguably becomes obsolete and leaves the movement without any substantiated ground as a movement based on the politics of difference. As explained previously, caste can be understood as an exercise of power that has continued for centuries, and despite being considered an 'Indian' institution, it has transcended nations within the Indian diaspora (Mosse, 2020). Research shows that Dalits abroad in the US and UK face similar discriminatory practices to Dalits in India: they are racially discriminated against by mainstream society and within Indian communities due to their caste (Taylor, 2014; Adur and Narayan, 2017; Pariyar, 2018). Some note that they have faced more discrimination and exclusion from other Indians than they have from mainstream society, which suggests that caste identity, along with a shared history and the experiences of subordination, are fundamental to who is 'Dalit'. Therefore, the caste system needs to be recognised as *an institution* because for the Indian 'community' both nationally and transnationally, caste is an important aspect of all their social relationships, such as social status, marriage, community organisation and employment (Mosse, 2020); the caste system can have detrimental effects if not examined as an institution. Thus, while the Dalit Panther movement made room for a process of deconstructing

history and language, it inspired the deconstruction of their Dalit identity by reinventing and producing a new and inclusive Dalit identity.

However, for the Dalit Panthers, the locus of class for treating all those subjected to oppression as one cannot be examined singularly. While class can be understood as a structure that can be overcome, from a Dalit perspective, it is harder to overcome, as the intersection of caste, class, location, education and (for Dalit women) gender makes it more difficult (Brueck, 2014; Arya and Rathore, 2020). This highlights the fact that all these socially constructed identities of marginality are deeply interconnected, and one cannot be substituted for another or viewed independently (Banerjee and Ghosh, 2018). Consequently, challenging only the *individual* marginalisation the Dalit people face is not enough. Banerjee and Ghosh contend that to make space for change through discourse, *incorporating intersectionality as a political tool* for those facing multiple oppressions is a mechanism of confrontation for interlocking systems of power.

Summary

The Hindu caste system manages every aspect of India's social structures, including financial, social, and cultural (Sooryamoorthy, 2008). It is a system in which individuals are organised within a hierarchy based on occupation in which those of the highest virtue are constructed as the purest and those of the lowest in virtue are constructed as polluted. Hindu society is divided into four Varnas: the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras. The fifth category, which is considered outside the caste system, is Dalits, formerly known as the 'untouchables'. This categorical social division has become a permanent fixture that successive generations preserve (Shah, 2006). The caste system oversees all areas of life, such as food, marriage, birth, death, communication, and interaction (Bapuji and Chrispal, 2020). One of the central discourses

around the construction of both the Brahmin and Dalit categories is the polarisation of purity and pollution in which one is symbolic of the other. It has been argued that without Dalits, Brahmins would not exist and vice versa, as it is in this contrast of the two that they can both exist at all (Javaid, Majid, and Zahid, 2014; Sooryamoorthy, 2008).

The history and social construction of the Dalit identity is complex. It not only encompasses a history of struggle, subjugation, and oppression, but also one of resistance, confrontation, and contestation. The identity politics of difference highlight the systemic and historical oppressions faced by Dalits. From the Constitution of India, oppressions of religion and everyday societal interactions have constructed and developed a paradox for the Dalit people. The very law that tried to abolish untouchability also used abhorrent language to identify them, thus furthering the perpetual contradiction between social practices within society.

Foucault (1988) argued that to invoke change within society, it must construct and develop new discourses. It is through the technologies of power, such as law, religion, medicine, and education, that attitudes and behaviour can deconstruct the disequilibrium of power. Historically, Dalits have struggled; but since the 20th century, they have mobilised and begun resisting their subjugation through anti-untouchability movements. These were organised by Dalit activists such as Dr Ambedkar and the Dalit Panthers. Anti-caste sentiments are not a new phenomenon— previously, they were organised by non-Dalits, such as Mahatma Gandhi and his Harijan movement; they also emerged during colonialism in anti-caste policies and regulations, such as the reservation system. What has come out of all these movements is the realisation that the institution of caste is complex and has shaped the societal consciousness and experiences of all Indians.

For Dalits, caste has constructed a life of subjugation, oppression, and exclusion—barriers they attempt to overcome through the contestation of identity in the form of name changes, occupation, location, and literature. To understand the experiences of Dalits and their politics of difference, it is important to reflect on the powerful force of intersecting identities—for example, caste, class, education, gender, and location. As examined in Chapter One, the need to address marginalised people's experiences from an *intersectional* perspective is fundamental to the reconstruction of society. And this is the challenge facing the exploration of discourses such as humiliation, exclusion, and exploitation. For the Dalit people, each one of their identities needs to be addressed simultaneously and must be seen as intersectional from the *outset*, as each one shapes the other in constructing the Dalit experience and identity.

<div align="center">**Chapter Three**</div>

<div align="center">*Locating Dalit Women*</div>

Dalit women constitute 16.68 per cent (approximately 98 million) of India's 587 million female population (Pradeep, 2011; Narasimhulu, 2019). In India, Dalit women are understood to be at the very bottom of the social hierarchy; they face a triple burden of gender subordination, caste prejudice and economic marginalisation both inside and outside Dalit communities (Deshpande, 2011; Sundaram, Sivakumar and Xavier, 2013; Tomar, 2013; Rao N, 2015; Shrivasta and Tanchangya, 2015; Paik, 2016; Pan, 2019). This chapter aims to locate Dalit women's experiences via an intersectional analysis of caste, class, and gender. It begins by detailing the construction of Dalit feminism. It then critically examines the institutions and ideologies of Brahmanical patriarchy and Dalit patriarchy and how they shape Dalit women's experiences. Finally, it undertakes an intersectional analysis of the disproportionate rates of sexual violence against Dalit women and the impunity of the perpetrators. It recognises that Dalit women are not a homogenous group and simultaneously highlights how deeply embedded violence is in the everyday lives of Dalit women (Rao, 2015). This includes violence at home (private space), in public and throughout the devadasi[10] system.

3.1 The construction of Dalit feminism

This section examines the construction of Dalit feminism through the existing frameworks of mainstream feminism and Dalit activism, demonstrating that these frameworks are inadequate for exploring and understanding the experiences of Dalit women (Rao, 2019).

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[10] The devadasi (servant of god) system is a system in which young girls are dedicated to a Hindu temple. However, some have argued that this is a religiously authorised practice of prostitution that exploits Dalit families though financial means (Shingal, 2015; Deepa and Suni-Suvarna, 2016; Sawarkar, 2019; Wilson, 2020).

Historically, Dalit politics and the mainstream women's movement have constructed both caste and gender as mutually exclusive (Sabharawal and Sonalkar, 2015; Pan, 2018, 2019, 2020; Senanayake and Trigunayat, 2020). It has been argued that upper caste feminists do not acknowledge that their caste privilege affords them social mobility and agency (Sabharawal and Sonalkar, 2015). When Dalit women are recognised by upper caste reformists in literature, they are often viewed as silently suffering victims (Gupta, 2016). This is particularly salient in academic research, wherein Dalit women are often made invisible in urban settings and only located in village settings (Vanada, 2020). For example, current studies examining the experiences and narratives of Dalit women almost always locate them in rural India (UN Women, 2012; Dutta, Sinha and Parashar, 2018; Atwal, 2018; Sharma and Kumar, 2020). In addition, they are represented as 'free' because they work outside the home and thus appear to have freedom of movement compared with upper caste women (Paik, 2016). Dalit feminists argue that this misrepresentation romanticises the notion that Dalit women have more freedom of movement (Rege, 2006; Paik, 2016). This romanticisation ignores Dalit women's experiences and concerns; it also suggests that although Dalit women may suffer economically, they are still in a better position than upper caste women because they have more 'freedom'.

These types of discourses are problematic, as they misrepresent the lives of Dalit women. For example, the notion that Dalit women have more 'freedom' than upper caste women do, does not consider that for Dalit women, working outside the home is a *necessity*, not a choice (Rao, 2015). When upper caste/class academics reframe and misrepresent 'freedom of movement' as forms of agency and/or autonomy, it takes away from Dalit women's experiences of suffering, trauma, and violence. In particular, in public spaces, Dalit women experience higher rates of violence— verbally, physically, and sexually—than upper caste women (Sabharawal and Sonalkar, 2015;

Diwakar, 2020; Vanada, 2020). This construction of caste and gender has denied Dalit women access to representation in both the public and private spheres (Jamwal, 2017). As a consequence, Dalit women become excluded from both mainstream feminist movements and Dalit movements (Sabharawal and Sonalkar, 2015; Jamwal, 2017; Sharma and Kumar, 2020). It has been argued that the very idea of a 'universal' feminism operates to exclude minority women from feminist spaces (Koyama, 2020). Dalit feminist writing in the 1970s asserts that the Indian universal feminist movement was earmarked as '*Brahmanical feminism*' (Rege, 2013, p.3), suggesting that a hierarchical structure exists within the women's movement that emphasises middle/upper class, caste and Brahmanic experiences; consequently, it excludes Dalit women (Paik, 2018). This reveals the lack of representation of Dalit women's experiences *by* Dalit women.

In response, the construction of Dalit feminism was produced to foreground Dalit women's experiences by understanding gender as relational to both casteism and classism (Rao, 2015; Pan, 2020). Dalit feminists draw on their 'outsider–within' experiences in order to represent their lived experiences (Sharma and Kumar, 2020). Paik (2018) explains that Dalit women cannot be limited to stereotypical readings of the self, such as either 'victim' or 'free', as the complexity of their experiences means that they can be both victims and agents. Their experiences of victimisation have shaped their agency, thereby making space for reflection, recognition, and reorganisation for both communal and individual transformation. This enables Dalit women to be seen as agents and acknowledges how power operates through their location within the private and public realms (Paik, 2016; 2017; 2018). It also highlights the problem of non-Dalit women speaking about and/or representing a 'universal experience' for women, which only further suppresses Dalit women's experiences and Dalit women's voices. Indeed, some have gone so far

as to say that Indian feminism can be understood as an *apparatus* of subjugating Dalit women (Arya and Singh-Rathore, 2020). A recent example of the way in which Dalit women's experiences of sexual violence are often ignored, dismissed and/or erased is the #MeToo social movement that began in 2017. The #MeToo movement in India was started by a Dalit woman named Raya Sarkar, who made a list of male professors who were alleged sexual harassers in academia in Indian universities (Bansode, 2020). Following the release of her list, a number of women came forward to share their experiences of sexual harassment in public institutions; but the Dalit feminists argued that Dalit women's testimonies were overlooked by many other Indian feminists.

What particularly stood out was the way in which Indian feminists responded. The older, more experienced feminists opposed the allegations that the list represented and urged for due process, whereas the younger feminists supported the release of the list (Bansode, 2020). The central focus became whether the list was appropriate for feminism or not. Dalit feminists argued that what was neglected in this debate was how Dalit testimonies were overlooked and the lack of inclusivity for Dalit women within feminist narratives. Bansode (2020) argues that when Dalit women speak out, their experiences are interlocked with their caste identity, which entails a deep history of exploitation that cannot find a place within mainstream feminist movements. For Dalit feminists, it is fundamental to understand that the concept of caste as intersected with gender and class is what makes their lived experiences unique (Sharma and Kumar, 2020) and central to their sense of self and belonging. As examined in Chapter Two, Dalit people as a community often share experiences of exclusion, especially in the public realm (Patel, 2016; Muthukkaruppan, 2017; Nelavala, 2019; Ps, 2020; Tamgadge, 2020). However, Dalit women are also excluded in the private realm and are thus rendered invisible.

Kannabiran's (2006) politics of becoming/belonging allows for further examination of the modern Dalit women's movement and its reimagination of the Dalit woman from a site of victimhood to a site of *resistance*: one that transcends borders, locates agency and resistance within the history of oppression, and transforms Dalit women's bodies as sites for resistance. This chapter argues that the politics of *belonging* are enveloped within the politics of *becoming*, meaning that both the politics of becoming and of belonging are transformative processes that make space for a community of *belonging*. The politics of becoming is derived from Dalit women experiences of *suffering*, which shape an awakening that operates to renegotiate identities by changing the 'difference' (Kannabiran, 2006). That is, 'new identities' (subjectivities) are produced by resistance and positions of difference. The Dalit woman's body is a site of contention for caste and male pride (Jamwal, 2017). Dalit feminism recognises that for Dalit women, caste and gender are not separate, nor are they mutually exclusive; rather, they are intersecting identities that produce the *oppression* of Dalit women (Jamwal, 2017; Pan, 2019). Both these intersecting identities are centred on Dalit feminist discourse to make space for Dalit women's experiences. Pan (2019) posits that Dalit feminism can be defined as discourses that enable Dalit women's perspectives, wherein their discourses of 'suffering' frame their experiences and their experiences of suffering construct their politics of difference. This means that the concept of *difference* becomes invoked to foreground their intersecting caste, class, and gender identities to reconstruct Dalit women's identity and to highlight the complexity of their oppression – a complexity that both mainstream feminists and Dalit activists do not recognise (Pan, 2019).

Some Dalit feminists argue that being able to *voice* their experiences of suffering and to have people *hear* their experiences is central to the healing process (Bahadur, 2020). For too long,

Dalit women's experiences have become muted by the larger community and by Dalit women who have been afraid to voice their suffering. This can relate to what Roberts (2017) refers to as 'agentive suffering', wherein readers are provoked to rethink how Dalit women are exploited and oppressed because of their intersecting identities. Simultaneously, this transforms suffering into a political tool that can be used to raise political consciousness (Anandhi and Kapadia, 2017). This suggests that Dalit feminism is a genealogy of its own and *not* another branch of feminism. It is this difference, and the language of *dissent*, that must be contextualised within Dalit women's experiences of oppression (Haldar, 2019).

As discussed in Chapter Two, the Dalit Panthers were inspired by the Black Panthers in the US. Dalit feminism is also said to be inspired by Black feminism (Mandal, 2013). Some see Dalit feminism as parallel to Alice Walker's (1983) concept of *womanism*, which Napikoski (2016) describes as the critical analysis and identification of the intersections of sexism and anti-Black racism as a movement (as cited in Sen, 2017). One of the central arguments that constructed the notion of a separate feminist perspective for Dalits was inspired by Black feminist criticism of how the mainstream universal women's movement ignored 'race' (or, in the case of Dalit women, 'caste') as an identity marker for oppression (Mandal, 2013).

This highlights the notion that for minority women, the politics of *difference* (Tomar, 2013) must be confronted and differentiated when examining their concerns from the perspective of a universal feminist movement (Pan, 2019). One example is the Khairlanji massacre in 2006, in which upper caste men punished a Dalit mother and her daughter by repeatedly raping the women in front of their family and parading their naked bodies in public before killing them (Arya, 2020). Dalit activists centred on caste as the key factor in the massacre, and mainstream Indian feminists argued that their silence was due to the lack of media coverage and ultimately

also labelled the massacre a caste issue (Teltumbde, 2010). This example illustrates why recognising *difference* in terms of their intersecting identities of gender, caste and class is fundamental to Dalit women. Dalit activists and the mainstream feminist movement acknowledged the massacre; however, both ignored its 'gendered' aspect and focused solely on caste, thus muting the Dalit women's experience as rendering it non-existent. Subsequently, Dalit feminists draw attention to the *intersectionality* of gender and caste and how this shapes the experiences of Dalit women (Pan, 2019).

i.   Dalit intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality was produced by critiques of Western feminism. Similarly, Dalit feminists draw on intersectionality; however, they make it their own. One of the critiques of Western feminism, including the issue of intersectionality, is that the intersections recognised by *western/white feminists* are not recognised or realised by women in the East. Further, one of the central components of Dalit feminism is the intersection of *caste*, which is not a concept or category understood by Western feminism (Senanayake and Trigunayat, 2020). Therefore, a more organic approach to intersectionality is needed to understand and situate Dalit women's experiences—the fact that they are different and separate from both Western and Indian feminism. This suggests that for the process of 'transformation' to occur for Dalit women, there needs to be a process of renegotiating space, both within the Dalit world and within other gendered spaces.

However, Dalit feminism is not without critique: Datar (2009) questions whether focusing on *difference* only furthers the goal of emancipation for Dalit women, and whether the centrality of the economic exploitation faced by all women then becomes overlooked (as cited in Senanayake

and Trigunayat, 2020). This also raises the question of whether having a separate Dalit feminism will only produce a different form of 'othering' that might not only essentialise all Dalit women's experiences but also produce another dimension of 'othering the other' (Mangat, 2018, p.11). That is, how are Dalit feminists interpreting other Dalits' experiences, and can they be the voice for *all* Dalit women? It is thus imperative that Dalit feminism understands the politics of difference within and between Dalit women (Kulkarni, 2014).

It has been acknowledged that over the last 20 years, Indian feminism has developed and become more inclusive in terms of identifying the invisibility of marginalised women encompassed by the category of 'woman' (Rege, 2013). However, many Dalit feminists argue that it is not possible for non-Dalits to become Dalit feminists because they do not have the lived experiences of Dalit women and thereby cannot be genuine (Kulkarni, 2014). This suggests that non-Dalit feminists can only take the position of an *ally.* Bishop (2015) notes that *becoming an ally* is a process in which one is '*being*' aware of their role within a system of oppression. However, Pan (2020) argues that Dalit feminism is about identifying and examining the different ways in which the intersections of caste and gender *oppress* Dalit women; it is not about capturing and reflecting on what it feels like to be a Dalit woman. Thus, this thesis recognises that non-Dalit women have not experienced the pain, trauma, and history of oppression as Dalit women have. It also recognises that Dalit women's experiences are unique to the intersections of caste and gender and the principles on which Dalit feminism was founded. This makes it very important to interpret and present their experiences via their intersecting identities (Pan, 2020).

3.2 Patriarchy

The following section explores how Dalit patriarchy and Brahmanical patriarchy shape Dalit women's experiences in the context of their family, their community, and the state. As discussed in Chapter One, not all women face the same type of patriarchy (Chakravarti, 2018; Bhopal, 2018). It has been argued that the intersecting identities of Dalit women shape their experiences in two ways in mainstream society; through Brahmanical patriarchy and within their own communities through Dalit patriarchy (Arya, 2020). This section provides an intersectional analysis to examine patriarchy from the Dalit women's perspective. It undertakes a thorough examination of Brahmanical and Dalit patriarchy to locate Dalit women's experiences.

i. Brahmanical patriarchy

The concept of Brahmanical patriarchy was first coined by feminist Uma Chakravarti (1993). She argued that within the Indian historical context, patriarchy was looked upon as an independent structure of exploitation; however, Brahmanical patriarchy is a system of rules and structures in which both gender and caste are interlocked, with each shaping the other (Chakravarti, 2003; 2018). Including caste social hierarchy in the understanding of patriarchy as a disciplinary tool thus reinforces patriarchy through religious practices. Essentially, Brahmanical patriarchy embraces an intersectional framework that enables a more comprehensive examination of Indian women's experiences (Senanayake and Trigunayat, 2020). Still (2014) argues that, with regard to sexuality, Brahmanical patriarchy adopts two principles. The first is that men are understood to be superior to women; the implication of this male superiority in terms of sexuality is that men have the right to sex, even if it is forced upon women. Second, men are the source of caste classification. For example, if a child is born from the relationship between an upper caste male and a lower caste woman, the child is considered

upper caste. However, if an upper caste woman and a lower caste man have a child, the child is considered lower caste. This suggests that men regulate the caste system; however, the principles of Brahmanism operate through caste and gender hegemony that manages women's sexuality, and therefore women are the gatekeepers of caste purity (Still, 2014).

Religious texts, such as *the manusmriti*, provide evidence of the different ways in which the subjugation of women is authorised for upper caste men and shapes these men's relationships with women in society (Senanayake and Trigunayat, 2020). For example, Brahmanical hegemony operates in a number of different ways, such as subjugating upper caste women's sexuality, restricting the movement of women, and the practice of endogamy. These practices are generally more restrictive to upper caste women than to Dalit women, as the repercussions of caste impurity are much higher for the upper caste than for Dalits. All these mechanisms operate to maintain and manage the caste social structure (Chakravarti, 2003; 2018). However, Chakravarti explains that an examination of Brahmanical patriarchy reveals a 'graded' inequality of gender-based violence as a mechanism for sustaining the caste system. Wherein, Dalit women experience patriarchy differently. The Indian social structure is constructed from a hierarchy that values individuals according to caste first and *then gender* (Arya, 2020b). Thus, with India's social structure being regulated by caste and gender, this constructs a system that makes violence committed against a Dalit woman more acceptable because her value is less than everyone else. Thus, while it may suggest that Brahmanical patriarchy is stricter for upper caste women, the patriarchal connection between caste and gender also produces severe consequences for Dalit women.

For example, in the introduction of this thesis the Hathras gang rape case of Manisha Valmiki was described. In a video posted to social media, the victim testified and identified the upper

caste men who raped her. However, allegedly the police neglected to file a report in a timely

manner and cremated her body before an autopsy could be complete. Afterwards, an official

statement was made by the state, dismissing the idea that Manisha was raped because no semen

was found (Arya, 2020). The patriarchal aspects of the case are apparent: a woman was brutally

raped and murdered by four men. However, including the intersection of class and caste

hierarchy identities in the analysis reveals how Dalit women are targeted by upper caste men

because they are Dalits. Further, the intersection of caste and gendered identities also reveals

how Dalit women's *access to justice* is restricted due to caste boundaries and socially sanctioned

violence. Essentially, Brahmanical patriarchy employs gender to exercise power and caste status,

and this shapes the different experiences of oppression for Dalit women (Mandal, 2013). Thus,

including caste in the understanding of patriarchy exposes how the intersections of caste, class

and gender produce differences in privileges and differences in subjugation for Dalit women.

ii. Dalit patriarchy

Dalit feminists argue that Dalit women are caught between patriarchal and caste oppression (Sen,

2017). They argue that Dalit women are not only oppressed by upper caste men and women, but

they are also oppressed by Dalit men (Bama, 2000; Rege, 2006; Kamble, 2009; Pawar, 2015;

Arya, 2020b). However, they explain that Dalit patriarchy within Dalit communities is *different*

to the patriarchy that non-Dalit women face because of their caste position in society. The

difference between Brahmanical patriarchy and Dalit patriarchy is said to exist in how Dalit

patriarchy is produced: Dalit men reproduce the same mechanisms of power against Dalit

women that the upper caste uses to exploit Dalit men (Arya, 2020). This produces a unique type

of patriarchy that impacts Dalit women differently compared with non-Dalit women. For

example, unlike upper caste women, Dalit women are equal financial contributors to the family

alongside Dalit men—but there are consequences for this type of egalitarian household. These include violence against Dalit women within the home, which often stems from patriarchal discourses due to the Dalit men's insecurity regarding Dalit woman's financial contributions (Sabharawal and Sonalkar, 2015). Thus, Dalit patriarchy is unique in the sense that it is reproduced as a consequence of male caste oppression.

However, these understandings of Dalit patriarchy are problematic, as they imply that the oppression of Dalit women is shaped by their relationship with Dalit men. There is no discussion or room made for Dalit women's relationship with upper caste men and/or women and how those relationships shape the oppression of Dalit women. The purpose of having an intersectional framework is to not make identities singular but to recognise that marginalised women have intersecting identities that can be separated and that they can simultaneously experience multiple types of oppression (Rao, 2015; Paik, 2016; Datta and Satija, 2020). And while Dalit patriarchy does place Dalit caste at the centre of the discussion, it must be made clear that *caste identity is not two-fold*—that is, either Dalit or non-Dalit (Herbert, 2020). For example, child marriage has specifically been characterised as a Dalit girl problem, as child marriage is widespread within Dalit communities (Torri, 2009; Kamble, 2009; Mahato, 2016; Sekine and Hodgkin, 2017). Little's (2013) macro-level study of child marriage found that 49 per cent of 112 girls married before the age of 18 belonged to the Dalit caste. According to Irudayam, Mangubhai and Lee's (2011) study, of the 21 girls they interviewed who had experienced rape, 20 were child brides. Moreover, in Devkota, Clarke, Shrish and Bhatta's (2018) study on the link between caste and adolescent pregnancy, 72.5 per cent of Dalit women reported adolescent pregnancy.

Examining child marriage from a Dalit patriarchy perspective does not allow insight into the intersections of gender, class *and* caste identities that place Dalit girls at higher risk of child

marriage. Child marriage is often cited as a tradition, whereas the underlying rationale for the

child marriage of Dalit girls is to avoid their likelihood of being raped (Irudayam, Mangubhai

and Lee, 2011); once a girl has been raped, she is considered unmarriageable (Torri, 2009; Lal,

2015). For Dalit parents, specifically mothers, the need to 'protect' their daughters' 'honour' is

often what drives these patriarchal practices of child marriage within the Dalit community (Torri,

2009; Mittal, 2019).

However, a number of other mechanisms are missing from these types of analysis, which do not

show how these traditions are produced and how they operate. While child marriage is a

patriarchal tradition that impacts Dalit girls and may stem from practices that are deep-rooted in

honour, it can also be argued that these traditions are produced by Brahmanical hegemony that

only further perpetuates negative stereotyping of the Dalit community. That is, to identify the

protection of 'honour' as the key determinant of child marriage is unfair, particularly for Dalit

families, as it has been found that child marriage is more prevalent among Dalits because of

socio-economic factors such as poverty, lack of education and fear of sexual violence (Irudayam

et al., 2011; Ghosh, 2011; Agnes, 2013). As examined in Chapter Two, culture is learned,

innovative and restraining (Little, et al., 2016). Drawing on this understanding of culture, it can

be argued that for Dalit girls and Dalit families, the intersection of their age, social class and

caste positions within society places constraints on them, and as a consequence, Dalit families

find different ways to support themselves and simultaneously protect their daughters from rape

through child/early marriage. From this perspective, child marriage can be seen to have evolved

over time and became a normative practice for Dalit communities; it can also be viewed as a

restraining and unjust practice for Dalit girls and women. However, it can also be argued that the

practice of child marriage is a solution to protect Dalit girls from rape by men. Therefore, examining Dalit women's experiences must take place within an intersectional framework.

Still (2014) argues that patriarchy shapes the experiences of Dalit women in three ways. First, upper caste men employ Dalit women and subjugate those women to their authority. Second, Dalit men subjugate Dalit women within the private sphere of the family and community context. Third, upper caste women rely on their male counterparts to further subjugate Dalit women to reinforce patriarchal power. This can explain the widespread targeted violence of Dalit women by upper caste men and the fear and apprehension that produces child marriage in order to avoid this violence. In the public sphere, Dalit women face sexual, physical, and verbal abuse from upper caste men and women; at home, they face the same abuse at the hands of their husbands, fathers-in-law, mothers-in-law and brothers-in-law (Sabharawal and Sonalkar, 2015). Thus, Dalit women face patriarchy differently compared with upper caste women.

However, Dalit women experience subjugation not only based on their gender but *also* based on their caste and class, both from Dalit men and from upper caste men and women. Similarly, Arya (2020) argues that the Dalit patriarchy is no different to Brahmanical patriarchy. She explains that while caste is an added dimension to the complexity of Brahmanical patriarchy, gender is the *centralised* component of patriarchy—and thus what is being misrepresented as Dalit patriarchy is actually *Brahmanical oppression*. This suggests that Brahmanical patriarchy is graded and should be measured on a continuum rather than seen as constructing another distinct form of patriarchy. This is supported by the recent work of Still (2017), who found that an elevated class status within Dalit communities has reduced egalitarian practices. For example, middle-class Dalit women are not 'working' outside the home as much as lower class Dalit women (Still, 2017). As a consequence, Dalit practices and values are becoming more similar to upper caste

practices in that the sexuality and movement of Dalit women have become more restricted as their class status is elevated. Still refers to this as the 'Dalitisation' of patriarchy, and she argues that Dalits are appropriating patriarchy from the upper caste and making it their own.

3.3 The impunity for sexual violence against Dalit women

This section employs Dalit feminism and Brahmanical patriarchy to examine sexual violence against Dalit women in the context of their community, family, and state. Many scholars have found that Dalit women experience disproportionate levels of sexual, verbal, and physical violence compared with other women in India (Tomar, 2013; Sujatha, 2014; Sabharawal and Sonalkar, 2015; Diwakar, 2020). It has been argued that the sexual violence experienced by Dalit women is often ignored, downplayed and/or made invisible as a consequence of the intersections of caste, class, and gender (Vanada, 2020). There are three distinct spaces in which Dalit women experience sexual violence: at home, in public spaces (specifically in the employment of the upper caste) and through the system of devadasi. This section investigates how these three spaces operate to sustain impunity for sexual violence against Dalit women.

i.   Violence - in the home

Chapter One noted that marital rape is a *legal* act in India unless the woman is under the age of 16 (*IPC s. 375*). While official empirical data is limited regarding violence against Dalit women within the home (Sujatha, 2014), Sabharawal and Sonalkar (2015) examined autobiographical literature by Dalit women and found that they wrote extensively about their experiences of violence *from Dalit men*. As explained above, they described how they became the targets of violence by men within their own community because these men take out the anger and frustration they feel as a consequence of their own oppression.

Many Dalit women have also drawn attention to the link between alcoholism and violence among Dalit men as a major contributor to intimate partner violence (Vinutha, 2014; Sujatha, 2014; Kapadia, 2014; Agalya and Manickavasagam, 2020). It is not only husbands who commit this violence, but also fathers and brothers. And contrary to the notion of Dalit women's freedom of movement, Dalit women's writings suggest that their movements are strongly policed (Kapadia, 2017). Many explained that their experiences of abuse often stemmed from accusations of adultery due to working with men in the public space, infertility, or physical appearance (Agalya and Manickavasagam, 2020). This suggests that the subjugated status of Dalit women transcends caste boundaries and is also accepted within Dalit communities. Moreover, Vinutha (2014) writes that due to their lower levels of education and financial dependency, Dalit women often feel powerless to leave abusive relationships and are more vulnerable to prostitution or to being trafficked as young girls to support their families.

Interestingly, many also described a sense of complicity, and simultaneously agency, regarding how they are socialised to reproduce these patriarchal beliefs. According to Mishra (2019), both caste and patriarchal systems are sustained by women's complicity: both patriarchal and caste norms and regulations of purity and pollution and of space and marriage are located in women's teachings and the mechanisms of women's complicity. Many Dalit women's writings point to their mothers and grandmothers discriminating between girls and boys at a young age (Sabharawal and Sonalkar, 2015; Mishra, 2019) and instilling in the girls the idea that they had a responsibility to uphold the family honour. Diwakar (2020) argues that the construction of women as the *guardians of honour* is what makes them more vulnerable to violence both within and outside the home. They are taught to accept domestic violence, just as they are taught that 'suffering' is a part of marriage and of being a Dalit woman (Yadav, 2017). Furthermore, when a

woman marries into a Dalit family, she takes the lowest status ranking within that family (Rather, 2016). This low familial status also makes her more vulnerable to violence within the home that is perpetrated not only by her husband but also by her mother-in-law. Notably, this is not unique to Dalit families: domestic violence perpetrated by mothers-in-law is also found in middle-class and lower class Indian families (Rew, Gangoli and Gill, 2013).

While women may be compliant and operate as agents in sustaining both caste and patriarchy, they may do so for different reasons (Mishra, 2019a). For example, taking on a subordinate position within the home offers women protection and privilege. While Dalit women assume a role in sustaining patriarchal practices, conversely, they also envelop these experiences within their power of transformation and agency. For example, Dalit women will often educate their daughters about how to 'avoid' rape, how to take precautions to protect themselves against sexual violence and what to do if anything happens to them: they remind them to never go into the fields alone, to keep themselves hidden while working, to keep silent if anything does happen and to never question an upper caste man (Yadav, 2017). At first glance, it appears that Dalit women are being taught to make themselves small and invisible, and many would argue that this is the opposite of empowerment. However, for Dalit women, sharing their experiences and guiding the behaviour of young Dalit girls is how they promote survival, and that is empowering. It can be understood as 'consciousness-raising' or the transferring of power between women. When Dalit women speak of their experiences and their fears, they create a shared awareness (Begum, 2016).

Moreover, as an upper caste Indo-Canadian female observer travelling through different Dalit communities, I observed that Dalit women do not hide; rather, they are outspoken, and they are present and visible within the community. Chapter Four undertakes an in-depth discussion of

researcher positionality and power, but it is relevant to include my observations of Dalit women's identity here in light of academic misrepresentation of them as passive or silent victims. It was I who was 'out of place' in their domain, and on many occasions, they would step in when they could see that I was being taken advantage of. For example, I had Dalit women swiftly confront rickshaw drivers when they heard them over-charge me because I was a 'foreign woman'. These observations are contrary to the typical representation of Dalit women as 'silently suffering victims' (Gupta, 2016). Their assertion of power and presence within their own community can be explained, as suggested above, by the fact that they are in a financially interdependent relationship with Dalit men (Sabharawal and Sonalkar, 2015). However, the imbalance of power may shift, and consequently their strong presence will shrink when they interact with upper caste men because they depend on these men to maintain their financial security through their occupation.

This suggests that Dalit women are not passive, nor are they ignorant of their suffering; furthermore, they do not want to pass on this suffering to their girl children or to other women if they can intervene or help in some way. This assertion is supported by the 36.26 per cent increase in Dalit girl education from 2000-1 to 2015-06 per cent (Kumar, 2019). Guinee's (2014) qualitative research of education among Dalit girls found that mothers often explained that although they had definite limitations on their own circumstances, they still attempted to make changes for their daughters, which was empowering for their daughters and for them: one way to exercise power to resist oppressions was by educating their daughters. An increase in education, particularly for girls, can empower girls to contest and negotiate oppression (Arur and DeJaeghere, 2019). Guinee (2014) found that even though Dalit parents often had limited, if any, formal education, it was mothers who encouraged their daughters to complete higher education.

It was also found that many mothers (against the wishes of Dalit fathers) took multiple outside jobs to ensure that their daughters did not have to work and could concentrate on their education.

However, the increase in education can also be attributed to Dalit activism, as explained in Chapter One, with the Ambedkar movement stressing the importance of Dalit girls' education in order to make changes in society (Arur and DeJaeghere, 2019). This increase can also be attributed to the reservation system reserving 27 per cent of the space for Dalits in higher education and includes added incentives such as free clothing (school uniforms), meals and books for Dalit students (Subramanian, 2016). One challenge with education that many Dalit feminists find is that India's academic structure is not inclusive of Dalits and/or Dalit women: most educational materials and texts are Brahmanical in nature, depicting women as subaltern subjects and caste and gender as one and the same (Arur and DeJaeghere, 2019), which decreases motivation for Dalit girls to continue.

ii.   Sexual violence - in public spaces

Although rape and the threat of rape impacts women around the world, the threat is higher for Dalit women due to their intersecting identities (Grey, 2014; Diwakar, 2020). According to Pandey and Mishra (2021) study of sexual violence of Dalit women in India, 83% of the 195 Dalit women participants faced threats of sexual harassment or assault and 40.2% experienced multiple incidents of physical sexual assault, specifically groping, or having their clothing torn and 23.3% had been raped. According to National Family Health Survey data from 2015–16, 33.2 per cent of scheduled caste women between the ages of 15 and 49 had experienced sexual violence. These figures show an increase in rape reporting over the years. It has also been found that the targeted rape of Dalit women rose by 88.4 per cent from 2009 to 2016, with reported

cases going from 1,346 to 2,536 (Teltumbde, 2018). In some states, such as Haryana, targeted rape against Dalit women went up by 167 per cent during the same period (Patwardhan, 2015). It has been found that violence against Dalit women is typically used as a form of retaliation or punishment and/or for the upper caste to exercise power over the Dalit caste (Human Rights Watch, 2017). However, statistics for rape against Dalit women are not reliable, as they are constructed through Brahman patriarchal culture (Abraham and Misrahi-Barak, 2016): the notion of impurity is marked on Dalit women's bodies, and there is an underlying expectation that they are sexually available. Similarly, Grey (2014) explains that Dalit women are more vulnerable to rape, and the problem with examining quantitative data on rape cases is that a Dalit woman's rape is not often referred to as a 'rape' nor reported as one. This may explain why so many rape cases involving Dalit women go unheard, unreported, unfiled, or ignored. Thus, it is imperative to understand how the construction of Dalit women's bodies as *impure* may operate as a mechanism for violence against Dalit women's bodies through rape.

Many scholars have found that Dalit women are often subjected to sexual exploitation by upper caste men (employers/landowners) (Vinutha, 2014; Sujatha, 2014; Loomba, 2016; Agalya and Manickavasagam, 2020; Diwakar, 2020). These experiences are frequently ignored, muted, and/or reconstructed by both Dalits and mainstream society as part of everyday life (Loomba, 2016). Vandana (2020) argues that studies on sexual violence have historically concentrated on gender, while studies on caste have focused on discrimination. As Abraham (2012) points out, rape in India has also been constructed as a 'phase' for adolescent boys that they have outgrown by the time they become middle aged. When this is connected with the rapes of Dalit women, another layer—the discourse of 'respectability'—surfaces, wherein these women become 'non-rapeable' because an upper caste man would never rape a Dalit woman due to caste restrictions

(Patil, 2016). This suggests that Dalit women's subject position within India's social order makes them more vulnerable to sexual violence (Vinutha, 2014). It also implies that not employing an intersectional framework in sexual violence research renders the rape of Dalit women invisible. As mentioned above, Dalit women's socio-economic status makes them more vulnerable to rape in public spaces because unlike upper caste women, Dalit women are required to work outside the home—and due to their caste status, they take precarious employment for the upper caste (Vinutha, 2014; Kumar, 2020). As mentioned in Chapter Two, Dalit women contribute to their household income by working in the public, and although their labour experience exposes them to more violence, they also gain the ability to negotiate space (Wessler, 2020). It is their experience of working side-by-side with men in the fields, their lack of education and others perception of their 'freedom of movement' that construct them as having no shame (Still, 2014). As a result, this marks them as untrustworthy (Paik, 2011).

This indicates that Dalit women's socio-economic status and their relationship to caste and gender is complex—while it provides space for agency, it simultaneously further subjugates Dalit women, as the regulation of Dalit women's sexuality and labour upholds caste patriarchy (Anandhi, 2013). The apparatus of Brahmanical patriarchy constructs different roles for upper caste and lower caste women. Chakravarti (2003) argued that caste and gender are interlocking mechanisms that reinforce patriarchy through the institutionalised roles constructed for women, with Dalit women are marked as 'free' and therefore seen as available by upper caste men. Conversely, upper caste women are kept away from the public gaze and are therefore constructed as fragile, innocent, and pure (Dalwai, 2016). This suggests that the gendered caste position of Dalit women as labourers violates societal norms of how 'ideal' women should behave. Consequently, the targeted sexual violence of Dalit women can operate as a patriarchal tool to

uphold gendered roles in society. This places Dalit women in a position of dependency that makes them more vulnerable to exploitation (Irudayam, Mangubhai and Lee, 2011).

Some researchers have pointed out that the targeted attacks of sexual violence against Dalit women by upper caste men are reminiscent of what happened to Black women during the time of slavery in the US, where Black women were often the target of sexual violence by white men (Davis, 2003). In her book *When Rape Was Legal*, Feinstein (2019) points out that the rape of Black women during slavery was not an either/or matter of sexual desire, punishment, or domination; rather, these factors were all interlocking in locating the identity of white masculinity. Furthermore, the oppression of Black women through the practice of sexual violence was used to operate white masculinity and sustain the hierarchy of power. Similarly, the systematic targeting of sexual violence against Dalit women by upper caste men can be understood as a mechanism of operating upper caste masculinity and sustaining the caste hierarchy. This can be evidenced by examining the response of the 'khap panchayats' (community councils) during intercaste conflict. In many states in rural north India, the khap panchayats are primarily upper caste men who are responsible for 'managing' society, settling internal disputes and determining how members of society are to be held accountable for wrongdoings, misbehaviour and even criminal acts (Patwardhan, 2015). For example, in July 2015, two Dalit girls were raped in Uttar Pradesh, India. Their faces were blackened, and their naked bodies were paraded around their village as a 'punishment' because their brother was having an affair with an upper caste married woman (Amnesty International UK, 2018). In this particular case, the punishment for the two Dalit girls was on behalf of their brother's affair with an upper caste woman.

Diwakar (2020) argues that Dalit women often become the targets of violence as a disciplinary tool for managing the collective, as acts of rape, murder and naked parading penetrate the Dalit subjectivity as a collective. During intercaste conflict, Dalit women's bodies often become a source of punishment, settlement, or retribution (Patwardhan, 2015; Teltumbde, 2018; Diwakar, 2020). Some common forms of punishment reserved for Dalit women are gang rape, naked parading and even murder (Channa, 2013; Diwakar, 2020). Agrawal (2012) argues that rape as a disciplinary tool for Dalit women has become a ceremonial practice. As discussed in Chapter Two, the caste system employs gender-based violence to manage the caste system (Ambedkar, 2002). Similarly, targeted violence against Dalit women by upper caste men operates to maintain the caste hierarchy, with rape, naked parading and/or murder employed as instruments of shame, dishonour and subjugation not only against a particular woman, but against the entire Dalit community. An attack on a Dalit woman is thus an attack on the entire community. It is not an exercise of male dominance, but rather a means of exercising power through the intersections of gender, caste, and class (Channa, 2013). Thus, the violence against the two girls in Uttar Pradesh can be understood as a strategy used to direct the conduct of other Dalits (Torri, 2009): when Dalit women are punished on behalf of their men, this functions as a punishment for the entire community (Diwakar, 2020).

iii.   Sexual violence - the devadasi system

The practice of devadasi has been performed since 273–323 BC (Deepa and Suni-Suvarna, 2016). It involves young Dalit girls between the ages of 12 and 15 being 'offered' to 'serve' God by providing sexual services to men on behalf of the Hindu temple (Deepa and Suni-Suvarna, 2016; Wilson, 2020). Historically, the devadasi were distinguished as 'goddesses', as they devoted themselves to the temple. In essence, they married themselves to an immortal and

therefore were perceived as divine (Shingal, 2015). But over time, the status of the devadasi transformed from goddess to sex object as they endured sexual exploitation. Dalit families with young girls are particularly forced into this practice as a means of generating income because they have such limited options due to their socio-economic position within society (Sabharawal and Sonalkar, 2015; Diwakar, 2020; Wilson, 2020).

The practice of 'devadasi' was made illegal in 1947 and, to further support young girls, *The Protection of Children and Sexual Offenses Act* cited the issue as a risk of devadasi practices to prevent the exploitation and sexual abuse of children (Wilson, 2020). However, although the practice of devadasi has declined, it still has an active presence today (Khandelwal, 2019). For example, according to Sabharawal and Sonalkar (2015), there are approximately 29,000 devadasis in Andhra Pradesh alone. Moreover, Blanchard's (2005) study on female sex workers in Karnataka found that many of these sex workers began through the practice of devadasi. It has been found that many of these devadasis were later auctioned off into urban brothels (Irudayam, Mangubhai and Lee, 2011; Wilson, 2020). This could explain why there are two polarised images of devadasis in society today: they are viewed as either stigmatised or as celebrated figures, which may provide insight into the way devadasi is currently practised (Khandelwal, 2019).

In the Indian context, Brahmanism is the platform from which the hierarchical axis of social structure springs (Tomar, 2013). As explored in Chapter Two, the caste system is a hierarchical social structure that divides people into different social groups (castes). It has been argued that Dalit women's intersecting identities of caste, class and gender make them more vulnerable to the practice of devadasi (Wilson, 2020). As discussed previously, Dalits typically live on or below the poverty line across India, and the practice of devadasi allows many families to become

financially secure and protected (Singhal, 2015). However, there is debate among feminist groups regarding whether the practice should be decriminalised. Similar to debates on prostitution, many argue that women should have the right to express their sexuality as they so wish and the right to choose their occupation. Viewed from this perspective, criminalising devadasi compromises the individual Dalit woman's autonomy and right to choose her occupation and way of life (Ramberg, 2014). Moreover, it has also been argued that the religious authorisation of devadasi makes their work more socially acceptable and thus less stigmatised than other types of sex work (Sampark, 2015). For example, some Dalit women and Dalit families that do not see the practice of devadasi as negative. Rather, they believe it is a blessing of the gods and a means of protection and financial security (Shingal, 2015).

Ramberg's (2014) research adds to this discussion—she found that many devadasis saw themselves as ritual 'specialists' and that it is reformists who have constructed them as 'prostitutes' or as 'trafficked' women. Dalit reformists are those trying to achieve social reform and uplift Dalits in India, they are primarily made up of Dalits and progressive upper caste men and women (Tharu, 2019). Ramberg argues that these types of discourses are counterproductive, as they pit one person against another, and they ignore the intersecting identities, perspectives and practices of the devadasis and the question of why reform may be needed. Ramberg explains that sex and religion are interconnected, which is how this practice is sustained and how devadasis negotiate between gendered caste ideologies and religious and sexual practices: they embody the power of devadasi by often taking on the role of a 'son' and financially supporting their families, and any children born out of the practice of devadasi assume their mother's caste identity and often unacknowledged by their fathers and consequently denied them any patrilineal rights such as to property. Moreover, Ramberg found that devadasis also appeared to have more

autonomy than women who were married to men. This demonstrates that gendered roles produced from devadasi are not merely performative but are practised.

Alternatively, others have pointed to the rights of the community and have characterised devadasi as degrading to Dalit women, stigmatising to the whole community and a contributing factor to impunity for sexual violence against Dalit women (Sabharawal and Sonalkar, 2015). Moreover, not all women *choose* to become devadasis. Wilson (2020) reveals that many devadasis state that they were coerced by their parents, who threatened suicide or were physically and verbally abusive until their daughters agreed to become a devadasi. Wilson also found that girls who refused to engage in sexual activity with upper caste men, Dalit parents would threaten or bribe their daughters. Moreover, the practice is linked to underage girls, and despite the illegality of dedicating young girls to the practice of devadasi, it continues today. It is also not always covert, as the dedication ceremonies for Dalit girl bodies are held in public (Wilson, 2020). If these ceremonies are performed discreetly, the extended family, community and police will eventually become aware, but they often turn a blind eye. Shingal (2015) argues that the intersections of Dalit girls' age, case, class, and gender make it challenging to prevent the practice of devadasi, as it is socially accepted within both the Dalit communities and wider society, which makes it difficult for law enforcement and the state to act. This is demonstrated by the lack of reporting of devadasis. Wilson (2020) notes that between 2011 and 2017, zero cases of devadasi were reported in Ballari, despite active devadasi practices occurring in the state.

Drawing on Foucault's explanation of power, discipline, and punishment, as discussed in Chapter One, it can be argued that Dalit women's bodies become the site in which the inequalities of both gender and caste are reproduced. Simultaneously, Dalit women are also able to negotiate and transform the self and produce value in their experiences of devadasi. This

illustrates that Dalit women's bodies become the 'political field' marked by power relations (Deveaux, 1994). The struggle of caste inequality is maintained and sustained through Dalit women via practices such as devadasi. Thus, the institution of devadasi operates through Dalit women's bodies as a mechanism that subjugates their gendered and caste identity through caste and religious power. As a consequence, the sexual exploitation of Dalit women furthers their oppression through normative practices of 'religious' traditions.

iv.   Impunity

Dalit women's subject position within the family and society makes them more vulnerable to sexual violence both at home and in public spaces (Sujatha, 2014; Diwakar, 2020). Moreover, this vulnerability to violence is also interlocked with systemic practices of impunity for offenders who abuse Dalit women (Pal, 2016, 2018). The concept of impunity can be defined as the inability to hold perpetrators of violence accountable in criminal, civil, administrative and/or disciplinary proceedings because they are not subject to investigation that may lead to accusations or disciplinary action. If they are found guilty, they are not tried, sentenced, or required to make sufficient restitutions for their victims (United Nations Human Rights, 2021). What needs to be made clear from the outset is that sexual violence against Dalit women is generally normalised and accepted within society (Geetha, 2016).

Dalit women find that their experiences of sexual violence go unheard by the public and the state (Human Rights Watch, 2017). It has been found that the police often ignore Dalit women or pressure them to 'compromise' with their perpetrators, particularly if the perpetrators belong to the upper caste (Human Rights Watch, 2017). For example, what makes the case of Manisha

Valmiki especially interesting is that it was quite similar to the Nirbhaya[11] rape case in 2012 that

made national and international headlines. Many scholars have argued that incidents of Dalit

rape do not have the same power to impact societal response as do middle-class and upper caste

rape cases. In part, Bradley, Saharaiah and Siddiqui (2016) argue that this is due to the way the

reports of these crimes are presented to the public. The discourses around rape suggest that only

middle-class and upper caste women can be 'raped', whereas the rapes of Dalit women are

regarded as 'everyday', 'normal' occurrences and are therefore not received with the same

outrage; as a consequence, they are ignored. Begum (2016) states that the rape of Dalit women is

accepted as '*part and parcel*' of Indian society (p.16). This suggests that violence against Dalit

women is legitimised by gender, caste and patriarchal ideologies of sexuality that are illustrated

by everyday social practices. This can explain the unacknowledged Dalit female rape cases, as

they are frequent in nature and society has become habituated to them.

This points towards the intersection of Dalitness and femaleness as markers of deviance and/or

deceit. Under the caste structure of Brahmanism, Dalit women have been constructed as polluted,

impure, vulgar and vindictive, whereas upper caste women are constructed as pure, shy and

morally chaste (Gupta, 2015). The Nirbhaya rape case received significant attention from the

mass media and mainstream society and, as a result, politicians and the state assigned the Justice

JS Verma Committee to review police and judiciary practices and laws with regard to sexual

violence committed against women (Verma, 2013). Prakash (2020) argues that this case received

so much attention because the victim was an 'ideal' one: young, upper middle class, urban and

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[11] On 16 December 2012, a 23-year-old female student was gang-raped by six men on a private bus in Delhi, India. The young woman was accompanied by a male companion who was also assaulted. The woman spent 13 days in hospital before she succumbed to her injuries and died. In response to her rape, many middle-class students and others began nationwide protests to advocate for the safety of women in public spaces in India (Fadnis, 2017).

perceived as chaste. The committee argued that the policing system was an extension of institutional patriarchy and that the impunity afforded to perpetrators in sexual violence cases normalised rape in India. The report also pointed to the lack of socialisation for Indian male children who were raised with entitlement and given privilege over female bodies (Datta, 2013).

In the cases of Dalit women such as Manisha Valmiki, this assessment should also be applicable; however, the element of caste is missing. Thus, by including the intersection of caste in the committee's report, it can be argued from a Dalit feminist perspective that Brahmanical patriarchal police practices, such as ignoring or refusing Dalit women's rape allegations against upper caste men, operate to *normalise* Dalit rape within society. Furthermore, upper caste men have been socialised to have privilege over Dalit female bodies and Dalit women are perceived to be 'lying' and/or as 'sexually available' when it comes to allegations of rape (Gupta, 2015). Therefore, it can be argued that impunity in Dalit women rape cases produces an environment with a panoptic presence of caste-based hierarchies. The institutions of the police and the judicial systems have a Brahmanical gaze that makes invisible, and produces as reality, the objectification of Dalit women (Jyothirmai and Ramesh, 2017). This not only produces a politics of difference, but also gives impunity to those who commit violence against Dalit women.

Moreover, this difference in the treatment of Dalit women and casted women illustrates the juxtaposition of these two constructions of Indian women and the production of bio-power: the first construction is how women should behave and how they should act, and the second is what women should not be like (Gupta, 2012), thereby marking caste as fundamental to the gendered, constructed politics of difference. This also does not mean that society is ignorant of the abuse of Dalit women, or that Brahman men are mindlessly attacking Dalit women, or that neither the state nor the law play a role in developing laws. The state and laws can be mechanisms of change

and can identify what is or is not permissible (Dalwai, Mahanta and Shakil, 2019). That is, as discussed in Chapter One, the state is a *reflection* of societal values, because social values are not *fixed.* Butalia, Murthy and Singh's (2016) three-year project examining sexual violence and impunity in South Asia specifically examined how deeply embedded the normalisation of sexual violence and the acceptance of impunity is within societies. They point out that the normalisation of rape has occurred over time. This is not to say that there has been no resistance against or contestation of sexual violence; the Indian women's movement has been active in fighting this form of violence and rape for centuries (Butalia et al., 2016). However, Butalia, Murphy and Singh point to the ways in which social, legal, and cultural norms have implicitly enabled impunity for men.

It has also been found that the rape and sexual violence of Dalit women has become normalised through routine practices of sexual violence and rape during communal conflict (Teltumbde, 2018) because violence is understood as an inherent part of the institution of caste (Chakravarti, 2020). While it is difficult to pinpoint what came first—whether the everyday practice of rape against Dalit women led to the normalising of rape, or whether it was the denial that the rape of Dalit women was a crime in the first place. However, as discussed in Chapter One, Dalit women become habituated to societal regulations and learn to self-discipline (Ghosh and Singh, 2017). Therefore, it can be suggested that the continuous surveillance of Dalit bodies, the systemic targeting of Dalits and the impunity granted to those who commit violence against Dalit women penetrates the consciousness of Dalit men and women, rendering them docile.

Similarly, Chapter Two addresses how bio-power operates through the production of power and the management of the population (Foucault, 1979). The process of bio-power in Brahmanical patriarchal practices against Dalit women's bodies operate to manage the Dalit population. This

is evident in customary practices such as devadasi, employing Dalit women's bodies for retribution in intercaste conflict, and marital rape. This suggests that these are not separate or distinct acts; rather, they demonstrate how impunity for sexual violence against Dalit women has become normalised through established norms of conduct in *all* aspects of their everyday life.

Summary

This chapter began by examining the construction of Dalit feminism, explaining that both Dalit politics and the mainstream Indian women's movements have co-opted caste and gender as mutually exclusive (Sabharawal and Sonalkar, 2015; Pan, 2018, 2019, 2020; Senanayake and Trigunayat, 2020). As a result, Dalit women's experiences were rendered invisible, romanticised and/or misrepresented (Sabharawal and Sonalkar, 2015; Vanada, 2020). In response to the invisibility of Dalit women, Dalit women constructed Dalit feminism to contest these misrepresentations and reproduce their own experiences (Rao, 2015; Pan, 2020). Dalit feminism draws on an intersectional framework that contextualises Dalit women's experience of suffering by identifying the multiple and simultaneous oppressions they face on account of their intersecting identities of caste, class, and gender (Jamwal, 2017; Pan, 2019). 'Women' in India cannot be viewed as a homogenous group because Indian women as subjects are shaped by class, caste, and access to education, health, justice, and safety—and this is particularly true for Dalit women (Sabharawal and Sonalkar, 2015; Diwakar, 2020).

The chapter then investigated both the Brahmanical and Dalit patriarchies. Chakravarti (2003; 2018) asserted that the Brahmanical patriarchy is a system maintained through the intersection of gender and caste. Including caste hierarchy in the definition of patriarchy illustrates the way in which mechanisms such as religion reinforce patriarchy, and Dalit patriarchy is understood to

situate Dalit women's experiences between patriarchal and caste oppression (Sen, 2017). The final section of the chapter used a Dalit feminist lens to explore the impunity granted those who commit sexual violence against Dalit women. It suggested that violence against Dalit women is deeply embedded in their everyday lives (Rao, 2015) and examined this notion through Dalit women's spaces in which everyday violence occurs: at home, in public (i.e., place of employment) and through the devadasi system. It found that the rape of Dalit women is accepted as 'part and parcel' of Indian society (Begum, 2016, p.16). For example, the state of Haryana has experienced a 167 per cent increase of targeted rape against Dalit women from 2009 to 2016 (Patwardhan, 2015). However, it was also pointed out that rape statistics are not always reliable for a number of reasons, such as reporting constraints, and this is particularly true for Dalit women, as police often reject or ignore rape reports by Dalit women (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Therefore, a feminist qualitative research project would facilitate more insight into the experiences of Dalit women.

Chapter Four

Research Methods

This chapter begins by outlining the research aims and the research design, including the rationale for adopting the following three qualitative methods: participant observation, focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The chapter then explains the epistemological and ontological assumptions that underpin this thesis as well as the fieldwork preparation and participant recruitment process. This is followed by a critical discussion of the research methods, the data analysis process and how critical discourse analysis (CDA) was used to analyse the data collected as well as a reflection on the ethical issues that arose during the research process. In particular, this section concentrates on the challenges of being a transnational researcher, focusing on researcher positionality and power. The final section addresses the dilemmas of researching sensitive subjects for both the researcher and the participants.

4.1 Research aims and choice of methods

This research aims of this project were to:

- investigate how Dalit women rape victims articulate their experiences of sexual violence

- examine how Dalit women rape victims' have constructed their self in relation to their caste, class, and gender

- analyse the relationship and/or disconnect between the experiences of Dalit women and the response to their victimisation by the state, the community, and their family.

The research was specifically designed to investigate these aims by employing qualitative methodology and CDA. I chose to use a mixture of qualitative research methods because they

allow for pluralism, in which the interview data can be examined with the data produced from the focus groups and can thus provide further insight. Furthermore, a mixture of focus groups and one-on-one interviews can be effective in cross-racial/cultural research (Cyr, 2017) and wherever there may be concerns of power and disclosure (Pollack, 2003). Lastly, this research is not searching for a cause or to claim truths.

4.2 Theoretical frameworks

The following section explains why I chose the theoretical underpinnings of this research: intersectionality, feminist theory, social constructionism and CDA.

i.   Intersectionality

The research focuses on gaining insight from the experiences of Dalit women rape victims. In choosing to research a minority group such as the Dalits, it was important to recognise that women can face multiple forms of oppression that may affect their lives in different ways. American scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) coined the term 'intersectionality', arguing that scholars need to consider both gender and race, and the interaction between the two, to understand the various dimensions of Black woman's experiences. As examined in Chapter Three, the experiences of Dalit women are often misrepresented and/or ignored, as caste and gender are often constructed as mutually exclusive (Pan, 2018, 2019; 2020; Senanayake and Trigunayat, 2020). Therefore, applying Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality as a research tool can help bridge the missing gaps between Dalit activism and the mainstream Indian women's movement in order to understand Dalit women's experiences, representation, and resistance. The importance and necessity of an intersectional approach can be illustrated by the impunity afforded to those who commit violence against Dalit women in India (Pal, 2016, 2018). As

Chapter Three points out, violence against Dalit women is two-fold, occurring in both public and private spheres. Dalit women are systemically targeted by upper caste men and women and also by Dalit men (Patwardhan, 2015; Diwakar, 2020). The concept of intersectionality was considered in this research because it facilitated further investigation into the targeting and treatment of Dalit women sexual violence victims that went beyond gender by factoring multiple intersecting identities into the analysis.

ii.   Feminist theory

Historically, Western scholars and writers have presented non-Western women as passive, without agency and in need of salvation due to their patriarchal traditions (Said, 1978). Chapter Three notes that Dalit feminists challenge the claim of a universal feminism, arguing that Dalit women have been robbed of their diversity and experiences by such a claim (Koyama, 2020). Postcolonial feminist critique uncovered the misrepresentation of the subaltern other[12]/ 'third-world'[13] women in previous feminism(s). Dalit feminists extend this critique to the mainstream women's movement in India because it presents idealised notions of a universal Indian woman. They draw attention to the 'outsider–within' experiences to bring attention to Dalit women's lived experiences (Sharma and Kumar, 2020).

As a transnational feminist[14] researcher, it is important for me to pay careful attention to how I interpret and represent the lives of others, particularly when working with minority women from

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[12] Subaltern/other: women who belong to lower social positions or exist in a postcolonial context—for example, women from Eastern or 'third-world' countries (Spivak, 1988).

[13] Third-world women/feminists is a concept referred to by many women who live exclusively in third-world countries and denies the notion of a universal feminism constructed by white feminism. These feminists claim that the perspectives of third-world women are more nuanced and grounded in their intersecting oppressions and diverse forms of resistance (Herr, 2014).

[14] Typically, transnational feminists are more critical of nation-states and nationalism because they are destructive to feminist causes. It also must be made clear that third-world feminism

another country, because their historical, social, and cultural experiences will differ from mine (Darder and Griffiths, 2018). Accordingly, the methodological approach of this research was informed by these postcolonial feminist critiques of representation and interpretation of the 'subaltern', and I attempted to develop the research from a postcolonial context. I achieved this by applying different layers of theorisation to draw from the personal experiences of the participants and from the broader social, religious, and political structures that may have informed their lives. Moreover, I was conscious and critical of how I engaged with and spoke to the Dalit women participants and of how I analysed and interpreted their narratives (Darder and Griffiths, 2018). As suggested by Foucault (1984), it is important to understand the way people speak and to think about the way in which they are represented in society because these factors carry implications for how people are treated. Thus, it was imperative that I adopted a postcolonial feminist analysis throughout the research process and data analysis to consider researcher positionality and ethical research.

iii.   Social constructionism

This research draws on a social constructionist epistemological framework. Social constructionism is suitable for investigating the targeting and treatment of Dalit women rape victims in India because of the philosophical belief that there are many versions of the social world and that our knowledge of the world is derived from our daily interactions between people, wherein we construct and produce shared assumptions/knowledge (Campanario and Yost, 2017)—because this knowledge is produced through interaction, this signifies that it is fluid and can be negotiated (Burr, 2015). Furthermore, the social constructionist epistemological

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differs from transnational feminism, as the latter is primarily concerned with feminist organisation and movements that happen at the transnational level. (Herr, 2014).

assumption would allow for the lives of the Dalit women participants and that of the researcher

to be interconnected, because human beings are intricately complex and only together can we

construct our worlds (Roller and Lavrakas, 2015). This is important because the data were

produced from Dalit women participants' lived experiences, which the researcher interpreted,

thereby producing a 'shared experience' between the researcher and the participants. As a result,

this research takes the position that each of us has different perceptions and interpretations of

'reality' that are based on our historical, social, and cultural experiences. Therefore, this research

acknowledges and reflects the fact that both the participants and the researcher are co-

contributors to a shared reality.

Social constructionist epistemology maintains that there is no absolute truth; accordingly, this

research acknowledges that the knowledge produced by both the researcher and the participants

is subjective (MacKellar, 2020). The narratives produced by the Dalit women are their

interpretations of their social world at that moment in time. These narratives are not fixed; they

can and/or may change over time and do not represent all Dalit women (Elliot, 2005; Sharma and

Kumar, 2020). The aim of this research is to gain insight into the lived experiences of these rape

victims and to provide support for future social justice and social change in the targeting and

treatment of Dalit women.

However, this study does acknowledge the debate among social constructionist theorists

regarding whether following a social constructionist epistemology can promote social change

and social justice without claiming an absolute truth. One of the challenges of using the social

constructionism approach is grounded in the 'realism-relativism debate' (Burr, 2015;

Campanario and Yost, 2017). Some social constructionists may adhere to a strong position of

relativism by accepting that various realities are constructed within different cultural contexts,

which implies we are unable to judge whether one reality can be more 'right' than the other (Burr, 2015). Thus, following a strong relativist position would undermine one's actions for social change and social justice (Burr, 2015) because it would be impossible to assert that some people, such as Dalit women, face multiple oppressions—their oppressions would simply be seen as one of the many possible constructions in the world. Moreover, some strong relativist social constructionists claim that it is only through language that things exist (Elder-Vass, 2012). Thus, events and social problems such as world hunger, poverty, war, and natural disasters are viewed as outcomes of language (Burr, 2015).

However, this research takes the position of critical realism: it acknowledges that the power of language constructs the world, but also that some aspects of the world do exist independent of language, including underlying structures such as race, religion, caste, and gender that do exist (Yucel, 2018). Furthermore, the importance and relevance of these structures may vary from place to place because we must consider historical, social, and cultural contexts. Critical realist Roy Bhaskar argues that real objects and structures exist in the world, have causal powers and are responsible for things that we experience, such as oppression (Bhaskar, 2008). As examined in Chapter Two, the caste system is a 'reality' for Dalit people and can be understood as an institution that shapes Dalit women's experiences. Moreover, Bhaskar contends that sometimes we may not be able to see these objects or structures *physically*, such as the caste system, but we can see them through their causal effects—that is, there is a symbiotic relationship between human agency and social reality (Rutten, 2019). Thus, epistemologically, this research takes a relativist position and accepts that we understand our world through socially constructed discourses. However, ontologically, this research reflects realism because our social

constructions and interpretations of the social world are based on some aspects of a structured reality (Rutten, 2019).

iv.   Critical discourse analysis

In line with social constructionism, CDA was employed to examine the Dalit women rape victims' narratives. A CDA framework highlights how discourse plays a central role in the construction of social reality, as discourse shapes how social inequality can be developed, perpetuated, and sustained (Loutfi, 2019). This research attempts to examine the words and references that the Dalit women used to understand their social world in the context of their rape. Moreover, it examines the historical, social, and political practices that have influenced how the participants defined their rape. This facilitates further examination of the definitions and explanations of rape against Dalit women.

This study adopts a variety of qualitative data production methods to examine how the experiences of Dalit women have been shaped by India's sexual violence discourses. These methods include participant observation, focus groups and semi-structured one-on-one interviews. The study also uses other research tools for analysis, such as my fieldwork diary.

4.3 Fieldwork preparation and recruitment

I chose Delhi, India as the field site because Delhi has become known in the media as the 'rape capital' of India. However, the sex crimes reported by the media are typically of middle-class or upper class women (Bradley, Saharaiah and Siddiqui, 2016). Approximately 2,343,255 Dalits reside in Delhi, and they comprise about 16.9 per cent of the Delhi population (Census India, 2015). However, there are minimal statistics regarding the number of Dalit women with the exception of a ratio of Dalit women to Dalit men: this is 922/1000 across India compared with

927/1000 for the rest of the country's population (Tamil Nadu Women's Forum, 2007).

Moreover, in the last decade, Dalit migration from rural to urban India has increased by 40 per

cent (International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2019). This is reflected in the current research, as

many of the participants had migrated from rural villages in India to Delhi within the last 10 to

15 years. According to the NCRB, in 2014, the overall rape rate in Delhi was 23.2 per 100,000

compared with the national average of 6.1 per 100,000 (National Crime Bureau, 2014).

However, the NCRB datum does not provide any further details about the demographics of rape

victims beyond gender. A qualitative design was employed for the current research to enable

further investigation because of the lack of demographic details provided by the NCRB data and

because lower caste women are less likely to report crimes to police (Irudayam, Mangubhai and

Lee, 2011).

Prior to heading into the field, I spent the first two years of the research process connecting with

different non-government organisations (NGOs) and with Dalit women activists via email, text,

Skype, and telephone. I was referred to two NGOs (AA[15] and BB) by a friend with whom I had

worked on a campaign to end violence against women in the South Asian community in

Vancouver, Canada in 2014. She also happened to be Dalit, and before immigrating to Canada,

she had worked for several NGOs in India. After conducting further online research and

maintaining contact with the two NGOs over this two-year period, I was able to confirm with the

NGOs that they would assist with potential participant recruitment. While in India, I was also

introduced to a woman whom I will refer to as Arya Rao; she was the coordinator for the CC

organisation. I met her through contacts I had made while volunteering at the AA NGO. The

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[15] I have used pseudonyms for all NGOs, individuals, and localities to protect the confidentiality
of the participants.

three organisations were not-for-profits that relied on donations and government funding. Below are brief descriptions of all three and the type of work that they do in Delhi, India for Dalit women.

The AA organisation is located on the outskirts of East Delhi and is a non-profit organisation that was built to provide street children and women with necessities such as medical assistance, clothing, food, shelter, and education. The organisation is run as a school, and it has hired trained educators to give women and children full-time training in career development. Approximately 450 young children and women come through it each day.

The BB NGO has offices located in East, South and North Delhi, and it offers scheduled caste and Dalit women job development and training skills. Most of the women BB assists are Dalit and reside in the nearby *jugghis* (slums). Those enrolled in the administrative job training program must attend full-time training for six months and are then given a job placement. The women are provided with training in English, computers, and administration. In total, there are approximately 100 women registered per centre, per year, who are trained and then offered administrative job opportunities. The age range for the women registered in the programs is from 19 to 50 years of age.

The CC NGO is similar to the BB NGO; however, it has only one office, which is located in East Delhi, and the program it offers goes for 12 months. Moreover, the women it assists are provided with daily food, clothing, counselling, and medical treatment. CC is located in a spiritual facility and thus the women have access to other on-site facilities and resources, such as yoga and meditation classes, medical assistance, and counselling services. Most of the women who participate in this program are Dalits, and their ages range from 21 to 47 years. CC runs two

full-time programs and assists approximately 70 women a year in career training and job development.

4.4 Into the field

Upon my arrival in Delhi, India, I began volunteering at the AA NGO as an English tutor. After spending approximately one month there, I recognised that most of the children and women who attended that NGO were of scheduled caste,[16] with very few being Dalit. However, through the few Dalit women I met at AA, I was connected with two Dalit activists, whom I will refer to as Shyama and Savitri, and the CC coordinator, Arya Rao. These women were invaluable gatekeepers, as they not only connected me to the Dalit women participants, but also assisted me with translation and educated me on social and cultural practices within the Dalit community. Furthermore, the two Dalit activists invited me to attend a woman's rights march that was inclusive of Dalit women. The BB organisation was also a sponsor of the march, and it was there that I connected with many Dalit women rape victims.

Prior to commencing fieldwork in Delhi, India, I began private Hindi lessons in London, UK, because Hindi is the primary language of India. Although I can fully understand Hindi, my spoken Hindi is not fluent because I was brought up speaking Punjabi.[17] From a social constructionist epistemological position, it is recognised that *the translator* informs the knowledge production process (Mandal, 2018), that meaning is constructed through discourses and that there is no 'truthful' translation of a text (Temple and Young, 2004). Moreover, for this

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[16] Scheduled Caste: In 1932, groups were officially defined as depressed castes, often referred to as 'untouchables'. These are groups officially recognised by the state as historically disadvantaged (Karade, 2008).

[17] Punjabi is a spoken language that is similar to Hindi. It is the primary language spoken in the state of Punjab, India and in Pakistan.

research, having a translator present was beneficial—the translator was known to some of the participants, and their relationship allowed the translator to also act as a support system. Shyama was my primary translator, however on five occasions Arya Rao translated for me and on two occasions was a lawyer who had connected me to the participants. Kalra and Bhugra (2013) state that victims of sexual violence in India, often rely on a family member or a support system to disclose their sexual violence due to the sociocentric culture of India (wherein individual identity is integrated with family and community), and the translator in this current research did just that. It was also important to use a translator because I wanted to be sure to use words and concepts that were relatable for the participants. For example, there is no common word for 'rape' in Hindi (see Gill, 2010); consequently, I had to use words that were related to rape, such as 'honour' and 'dignity'. The solutions to translation issues cannot always be located in a dictionary but are resolved by understanding how language is linked to local realities (Mandal, 2018). Thus, having a translator helped ensure that I was using language that was mutually understood.

4.5 Research methods

The following section discusses the research methods that were employed for the data production: participant observation, focus groups and semi-structured interviews.

i. Participant observation

Participant observation can be used as a tool for a researcher to develop rapport with potential participants (Brancati, 2018). In this research, participant observation was used as a tool to gain 'a way into' the Dalit community and as a means to familiarise myself with the field, make connections, develop relationships, and potentially identify and recruit interview participants. I

initially began my observation by spending time at the NGOs and observing the social workers and their interactions with the women they assisted. I attended the various classes offered to the women and tagged along on social service visits to the homes of women and children. Savage (2003) questions what a researcher wants to achieve when they are on the 'inside'. From a social constructionist framework, the aim of my observation was to see how the participants constructed their reality; I achieved this by examining their social practices and the way in which they communicated with one another and with me as the researcher.

However, over time, I recognised that finding 'my way into' the community was not going to happen by my simply observing the women and their interactions within that community; rather, it was important that I actively participate in their world with them. After my first week of observing at the AA NGO, I sought permission to teach an English class and asked if the students could help me with my Hindi. It was this interaction that initiated bonding that later developed into relationships. By engaging and being a part of the Dalit women's social world, I became both participant and observer.

I also taught a four-day course on sexual harassment at the CC NGO, which gave me an opportunity to interact with the Dalit women and build trust in the hopes of recruiting participants for the focus groups and interviews. However, it was through teaching this course that I was able to observe and practise much of the language used to describe sexual violence. Thus, participant observation served as an effective tool to understand how participants spoke of their experiences with one another (Ciesielska, Boström and Öhlander, 2018) and how they drew on their knowledge of sexual violence in a broader sense to understand sexual violence within

the context of their family, their community, and the state. For example, the women did not use words such as rape or sexual violence; instead, they would say that their izzat[18] was taken.

This could raise concerns regarding whether being both participant and observer has methodological implications in terms of ethnographic practice. For example, how and where does reflection on the participants take place? Teaching the class was meant to be an opportunity for me to 'connect' and build rapport with potential participants and/or gatekeepers. It was not necessarily meant for me to 'observe' as a researcher; and for a transnational researcher it is important to be in the research environment when you are 'off the clock', as this creates space for discovery that may or may not have been anticipated. For example, through participant observation, I discovered how rape was spoken about among Dalit women. Moreover, I noted any observations or reflections about participants during class (if the opportunity arose), between class time and immediately afterwards. The risks of not recording during observation are forgetting or misinterpreting after the time and not 'seeing' something. However, this thesis acknowledges that there is no 'true' way of seeing the world and that the data collected and analysed are subjective, but representational, in terms of understanding the lived experiences of the participants (Hesse-Biber, 2010).

In addition, participant observation gave me the opportunity to analyse how power could also be mirrored physically in the social world. For example, I observed that the women enrolled in the NGO programs would not sit directly beside me or at the same level as me. When I questioned this, they said it was out of respect because I was considered to have a 'higher' status than them. This observation allowed me to address predetermined researcher positionality, which I address

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[18] Izzat is the notion of respect and honour; it can take on various forms for the individual, the family, and the nation.

this further in the 'Reflexivity' section. However, this exemplifies why participant observation is an important method to use in addition to the interviews and focus groups: because there are aspects of the world that exist *independent* of language (Little, McGivern, R' Keirns, Strayer, Griffiths, Cody-Rydzewski, Vyain,, 2016).

ii.   Focus groups

The participants of the focus groups were recruited through the CC NGO and were also the students of the four-day course I taught at the CC NGO on sexual harassment. The focus groups were run in small groups of five to seven women because it has been suggested that smaller groups enable more intimate discussions and for everyone's voice to be heard (Robinson, 2020). In total, there were 22 participants in the focus groups: three focus groups with five participants each and one group of seven. The women ranged in age from 19 to 39 years, many had an education of class 11 or higher and all of them lived in the nearby slums in East Delhi.

Most of the women were Dalit, apart from two who did not identify their caste. None had been specifically identified as rape victims by the NGO. The CC staff stated that many of the women had come from abusive backgrounds but had not determined the type of abuse. An advantage of using focus groups is exploration of how the women spoke about sexual violence to obtain information about key concepts and narratives that can be used for other areas of research (Zander, Stolz and Hamm, 2013). For this thesis, the focus groups were used in place of pilot interviews to provide insight into the key concepts, themes and words affecting Dalit women in Delhi.

The focus groups were particularly beneficial as they enabled me to make changes to my questions for the one-on-one interviews based on the knowledge that I gained during the group

sessions. Focus groups can be an effective way to extract values and beliefs, attitudes, and norms (Bovill, Waller, and McCartan, 2020). In my case, they were also very beneficial in terms of helping me understand the language the women used and how they talked about sexual violence within a greater social, political, and religious context. For example, I recognised that it was important not to directly ask the participants if they had been raped. I would begin with a buffer question by asking them what they thought about the Jyoti Singh Pandey rape case (described in the introduction), and then I would slowly move into discussing their specific rape case by taking cues from their responses (see the 'Semi-structured interviews' section). Furthermore, because focus groups are inherently social, they can offer participants the opportunity to share their individual identities while simultaneously contributing to their understanding of how their individual experiences may link to the broader constructions of the social world (Callaghan, 2005; Cyr, 2017). Thus, focus groups can provide insight into the construction of meanings and can be used to investigate common themes in relation to social identities, such as class, religion, age, and gender. In this research, the focus groups also operated as a recruitment tool for individual interview participants.

Moreover, the focus groups acted as a pilot. They proved useful in helping me to conduct more culturally sensitive and respectful research, and they allowed me to assess my interview techniques and interview schedule. The focus groups were small and intimate, and many of the participants did reveal personal trauma during the sessions. I learned how to be more supportive and to give the women the silence and space they needed to share their narrative. Further, after each focus group, I asked the participants to provide me with feedback on how I could improve my approach. This feedback allowed me to adjust the way I asked questions. For example, as indicated above, some of the feedback I received was to not be so direct in my questions relating

to sex or abuse. The participants preferred me not to name specific types of abuse and instead to talk *around* the abuse. This allowed me to conduct more culturally appropriate research and taught me how to be more culturally supportive for future focus group and interview participants.

iii. Semi-structured interviews

The participants in the semi-structured interviews were gathered via the snowball sampling method. In total, 28 interviews were conducted with Dalit women rape victims living in East Delhi, India. Many of the women had survived rapes that had occurred as long as 10-20 years ago and one as recently as six years ago and one participant's daughter who was raped three years ago. All the participants had been raped by men. Nine had been raped by relatives (uncles/cousins), two by unknown assailant(s), four by employers/landlords, seven by local villagers/neighbours and four by their husbands/boyfriends; one was gang-raped by classmates, and one was raped by a student teacher at her school. Of the 28 participants, two had been gang-raped.

I conducted all the interviews and, as indicated earlier, I had a translator present who assisted when needed. I developed a semi-structured schedule that explored issues raised during the focus groups (see interview schedule.) A typical interview began with me asking the participant to provide basic demographic information. I then asked questions about whether they had heard of the Nirbhaya case. I did this to ease our way into discussing the participant's rape. I then gradually moved the discussion to their rape, typically by referencing a point they had made regarding the Nirbhaya case. This would allow me to find out the participant's perspective on rape in general and on their personal rape experience. Once the interview was complete, I reread the interview transcript and asked the participant if they wanted to add, change, or delete any part

of it. Finally, I gave them a counsellor referral (see the 'Researching sensitive subjects' section), should they decide to see a counsellor, and my personal contact information.

Drawing on social constructionism epistemology, I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews to generate multiple narrative accounts from the Dalit women, whereby I could examine their experiences and how they were shaped by sexual violence discourses and/or by the threat of sexual violence and sexual violence itself in India. Semi-structured interviews can enable further exploration in research of a sensitive nature (Das, Bhattacharayy and Pervin, 2020) by making space for participant subjectivity (DeJonckheere and Vaughn, 2019). For example, how rape victims' traumatic experiences have been shaped by their social world. This can be achieved by investigating how and why some rape victims disclose their rape and why some do not. In this research, examining the language participants used to share their narratives facilitated further insight into these women's social world. When a woman chooses to disclose her rape, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, it can have greater societal implications and can make space for societal interpretation, stigmatizing reactions, and victim-blaming (Iles, Waks, Seate, Hundal and Irions, 2018). For example, depending on the cultural and social expectations of a given society, rape disclosure may result in the shaming of the victim (Bhuptani, Kaufman, Messman-Moore, Gratz and DiLillo, 2018). Thus, examining how, when, and why a victim discloses their rape is important because it can yield additional insight into the targeting and treatment of Dalit women rape victims. In this research, the use of semi-structured interviews attempted to examine how the participants spoke about their personal experiences and how they made sense of those experiences within the social world.

iv.   Interview settings

Most of the interviews were held in rooms within the facility where the CC organisation was based, some were conducted in rooms made available at the BB NGO and a few were conducted in off-site locations chosen by the participant. On one occasion, a participant requested to meet at a local park, and on two other occasions, participants requested the interview to be held at a local women's law advocate's office.

I wanted to find space that would allow for an informal interview setting and in which the women would feel safe and comfortable. I chose a room within the facility where the CC NGO was based as my primary interview setting for a few reasons. First, it was offered to me at no cost. Second, many Dalits in East Delhi are aware of this particular spiritual facility as a place that offers free assistance in terms of food, education, health, wellness, and job training; this meant that the space would not have any negative ramifications for the participants should anyone in their respective community see them entering or leaving. Third, the facility had an on-site counselling office to which I could directly refer participants, if appropriate, either before or after the interview was conducted. However, as a way of minimising the power imbalance between myself and the participants, I gave them the opportunity to *choose* the interview location, if they so desired, before suggesting a room at the CC NGO.

As an upper class Sikh woman, it was important for me to address the societal hierarchical structures that generated a power imbalance between me and the participants. In India there is a separation between the classes that is implicitly understood. For example, servants (who are typically of Dalit background) do not sit beside the upper caste/class, and nor will they eat in the same room as them. If they must eat in the same room, they always sit on the floor. Irrespective of how uncomfortable I was with this arrangement, I had to consider that the participants might

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not be. It has been argued that there is an inherent power imbalance between the researcher and the participants, wherein power is constantly shifting but that it is never equal (Bhopal, 2010; Raheim, Magnussen, Sekse, Lunde, Jacobsen, and Blystad, 2016). While the researcher should attempt to shift the power imbalances that are within their control, they should only do so if it is in the interest of, or beneficial to, the participant. Thus, prior to sitting down for the interview, I allowed the participant to determine where they wanted to sit. Each room had tables and chairs and had carpeted floors. I also brought some shawls with me, as the temperature is still quite cool from December to March. Most of the women chose to sit on the floor, and once they had seated themselves, I either joined them on the floor or, if I noticed them feeling uncomfortable or hesitant, asked them where they would prefer me to sit. I commenced the interviews with informal discussion over tea and biscuits to create a more relaxed setting and to ease into the more 'formal' interview process.

4.6 Data analysis

This section discusses how the data were recorded and how CDA was employed to analyse the data collected. CDA was chosen because it enables the exploration of how gendered ideologies become normalised in social and the political contexts (Lazar, 2018) and exploration of the intersection of class, caste, and other identities (Crenshaw, 1989). The aim of this thesis is to examine women's experiences through their use of language to explain their rape, trauma, and resilience. Furthermore, incorporating a feminist approach is important in the analysis because it can account for how the women negotiated their personal and social identities through language by focusing on how the participants used language to construct themselves and their social world (Lazar, 2018). In particular, the objective of CDA is to highlight how language can contribute to

the oppression of marginalised people but can simultaneously encourage agency and social emancipation (Fairclough, 2013).

All the interviews were recorded by hand because I was not allowed to bring any technology into the spiritual facility. All technical equipment, including cell phones and laptops, had to be checked in upon arrival. Recording the interviews by hand did pose a few challenges, such as participants speaking too fast, and I sometimes had to ask them to slow down or repeat what they had said. Recording interviews in this manner may have also resulted in missing information, less accurate information, and room for interpretation and selectivity (Paulus, Jackson and Davidson, 2017). However, Nordstrom (2015) points out that recording devices are not silent and arbitrary—rather, they have a presence that can influence the data being collected. Nonetheless, I attempted to address these concerns by paraphrasing participant responses in my notes and, at the end of each interview, asking the participant if there was anything I had left out. Inevitably, an interview becomes a 'pre-interpreted' transcript (Sim and Wright, 2000), which is why I take the position that a researcher should not speak *for* a group, but rather speak *with* the group (Gill, 2010; 2013).

After reading the transcripts several times, I began coding the data with the NVivo qualitative software program and identifying recurring themes and concepts. These included codes such as 'marriage after rape', 'disclosing rape', 'izzat', 'naming their rape', 'justice' or victim'. After establishing broad themes, I then identified subthemes that I coded and linked to other recurring themes. For example, I identified a common theme of 'izzat' and linked this code to various subthemes, including 'marriage' and 'family'. From there, I was able to identify how 'izzat' can be linked to sexual violence and to determine how this code was used to negotiate identities, such as being Dalit, poor, a woman, a daughter and/or a wife. In addition, I mapped out the

women's lives chronologically based on common events post-rape, such as marriage, educational achievements, having to drop out of school and/or being forced/or not forced out of their village. I organised the data to see if there were any common themes to help me understand how the women's lives had been impacted by their rape over time. I paid particular attention to mapping out how the lives of the women who had disclosed their rape were similar to and/or different from the lives of those who had not. Coding key events and the women's interpretation of them allowed me to draw out how the the women themselves had further constructed their identities following their rape.

4.7 Ethical responsibility

Given the nature and the sensitivity of the subject, I reflected on the ethical considerations for this study throughout the research process. This section addresses confidentiality and consent.

i.   Consent and confidentiality

Participant confidentiality is essential in research and is of particular importance for participants who are victims of sexual violence and trauma (Liamputtong, 2007; Proctor, 2015). When investigating sensitive research topics such as sexual violence and rape, researchers must be especially thoughtful about confidentiality and participant anonymity (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen and Liamputtong, 2007; Proctor, 2015). The repercussions of confidentiality being violated can be paramount, as a woman's life—mentally, physically, and socially—can become at risk.

I obtained consent from participants using the university-approved confidentiality and consent form (see Appendix); to ensure anonymity, I used pseudonyms for the participants, their city locations, and their villages and for the NGOs, including their locations and their staff. However,

obtaining consent was more complex than anticipated because some participants were reluctant to sign the consent and confidentiality forms, and others signed the forms based on a bond between the researcher and the participant. The participants began to 'trust' me not just as a researcher but as a confidant and a friend. Participants in trauma-related research, particularly, need to be made aware of informed consent because of the potential (although low) risk of any adverse effects from participating (Hetzel-Riggin, 2017). Informed consent requires the researcher to provide information to participants about the rationale of the research, the methods, any possible risks involved and the foreseen benefits (Liamputtong, 2007; Hetzel-Riggin, 2017). The participant can make an informed decision as to whether they will agree to participate.

However, what happens when the lines between the researcher and the participant are blurred? And what about when Western forms of consent are not the same in the East? Drawing on postcolonial feminist critique, I raised and reflected on these questions throughout the research process. Some of the conclusions that have been drawn in the literature are that transnational researchers must situate their research and ethics within the country they are in (Vanner, 2015) and should not bring presumptive, colonial practices to an Eastern context (Simonds and Christopher, 2013). It is the researcher's job in these situations to be adaptable and to be as informative as possible while causing no harm. The lines between the researcher and the participant can often, but not always, blur with trauma-related research that is qualitative in nature. When participants open up about emotional trauma, it is very difficult for a feminist researcher to remain neutral. A tenet of feminist research is to provide compassion (Proctor, 2015) and part of that may include 'being a friend' (Wilkinson, 2016), even momentarily.

For example, prior to formally sitting down to interview the study participants, I spent months forming bonds and relationships with them. By the time I started conducting interviews, the

majority of the women had begun to refer to me as '*didi*' (sister). These relationships went

beyond the roles of researcher and participant, and I began to question whether my new

friendship with these women had influenced their decision to sign the consent forms. I also

reflected on whether the formal consent that I was required to obtain was adequate because the

participants' social and cultural influences differed from mine and those of my academic

institution and I had maintained multiple subject positions (Bhattacharya, 2007; Vanner, 2015).

I particularly struggled with the requirement of a signed consent form because it does not

account for the social anxiety regarding authority and corruption that occurs in Eastern localities

and/or for marginalised people. In India's Dalit community, given the country's history of

discrimination and the impunity granted to those who commit violence against Dalits, there is a

general distrust of individuals in positions of authority, such as the police community (Shinde,

2005; International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN), 2019; Immigration and Refugee Board OF

Canada (IRB), 2020). I missed a few interview opportunities because the potential participants

were reluctant to sign the consent form due to their past experiences with people in positions of

authority manipulating, altering, or doctoring paperwork. This 'distrust' was represented by a

piece of paper that required their signature. I began reflecting on why a piece of paper should

determine whether one could share their experiences with me. I never took it personally when a

potential participant refused to sign the consent forms. Moreover, when I could see that a

participant had reservations, I did my best to explain to them why the consent form was required;

if I still felt that they were unsure, I asked them to think about it before they signed it. This

sometimes left me and the NGO staff at odds with one another because they could not

understand how a signature was 'protecting' the women and did not think I should give the

participants more time to think about signing the form. To them, I was just adding to the

participants' fear of sharing their narrative. I questioned if perhaps I was assuming the participants were too naïve and unable to understand the ethical requirements of the research process (Bhattacharya, 2007). I reflected on my role as a researcher and how it extended beyond producing data because I felt I needed to protect the women. Conversely, I also needed to protect myself as a student researcher. I had ethical requirements and obligations to fulfil, and these led to my own fears of not having my participants' signatures.

I initially designed the confidentiality and consent forms in a manner that I thought was informative and clear and that fit the university requirements. I ensured that I considered the relevant language barriers and incorporated a variety of methods to obtain consent and confirm the competency of that consent (Xu, Baysari, Stocker, Leow, Day and Carland, 2020). I made the consent form available in Hindi and in English and gave the participants ample time to read the document and ask any questions. I also verbally reviewed the document with them and had them verbally confirm that they understood it. This ensured that the participants were fully aware of both their *requirements* as a participant and their *rights* as a participant. But as I began this process, I recognised that the consent form needed to be designed in a way that went *beyond* the university ethical requirements. Instead of just having the participants read and sign the documents, I took the time at the end of each interview to read back the interview transcript and confirm if it represented what the participant wanted to say. I also continued to follow up with the participants via telephone and email to ask them whether they wanted to make any changes or additions to their transcripts. I gave them a cut-off date of October 2020; however, none of the participants asked to make any changes or additions. Unlike quantitative methods, which attempt to derive validity and separate social influences in research, the rigor of qualitative research incorporates these influences and uses them for deeper analysis (Cypress, 2017). In the future, I

would consider other alternatives to obtaining consent that would enable further negotiation between researcher and participant. This might include obtaining verbal consent and/or having the consent witnessed by another individual, such as a translator.

ii.   Reflexivity, positionality, and power

Historically, transnational researchers were typically white Westerners who crossed nations to research the 'subaltern'. As a result, postcolonial feminist critique of transnational researchers producing research participants as 'the other' necessitated more reflexivity with positionality and power (Fisher, 2015). Postcolonial feminists began challenging transnational feminist researchers' motivation for studying and 'speaking for' the 'subaltern' (Darder and Griffiths, 2018). Considering these critiques, contemporary Western feminist researchers have attempted to find ways to construct new representations of the 'subaltern' participant and to account for their own motivations in conducting transnational research. Reflexivity, positionality, and power are relevant to the current research because the knowledge being produced is situated in the social differences between the researcher and the participants (Ross, 2017). As a transnational feminist researcher, it is important to acknowledge and account for my positionality in relation to the Dalit women with whom I worked in this study. Positionality can be explained as the parts of one's identity, such as class, caste, gender, or race, that can be indicators of relational positions and that can explain a researcher's sense of self and how participants see them (Chereni, 2014). Understanding my positionality allows me to understand where I stand in relation to power with the participants and vice versa. This section thus discusses the positionality and power of transnational researchers investigating sensitive subjects.

iii.   Positionality and 'being' a transnational researcher

After leaving London, UK and crossing nations into India, I was quick to recognise that moral and ethical clarity can become obscure. As a transnational researcher who was born in the West but has Eastern heritage, I began to question how and where researchers such as myself fit within these broad categories of Eastern and Western feminism and how this impacts the traditional ways of understanding researcher positionality. Traditionally, the focus has been on 'white' feminist academics being critiqued for the imperial and colonial influences that they may carry. However, the researcher's identity has become more complex; it is no longer only white researchers travelling to the East to study the 'subaltern'. While in the field, I would often move back and forth between playing the parts of both insider and outsider—and sometimes of the 'in-betweener'—but this was subject to context, situation, and interpretation (Milligan, 2016). While I was struggling to situate myself in the field, the participants were quick to locate me as a Westerner and to see me as occupying a higher class position because I was from Canada. The fact that I had Indian heritage and understood their spoken language granted me easier access to participants and may have made it easier for me to gain acceptance into the various Dalit communities. However, I was still very much an outsider because I was not Dalit and because I was not an Indian national. This prompted me to recognise that I represented multiple, shifting identities depending on the participant, the context, and the situation (Milligan, 2016).

Subjectivity in the field of transnational research can be illustrated through my experience of researcher identification. In addition to a researcher locating themselves with respect to the participants. However also acknowledging how the researcher identified by participants (Holmes, 2020). As suggested above, while I was in the field, I was viewed as a 'Westerner' by the participants, even though I do not identify completely as such. Meanwhile, I have always

identified, and been identified, in Canada by other Canadians as 'Indo-Canadian', and thus I

have always felt somewhere in between. In addition, during the study in India, the participants

automatically assumed that I had a higher level of education, belonged to a higher caste, and held

a higher class position. Nagar and Geiger (2007) argue that the researcher–participant

relationship is predefined *and* that this can be changed through reflexivity. However, some

researchers advocate for 'ethnic matching' between interviewer and participant, believing that

similar racial and ethnic identities can impact the research process by encouraging more

information to be shared and enabling a richer understanding of the data (Bhopal, 2010;

Muhammad, Wallerstein, Sussman, Avila, Belone, and Duran., 2015).

I agree that it might be easier in terms of interpretation if a researcher is ethnically matched with

a participant because of the mutual understanding of cultural norms and practices. However,

simply having an Indian heritage was not enough to encourage participants to share more

information with me. The fact that I was also a woman and was aware of the social and cultural

history and politics of my Indian heritage allowed me to connect with the participants. Further,

focusing on similarities could mislead the researcher into thinking that they can identify with

participants when in fact the participants' lives are very different based on their experiences of

social categories such as gender, caste, class, religion, and language (Berger, 2015).

Alternatively, a researcher's identity is in constant flux between insider, outsider and/or in-

betweener—these intersecting identities cannot fix researchers in a specific position, and we thus

take on different positions depending on context and the people with whom we interact

(Milligan, 2016). In my case, being able to move between insider and outsider had its benefits:

many of the participants stated that they were happy they had someone to speak to because they

had found it difficult to speak to anyone within their own community due to fear of judgement.

In addition, as a researcher from the West, I was conscious of my subject position and what this meant as I assumed the role of a narrator sharing the narratives of these Dalit women. I was aware of the need to use a theoretical framework that would allow me to interpret the findings from the interviews and for both the researcher and the participants to be co-producers (Harding, 2020). As a feminist researcher, it was important that I actively engaged with and produced knowledge that was beneficial for both the participants and me.

This research recognises and acknowledges that both the researcher and the participants are co-producers of knowledge developed from a shared reality that was produced during the fieldwork (Harding, 2020). However, practically, and theoretically, this was challenging. Upon reflection, I question whether co-producing is possible. How equal were our contributions, and is the final analysis a 'shared' reflection? Each participant said that they did not need to make any changes to the interview transcript, that they were happy I had taken the time to speak with them and that they had enjoyed spending time with me. Upon reflection, I questioned whether we shared the same goals of social change or whether the women had participated for other reasons. The question then becomes whether the research can be a 'co-production' if the vested interests and goals of the research are not the same for the participants and researcher (Bhattacharya, 2007). Epistemologically, the final reading of the results for a true 'co-production'would be produced from a shared reality comprising both researcher and participant experiences and interpretations of one another and of the social world at that time, regardless of whether the research goals were the same for both parties.

iv.   Power

Power is also an important component of the research process (Bhopal, 2009). The intent of feminist research is to counter those power imbalances (Harding, 2020). Feminist research works from the principles that the balance of power generally lies with the researcher because they have more power to manage the research process (Bhopal and Danaher, 2013). Addressing the imbalance of power is important when studying marginalised groups such as Dalit women, and this can begin by not speaking *for* them or rationalising the research as a means of an 'opportunity' for them. This research takes the position that 'voice' is constructed through interaction (Harris, 2016), and thus the knowledge produced is understood *to be co-produced* between the researcher and the participants.

If researchers state that they are 'giving' voice to marginalised women, this is problematic (Falcon, 2016)—particularly for Western transnational researchers, as they exercise an imperial privilege when 'speaking for' that ignores both the individual and structural benefits afforded to them (Falcon, 2016). That is, they are masking the power relations between researcher and participants. Some feminist theorists have suggested an interactive approach to balancing 'voice' by allowing the participants some decision-making in the research project to allow for a more democratic research relationship (Burns, Hyde, Killett, Poland and Gray, 2014). For example, in my study, I reviewed each interview transcript with the participant to ensure that I had captured what they intended to say. In addition, after the interviews and focus groups, I sought participant feedback, which gave me the opportunity to improve the way I would conduct future focus groups and interviews. A central element when applying feminist theory in research is recognising that researcher identity is complex and subjective according to how we see ourselves and how others see us. It is vital to be able to be reflect on identity and social location to

understand how power operates through us and how it may afford us certain privileges that are not available to participants (Muhammad, et al., 2015). However, power imbalances will inevitably exist, and they may shift between researcher and participants (Bhopal and Danaher, 2013). For example, participants have the power to quit the interview at any time and on one occasion in this study, this did happen. One of the participants Lakshmi quit because she became so nervous after her husband had called while in the middle of our interview. She told him that she was working because she did not want to tell him she was participating in the research. A few minutes after the phone call she said she did not want to continue because she was nervous, that he may find out that she lied to him. While she apologised, she never responded back to the request for a follow up interview either. What was learned from this is that as a researcher it is vital to take time and reflect on how assumptions and positions may influence the research process (Linabary and Hamel, 2017). The participants were taking a big risk by sitting down for an interview. Moreover, it also provided insight on how time was being managed during the interviews. In that there needs to be a balance between the requirements of the research process and the participants time and accessibility (Linabary and Hamel, 2017).

Simultaneously this also reflects how participants exercise power by either quitting at any moment during an interview (if they want), ignoring follow up interview requests and/or refusing to answer certain questions. These were common examples that occurred throughout data production and thus the silence, the quitting, the ignoring, and the refusing all operate as forms of resistance. Participants find different ways to resist the power structure between the researcher and the participant that exists in the research process (Linabary and Hamel, 2017).

v.   Researching sensitive subjects

Reflexivity is important when researching sensitive topics and working with vulnerable groups (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Researchers must be conscious of the burden placed on the participant when they choose a topic that produces knowledge from a person's experience of suffering (Page, 2017). Consequently, this research recognises and assumes a 'non-hierarchical' standard that was constructed from collaboration, caring and connectedness between the participants and researcher (Proctor, 2015). Victims of sexual violence can face negative consequences when disclosing their abuse, including victim-blaming and shame. Victims of sexual abuse in Asian cultures can face a high degree of social stigma (Kalra and Bhugra, 2013). Many of the participants in this study had not disclosed their experience of violence in years, and a few had never formally disclosed their experiences at all.

As part of the university ethical requirement for this research, I was to find a local counsellor in Delhi, India, to whom I could refer the participants. This counsellor was known to the CC NGO, which had employed their services in the past. The counsellor could be available on site at the time I was holding interviews, or they could make an appointment. In addition, the NGO offered their services to all my research participants at no charge. After each interview, I gave the participants the name, phone number and address of the counsellor on a piece of paper. However, the women declined the services; on one occasion, I noticed the participant placing the information sheet into a rubbish bin as she was leaving.

After careful reflection and following up with the participant who had thrown out the information sheet, I was made aware that some individuals may not have been able to take the information sheet home because they feared their spouse or family member would ask them what it was for, and some were not interested in counselling because it was not something that they

were familiar with and/or trusted. In recognising this dilemma, I was able to change the way I provided the counsellor referral to the participants. Since most of the women had mobile phones, I began offering them the option to input the counsellor's phone number into their phones instead of taking the piece of paper home. On several occasions, when a counsellor was available on site when I was conducting an interview, I had the counsellor come in and introduce herself before the interview. I thought this would be a way to bridge the relationship beforehand should the participant ever want to contact the counsellor.

However, what must also be acknowledged is that while there is a strong emphasis placed onto the responsibility of the researcher to find counselling services for the participants of the research, the same regard is not given to translators. In this study, this was an oversight of the researcher. As translation was not a 'planned' course of action. In all the interviews the translator was known to the participant, and I failed to recognise the implications of a translator hearing these kinds of narratives and the traumatic impact and demands placed on them making them vulnerable to vicarious trauma (Rajputi, Rehman and Ali, 2020; Williamson, Gregory, Abrahams, Aghtaie, Walker and Hester, 2020). In part this may have been because the translators were also the 'gatekeepers' and helped me find the counsellor for the participants as they were working in this field. It was assumed that they were already 'managing' themselves because they did not show any distress throughout the data production. If they, had I would have had acted in the same way if the participants had. The three translators used in this study were Arya Rao the coordinator of the 'CC' NGO, Kiran a human rights lawyer who specifically took on cases of Dalit women and the other two were Dalit women activists Shyama and Savitri. Regardless, researchers do have an ethical responsibility to support translators in research that is distressing

(Leanza, Miklavcic, Boivin and Rosenberg, 2014) and it is recommended that as a matter of course for all future resarch.

However, drawing on postcolonial feminist critique, I questioned whether offering 'counselling' was a Western construct and whether I was pushing my culture, ethical beliefs, and university requirements on to these women. The challenge for transnational researchers is to consider whether they are imposing Western methodologies and ethical practices that have been developed in the West but may not transfer to the rest of the world (Mukherji and Sengupta, 2004; Cronin-Furman and Lake, 2018). Similarly, Cronin-Furman and Lake point out that another challenge for researchers is to recognise that participants may not have the same safeguards in place as participants in the West.

For example, most of these participants had migrated from rural villages in India and they had very limited knowledge, if any, of what counselling was and what it could do for them. Considering this, I also provided my personal contact information to all the participants. I have personally maintained contact with many of them and check in with them from time to time because I do not think they will use the counselling services. However, even though I made it clear to the participants that there was no 'material' or 'direct' benefit to their participation, I realised that this may put me in a particular position in terms of responsibility and ethics should something be asked of me beyond the bounds of the research project; I would address this issue with my director of studies if it arose. Ethical challenges could thus arise with or without extending compassion, and as a feminist researcher working with vulnerable populations, I maintain that compassion must be extended. I also introduced the participants to the NGO coordinators and the two Dalit activists I had met should they require any support in the future.

vi.   Coping methods for researchers studying sensitive subjects

Sexual violence research can be particularly challenging for researchers, even when tremendous effort is made to ensure the physical and psychological safety of participants. However, similar to the discussion of translators above, this is not always the case for the mental health of the researcher (Coles, Astbury, Dartnall and Limjerwala, 2014). I found it quite difficult when some of the women revealed accounts of child sexual abuse because I had not adequately prepared myself for those conversations. It was important that I addressed the emotions I was experiencing because I did not want to impact the research by prioritising my voice over those of the participants. I thus reflected on the knowledge I had gained and learned to distinguish my needs from the participants' by writing my thoughts down in my fieldwork diary. I also exercised regularly and spoke with one of the counsellors on site to address the personal feelings that arose for me while I was in the field.

Summary

This chapter explained the epistemological and ontological position of this research study. I chose qualitative methods to further examine the participants' lived experiences by analysing their personal narratives (Bows, 2017). I adopted a multifaceted theoretical framework that incorporated intersectionality, feminist theory and social constructionism, which also enhanced the study's legitimacy. The research is women-centred and makes room for the intersecting identities of caste, class, and gender to understand the various dimensions of Dalit women's experiences (Crenshaw, 1989). Moreover, the research design was informed by postcolonial feminist critique and foregrounded the integrity of the research by concentrating on researcher positionality and power and the ethical considerations of researching sensitive subjects. This chapter also stressed that the research does not intend to represent all Dalit women but to give a

collective voice to both the researcher and the participants. Epistemologically, recognising that the research methodology and research design is a socially constructed reality situated the research in a social constructionist context.

I used a mixture of qualitative methods—participant observation, focus groups and semi-structured interviews—to further triangulate the data. These data were analysed using CDA, as this was a suitable fit within a social constructionist epistemology and allowed me to examine how the women used language to inform social processes and negotiate their identities. In the final section of this thesis, I address the challenges researchers may encounter when studying sensitive topics. As a feminist researcher, I acknowledge that conducting research on the experiences of sexual violence victims is a privilege; I am in a position of power, and therefore I have a responsibility to conduct research that is fair and respectful to the participants. Furthermore, it is imperative to recognise that researching and interviewing sexual violence victims can have an emotional impact on both the researcher and the participants and thus requires adequate care and attention.

Chapter Five

The Construction of Rape in Speech

Using discourse analysis, this chapter examines how the Dalit women participants constructed their 'rapes'. The chapter begins by analysing the words and phrases the participants used to construct their experiences of rape and how they made sense of those experiences. It then explores how they experienced being 'silenced' in the contexts of their families, communities, and state. It also addresses the 'silences' identified during data production and analysis. Finally, the chapter investigates how silence is used as a tool of power and as a mechanism of empowerment and agency.

5.1 Talking about rape without using the word 'rape'

The language women use to speak about their personal experiences of sexual violence is produced by their cultural norms and regulations and 'by the everyday social interactions in which women participate. It has been argued that individuals rely upon existing discourse and linguistic repertoires that are made available to them to describe or explain their experiences (Lea, 2007; Bonvillain, 2019). Thus, the women in this study found ways to describe their experiences of sexual violence with the language made available to them. If we can understand how they named their experience of rape and how others spoke about it, we can explain how rape culture is constructed in the context of Dalit Indian culture (Gouws, 2018). This section examines the language the Dalit women participants used to state that they had been raped and how they managed their words in order to disclose rape without having to provide details of their experience.

The current study identified that all the participants were uncomfortable talking about and naming their rape. None of the women used words such as 'rape', 'sexual violence' or 'sexual

abuse' to name or describe their rape, and none went into detail about their actual experience of rape. Instead, they attempted to say very little, if anything, about their rape. Some avoided naming it altogether and only provided enough information for me to understand what they were trying to say without using the word 'rape'. The women used the following words to construct their experience of rape: 'izzat' (honour), 'husband–wife relations' and 'my problem'. They externalised their accounts of rape to their families and reflected on their rape as a collective experience. That is, their personal experience of rape was also felt and experienced in different ways by their family and community and therefore the women draw from a collective experience to frame and name their experience. Collective experience of trauma is a response that can occur when a society has a traumatic experience(s), such as: war, genocide, poverty, systematic and historical oppression and/or poverty and so forth. And often the trauma is dealt with collectively although individual experiences and responses can vary (Aydin, 2017). This section draws from collective trauma research and argues that the historical oppression of Dalits as a whole and the systematic targeting for sexual violence against Dalit women (Diwakar, 2020) has constructed a collective experience of trauma within Dalit communities. This explains why the women may have phrased their responses to their rape in ways that places the responsibility for rape onto themselves; and why their primary concerns were the implications of the rape for their future marriage and their family's honour. For Indian women honour is vital to their family's standing in the community, and it is retained through the behaviour and social performances of its female members (Cowburn, Gill and Harrison, 2015). And any violations that may impact a family's honour can have implications for a woman's future marriage potential (Cowburn et al. 2015).

Many of the participants informed me that they did not want to share details of their rape. However, a few brought a relative or friend to the interview as a support system (SS) and

allowed these individuals to provide details of the participants' experiences. I followed a trauma-informed approach to data production, which specifically is driven by the principles of minimizing retraumatization (Campbell, Goodman-Williams and Javorka, 2019). I let the participants express their experiences without having to disclose intimate details, and I did not focus on the details that they were leaving out. I did this in part because I did not want the participants to feel uncomfortable, interrogated or pressured to speak about their experiences.

There is no commonly used word for rape or sexual violence in Hindi,[19] which may explain the words the participants chose to name their rape. Pande (2016) points out that the lack of sexual vocabulary made available in Hindi has great implications for naming rape. It also indicates that there is shame attached to sex and sexual violence. Therefore, the participants drew on existing discourses to name, speak of and describe their rape in the context of their lives.

i.   'Husband–wife relations'

Twelve of the 28 women used the terms 'husband–wife relations', 'man–wife relations' or 'marriage relations' to describe or name their rape at some point during the interview. Anju explained that speaking about sexuality and/or rape is not common in Indian communities:

> *Didi, you know we cannot speak openly to our parents or families about 'husband/wife relations'*
>
> *(sex). So how can we talk when it is outside of 'husband/wife relationship'?*

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[19] According to Google Translate, the Hindi word 'balaatkaar' or 'balaatkaar Kanoon' translates to rape or rape law. However, after asking the NGO staff what Hindi translated word of rape or what word was used to describe rape, and none could provide me with a word or term. The above terms seem to be used more often in, online and academia. For example, academic research, see (Gupta, 2010; Madhok, 2003; Barman, 2013; Pande, 2016).

Anju's description of this inability to speak about sex openly suggests that it is not possible to talk about rape in Indian communities. This further implies that a culture of silence exists around the subject of sex and consequently restricts women from speaking about sexual violence. This is particularly reminiscent of what Foucault (1978) described in *The History of Sexuality*: that sexuality was understood by the specific encouragement of discourse around marital sexuality, the importance of decency and the reduction to silence. Anju's choice of words to describe rape is also interesting—it is apparent that she was drawing on what she knew and related 'sex' to marriage, with sexual relations such as rape therefore being 'outside' of marriage. The implications of this lack of suitable vocabulary to identify 'rape' makes it difficult to distinguish between any types of consensual sexual relations and sexual violence (Das, 2014). It also makes it more challenging to speak out about rape without trivialising it.

Further, Anju's response relates to a common phrase I heard from many of the elders in our discussions about anything related to sex or sexuality while on my field visits to the jhuggis: '*Ladkiya aisi baate nahi karti hain*', which translates to 'girls don't speak about that'. This demonstrates the discursive associations of sexual embodiment with shame, which often leads to secrecy and a culture of silence (Ussher, Perz, Metusela, Hawkey, Morrow, Narchal, Estoesta, 2017). The very lack of language made available to girls and women suggests there are elements of shame (Sanyal, 2019). Consequently, young girls learn to understand that talking about sex is considered shameful.

During the focus groups, many of the participants noted the lack of sex education in general for young Dalit girls. Many learned about sex through friends; some learned from their husbands after marriage:

Paru: I didn't even know how it happened. After my marriage my husband just did to me and that was how I found what sex is.

Ishita: My friend had told me about this. She had told me when she was newly married on her wedding night and that it was very painful.

Romina: We don't learn about these relations in the school and my mother don't tell me either. It is like a shock the first time.

The discussion of sex during the focus groups made it apparent that cultural constraints were placed on obtaining sexual knowledge, and this was particularly true for unmarried women and girls. These discussions demonstrated that women have little agency over their sexuality and are only supposed to obtain knowledge of sex from their husbands; this means that they have limited or no understanding of sex prior to marriage. Research shows that in the Indian context, socio-cultural norms privilege men's sexual agency over women's, thus leaving women with limited sexual choices (McDougall, Edmeades and Krishnan, 2011). As Paru stated, 'I didn't even know how sex happened'. This suggests that sex has not only been confined to the heterosexual couple, but also that various institutions within society, such as the family, have encouraged secrecy and shame in regard to sexuality (Das, 2014). This can be attributed to the patriarchal discourses operating to police women's bodies—discourses that emphasise purity and virginity (Ussher, et al., 2017). This was evident in the words of the three focus group participants quoted above—Paru, Ishita and Romina—all of whom made it clear that virginity is lost only when a woman is married.

Some women, including Ishita, showed resistance to sexual secrecy: Ishita spoke about sex with a peer prior to marriage. However, learning about sex in such ways can be problematic—when women do not fully understand what they are consenting to, they are disempowered (Clarke,

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Barnes and Ross, 2017), and this furthers the silencing of sexual violence. For example, Ishita stated that her friend told her sex was painful. Other women, such as Romina, highlighted the fact that sex education is not taught in the Indian school system, which is a result of the taboo nature of discussions about sexuality or sex. Research demonstrates that sex education is thought to be against 'Indian values' and to promote promiscuity and irresponsible sexual activity (Ismail, Shajahan, Sathyanarayana Rao and Wylie, 2015).

Many of the focus groups participants expressed the belief that women in general may not know how to articulate their sexual abuse because they have not been taught about sex and thus may not have the words to describe their experience. This is problematic because if there is no common word for rape, then it cannot be named—and if it cannot be named, how can women report it? This highlights how the 'repressive hypothesis' is carried out: calling sex by its name is difficult because it has become subjugated at the level of language and therefore rendered invisible (Foucault, 1978). Thus, not saying the word—nor even knowing it—alongside the interplay of sexual taboos and prohibitions has resulted in muteness and normalised silence. This hypothesis of repression resonates with what the women suggested: that by not being able to talk about sex or to learn about it, they were rendered silent. Further, this type of secrecy produces powerlessness, shame, and stigma around sexuality (Kumar, Goyal, Singh, Bhardwaj, Mittal, Yadav, 2017). The implications of this lack of sexual knowledge affect family planning, leading to lack of prevention and/or treatment for sexually transmitted disease and an overall lack of understanding of sexuality (Kumar, et al., 2017). This in turn can produce problematic and unhealthy expectations and understandings of what is considered consensual sex (Hust, Rodgers and Bayly, 2017). For example, Paru explained that her husband had sex with her without her full consent (meaning she was unaware of what she was consenting to), and this can normalise

forced sexual practices. Ishita's understanding of sex as painful is also problematic because it can normalise painful sex, produce negative connotations around the act and overlook sexual health concerns. Ultimately, the fact that these are the normative discourses of sex in the specific Indian context produces unhealthy relationships and uninformed beliefs.

ii.   'Izzat'

The construction of Indian women as 'guardians of honour' (Diwakar, 2020) can explain why many of the focus group and interview participants drew on the concept of izzat to articulate that they had been raped and/or to describe their experience. It was during the focus groups that it was recognized that it is common for Dalit women to state that a woman's 'izzat' (honour) was 'taken' to reference a woman who had been raped. Moreover, all 28 of the interview participants used the word 'izzat' (honour) to reference their rape at some point in their interviews. The following interview excerpts illustrate how the women typically referenced izzat in the context of their rape:

Shabana: He had taken everything from me. [pause] … My izzat [honour] and my family.

-

Interviewer: Do you remember how your parents reacted when they found out?

Meera: [pause] No I don't remember very much. I do remember my mother was very frantic and upset, and I remember her crying and screaming how he had taken my izzat. I remember she was so worried about what people would think. Our landlady had to calm her down and tell her to not make such a scene.

-

Interviewer: You have talked of izzat a few times; why is it so important?

Nindhni: I don't know that. [pause] It is because we don't want to embarrass our family. I don't know how to answer … it is important because we represent our family.

The above quotations reflect how the stigma attached to a rape victim transcends the individual and impacts their family. Each of the interview participants described how stigma operates through social power. This is not new—the disclosure of rape is more complex and challenging among South Asians because of the cultural factors of izzat and *sharam* (embarrassment) (Roberts et al. 2016). Both Meera and Nindhni stressed the importance of maintaining izzat and avoiding sharam for their families; their bodies became the sites through which discursive and societal power was exercised. Silencing their experiences of rape through the discourse of izzat sustained patriarchal power. The women's words reveal how izzat and sharam are interconnected (Walker, 2018)—together they operate as a form of disciplinary power, shaping women's conduct and their choices in terms of how they can respond and react to and disclose (or not) their rape. Meera and Nindhni both said that they remained silent about their rapes because they wanted to protect their families. Studies show that izzat is understood as an asset and is viewed as something that needs protection; fear of judgement and loss of izzat can drive social norms and conformity and sexual violence (Gill and Walker, 2020). This can explain why the concept of izzat is used as a means of describing and/or disclosing rape—when a woman's virginity is lost through rape, it is regarded as an asset that has lost value, and fear of the public finding out drives the subject of sexual violence into silence.

Meera's description of how her mother reacted to learning about her rape illustrates how the stigma of rape is produced through the discourse of izzat. Drawing from Goffman's (1963) work on stigma it can be asserted that how well managed the visibility of a rape victim's status, and

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how that becomes known in society, is what determines stigma. When one sees oneself as stigmatised, it stems from negative treatment or reaction from others when they find out. Meera's mother's reaction, and Meera's recollection of the landlady telling her mother not to 'make a scene', exemplifies how rape victims come to feel stigmatised—if fewer people know the truth, there is less likelihood of others finding out and the rape victim being stigmatised within society. This is what Goffman (1963) referred to as a characterological 'mark'—if this mark is revealed, it can result in exclusion.

Sexual acts and sexual violence are viewed, perceived, and processed differently by different cultures and communities (Kalra and Bhugra, 2013). Shabana, Meera and Nindhni construct their experience of rape as symbiotic with their relationship with their family and their community. This has also been identified in research on Indian sexual violence judicial judgements, where rape is understood as *a loss of family honour* rather than *a violation of bodily integrity* (Gangoli, 2011). This means that fear of judgement and the potential loss of honour becomes a powerful motivator to follow social norms and to protect honour (Gill and Walker, 2020). The participants' concern here was not for the self but for how their rape could affect public perceptions of their family and its subsequent status within the community. For example, Shabana's and Nindhni's concerns about their family's public perception were transmitted through them as individuals. Nindhni explained that the perception of a family is vital and that, as a woman and a daughter, she *represented* her family. Therefore, she was required to manage that perception because there is great shame attached to being a rape victim. The interviews indicate that the concept of honour is complex—it is not necessarily about being honourable but more about community standing. For Dalit women, this is of particular importance, as their caste status already leaves them stigmatised in the larger Indian community; they are seen as impure,

which means they are socially segregated and isolated (Sabharwal and Sonalkar, 2015). Within their own communities, they are also at risk of being sexually exploited through religious and cultural practices such as devadasi and child marriage (Wilson, 2020). Consequently, perception management is not new to Dalit women, as they have learned and been socialised to manage themselves and their bodies from a young age.

For many South Asian families, daughters are made to understand the importance of guarding their family honour and that they are the *transmitters* of both religion and culture (Bhopal, 2018). This is made more complex by the fact that the ideal Indian woman is constructed as sexless, and her sexuality is restricted to marriage (Gangoli, 2011). This was evident in Gulee's construction of sexual relations outside of marriage:

> *Interviewer: I can understand that getting married is very important in Indian culture. [pause]*
>
> *Interviewer: Why would no one have married you? And 13 years would have been too young to be married?*
>
> *Gulee: I would have been 'spoiled'. And 'spoiled' at too young of an age. You know many girls get married so young—13, 14, 15 years. By 16, they already have children. This is why girls are married at a young age.*
>
> *Interviewer: Okay. So, if a woman is raped or has a relationship with a man before marriage, she is considered spoiled?*
>
> *Gulee: Yes, of course …*

Gulee's use of the word 'spoiled' reveals the stigma attached to women for engaging in any sexual relations (including rape) before marriage. It also underscores the high regard with which the notions of 'purity' and 'virginity' are held within her family and her community; as a result,

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it becomes the woman's and her family's responsibility to protect her body from sex and rape before marriage. That is, the above quotation from Gulee justifies child marriage as a mechanism for protecting girls' bodies from rape and the stigma of a 'spoiled identity' (Goffman, 1963). The implications of this are that a young girl's virginity becomes a powerful tool for managing her body and shame is attached to the loss of that virginity (even by rape). This notion is used to disempower young girls and women and keep them silent about rape, thus perpetuating the exploitation of young Dalit girls. By drawing on the notion that women's reputations need to be protected, Gulee placed the responsibility of rape on young girls and women and away from men. This position enables Dalit girls to negotiate a subject position of respectability for themselves as upholding family honour rather than as victims of exploitation and vulnerable to the risk of rape before marriage. For Dalit women, this is especially salient: their experiences of sexual violence differ from others' experiences because of how hierarchical power structures operate through Dalit women's intersecting identities of caste, class, and gender (Rao, 2015). Not upholding community and cultural values can lead to further ostracism, and this plays a critical role in how Dalit women may receive, react to, and come to accept violence.

iii.   'My problem'

Of the 28 interview participants, four used the word 'problem' and one used the word 'issue' to describe their rape. Two participants, Gulee and Priya, used the word 'problem' to tell me that they had been victims of rape without actually telling me that they had been raped:

> *Gulee: I never told anyone of 'my problem' I had when I was young.*

> *Interviewer: What problem was that?*

> *Gulee: [pause] You know, what your studies are for... My sister has told you.*

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Later, our conversation turned to marriage, and Gulee again used the word 'problem' to

reference her rape and explain why she did not disclose it:

> *Gulee: Because of the problem I had, it would be difficult to find a suitable husband.*

Similarly, Priya disclosed her rape by explaining why her marriage was arranged to a man who

was far less educated than she was:

> *Priya: [pause] Yes, that is what happens. But 'I had some problem' so I was matched here and*
> *my parents paid a dowry to his family as well.*

> *Interviewer: Okay. A dowry also? Do you mind if I ask what 'the problem' was?*

> *Priya: [pause] I think you have already been made aware of what happened.[20] That is why my*
> *family wanted to arrange my marriage right away after.*

These participants did not refer to their rape directly—rather, they described it as a personal

'problem'. They both questioned me when I asked them what 'the problem' was, reminding me

that I had already been told and therefore ending the discussion about their rape. Their pain and

discomfort at having to 'reveal' or 'disclose' and not possessing the words to articulate their

experience was apparent; the implication of this is the silencing of the subject. Both participants

drew on the consequences of their rape to name it 'my problem'. Their primary focus was the

fact that being a 'raped' woman left them with limited choices for a marriage partner. Thus, the

discredited identity being judged here was that they were not always seen as 'victims' by others

because at times they were seen as something brought on themselves and thus deserving of

dishonour. The interviews yielded a common theme of how rape could and did affect marriage

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[20] Priya's cousin was one of the focus groups participants. Priya's cousin referred her as a
participant and told me what had happened to Priya.

potential. For Indian women, this is very important, as they are socialised from a young age for two primary roles in life: marriage and motherhood. If a woman does not fulfil either role by a certain age, she faces great stigma for herself and her family (Sharma, 2015).

The use of the words 'my problem' and the participants' relationship to marriage is reminiscent of Goffman's work, discussed in Chapter Two, on 'spoiled identity'. Identifying as a woman who has been 'raped' causes one to experience stigma and thus to be viewed as 'not normal'. In their interviews, both Gulee and Priya attempted to redirect my question in order to manage their stigmatised identities as rape victims. As Dalit women, they were not only battling the broader cultural stigma that devalues their identities, but also the stigma of rape. Goffman (1963) argued that a discreditable identity was one in which a stigma has the potential to discredit a person and expose the inconsistency between their perceived and actual social identities. This is very important for Dalit women, as their intersecting identities—being Dalit, being a woman and being poor—are all discredited (visible stigma); being identified as a woman who has been raped would only magnify their stigmatised identity within their own community.

For Gulee and Priya, not naming their rape and constructing the discourse of rape according to its consequences is problematic because it holds them responsible as victims and justifies the sexual violence committed against them. They viewed their rape as affecting their family honour and their future, thus bringing them shame. Robertson et al. (2016) found that family violence and child sexual abuse was hidden among South Asian communities because of cultural and community stigma. Disclosing Gulee's rape would have rendered her impure in the eyes of her family and communityand potentially risked her future relationship; indeed, this was evident in Priya's arranged marriage to a man less educated than her. This indicates that the value of a woman is in her virginity and marriageability. This patriarchal socialisation of Indian women as

wives and mothers' places responsibility on women for their family's honour (Zaidi, Couture-Carron and Maticka-Tynedale, 2013) which places Indian girls at a higher risk of violence (Robertson, Nagaraj and Vyas 2016).

Priya's situation is interesting—she suggested that her discreditable identity as a rape victim spoiled her chances of marrying someone of equivalent education. For many Dalit women and their families, this sort of unequal marriage can be perceived as a setback. Over the years, Dalit families have focused on increasing the education of Dalit girls in order to lift their family and community class status (Guinee, 2014; Arur and DeJaeghere, 2019). The ideal circumstance would be for an educated Dalit man and an educated Dalit woman to marry:

> *Kajal: Education is very important. All the girls should finish and then they can also find good jobs and good husbands, and not have to do these other jobs of cleaning. If both husband and wife are educated, then they can do more and not live like us.*

This can explain Priya's feelings of 'loss' regarding the expectations she had of her future. If she had not been a victim of rape, perhaps her marital arrangement would have been different, and thus her life would have been different. Foucault (1978) argued that as a society, we have not liberated ourselves from the historical confinement of sexuality that situated it in the home, in the control of the family, and focused on its primary functionality of reproduction. In effect, this means that sex itself has become repressed, and that repression has become entwined with power and knowledge. This may explain why both Gulee and Priya reminded me that I had already been 'told' about their experience and that they were not going to articulate it further. The women constructed their rape as a form of personal loss that had restricted their future potential. The result of this thinking is that it is always a woman's responsibility to protect herself from rape. Rape thus becomes a silenced subject, and the women who have experienced it are left to

deal with the after-effects alone. Moreover, the blame rests solely on the *woman* and not the *perpetrator* because of family pressure to maintain purity (Koo, Nguyen, Andrasik and George, 2015) and, therefore, future marriage potential.

5.2 Silence, secrecy, and shame

This section examines the silence, secrecy and cultural censorship surrounding sex and sexual violence. It identifies and highlights implicit and explicit discourses of sexual shame and explores the various contexts in which the subjects of both sex and sexual violence have been silenced. It must be noted here that there is a difference between *silence* and *the inability to speak* about sexual violence trauma, although the two are related. The latter is when victims may want to talk but find it difficult to express themselves; the former relates to secrecy and deliberate avoidance of the subject due to the shame or stigma attached to it (Sheriff, 2000; The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2018). However, it can be argued that what might begin as difficulty with expressing trauma may, over time, contribute to constructing a culture of silence (Jeremiah, Quinn and Alexis, 2017). That is not to say that the women of this study had no agency, because at times they actively chose to be silent (this is addressed in the final section)—this emphasises the difference between being *silent* and being *silenced*, although both involve elements of power.

i.   Reflecting back

All the participants were raped when they were teenagers and were thus reflecting on incidents that took place 10 to 20 years ago, except for one participant whose rape occurred six years ago. And one participant's eight year old daughter who had been raped three years ago. While none of

the women directly answered the question of why they had not disclosed their rapes before, some explained it in the following terms:

> *Azura: There is no need to talk of bad things that happened. It is long time ago; it is better for me to forget.*

> *-*

> *Lakshmi: No one will talk of this, no one. What good will it do to talk about these types of problems? It is not in any woman's interest to discuss such matters.*

> *-*

> *Kajal: I have long forgotten and I am feeling embarrassed to talk about it. What is the point of these discussions? No one is wanting to listen to such things, and I also don't want to talk about this with the people.*

Azura and Kajal emphasised the time that had elapsed since their rape: 'It is a long time ago' and 'I have long forgotten'. It is not uncommon for rape victims to want to forget what happened to them; as a coping mechanism, they will avoid disclosure or discussion of their rape by focusing on moving forward. They believe they can do this by not thinking about or talking about their experience (Jean-Charles, 2014; Kaszovitz, 2021). 'Being silenced' thus takes place not only when one's right to expression is restrained and/or is reproduced by those who are empowered to speak (Thiesmeyer, 2003). All three of these above-quoted women negotiated the shame of sexual violence and the resistance to speaking about it, demonstrating a discursive association between sexual embodiment and shame that has produced a culture of silence. Lakshmi highlighted the fact that rape is not disclosed because the subject is not open for discussion: 'No one will talk of this, no one.' Kajal drew on personal feelings of *embarrassment,* which

demonstrates that sexual violence is positioned as shameful and talking about it is prohibited. Azura, Lakshmi and Kajal also expressed the idea that there was no positive benefit to their speaking about rape: 'What good will it do?', 'There is no need to talk about bad things' and 'What is the point?' The contempt in these quotations is not unusual or is indicative of the way many Dalit women feel about disclosing rape, and this contempt thus translates into coping strategies produced by community norms, beliefs, and institutional practices (Holland and Cortina, 2017). Lakshmi pointed out that sexual violence is a gendered experience: 'It is not in any woman's interest to discuss such matters.' For Dalit women, this is particularly salient because they have historically been deprived a voice (Paik, 2014; Festino, 2015; Menozzi, 2016; Rajendran, 2020; Bahadur, 2020). They are often met with disbelief by authorities, family members and general society (Gupta, 2015); as a consequence, they face a lack of support and justice. This can explain the participants' disdain for the question of why they had not previously disclosed their rape. Moreover, it illustrates why it would not have been useful or helpful to them to disclose: because no action would have been taken.

ii.   Being silenced - Family context

These subsections examine the different contexts in which Dalit women have experienced being silenced regarding their experiences of sexual violence.

According to Foucault (1980), there are numerous loci of power/knowledge which produce and regulate society. And if we understand that discourses are reproduced through numerous sites of power and institutions. Consequently, what must be examined is how the production of discourses necessitates silence, discipline and policing behaviour. If we consider this from the context of sexual violence, when a woman is raped and the family is made aware, the subject of

rape becomes unspeakable, and therefore silence is normalised (Chubin, 2014). Similarly, in this study, many of the women interviewed stated that their family and community[21] exercised disciplinary tools of shame that operated to silence their experiences of sexual violence and the subject of rape:

> Chandhni: People had come over to see how I was doing. But I would not see them for a long time. See, I did not want to talk about it, but also I don't think people were ready to hear what happened either.

> Interviewer: What do you mean by that?

> Chandhni: [pause] I don't think the people actually want to know what has happened. They just come to look at you; in their mind they wanted to see what had happened to me. As long as I was alive, that was good enough for them.

> -

> Jeeya: No family will give support for the case to go to the media, and that is only if the family comes to know of the abuse in the first place. Most women won't even tell anyone, and if they do tell, everyone would tell them to be quiet.

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[21] The women often conflated family and community when describing their experiences. This may be because Indian societies are collective in nature and the community is seen as an extension of the family (Sonawat, 2001). However, it was also apparent that the nuclear family was its own distinct unit, as they attempted to keep things 'secret' from their larger collective family to avoid shame and stigma. Thus, at times, both family and community can reflect a single unit, but not always.

Sneh: Yes, she (mother) will not understand all this. I would not have told her or anyone in my family. My family is very—how you say—formal. They would not like to hear of such things. They will think it is bad for the family and that it will not be good.

-

Shahei: No, she [her mother] never would talk about it. She just stayed quiet. She always checked on me but there was no need to talk about what had happened. She already knew. She made sure I was okay, and that I was eating and getting out of bed.

Chandhni, Jeeya, Sneh and Shahei describe different ways in which their experiences of rape were silenced. Foucault (1978) argued that silence does not occur from mass censorship—rather, it starts with establishing what type of talk is appropriate within the family and the community. Similarly, Shahei, Jeeya and Sneh were never explicitly told not to disclose. Their silence was born of fear: Sneh felt that her mother 'will not understand this', and Shahei's mother's thoughts materialised through an intercorporeal experience (Katila and Raudaskoski, 2020): maintaining her daughter's physical needs produced a shared experience and understanding between the two. Jeeya expressed the view that a woman would not be supported if she chose to disclose. It is not uncommon for Indian female victims of abuse to keep silent of their abuse as there are expectations placed on young girls to maintain their 'purity' before marriage (Gill and Harrison, 2019).

While voice/talk typically requires more than one actor, silence requires cooperation, and it is an implied communal understanding that such cooperation is to be understood (Sheriff, 2000). This can explain why the participants never questioned the silence: because it was a mutually exclusive understanding. This is not to say that they were not warranted to speak, but that they

regulated their speech based on their assumptions of what could happen if they did speak. This highlights the different ways in which silence operates as a powerful communicative tool.

It is well documented in the literature that rape victims do not disclose their rape because they fear being met with disbelief and/or they want to avoid the associated stigma of being a rape victim (Menon and Allen, 2018; Kennedy and Prock, 2018; Gallagher, Stowell, Parker and Welles, 2019; Ullman, O'Callaghan, Shepp and Harris, 2020). Moreover, given that India is a collectivist society (Menon and Allen, 2018), the stigma of rape that Sneh describes would also extend to the rape victim's family. In the Indian context, a family's social status shapes an individual's attitudes, values, and beliefs (Little, McGivern, R' Keirns, Strayer, Griffiths, Cody-Rydzewski, Vyain, 2016), thus influencing the family response to rape victims and consequently the way that individual rape victims construct and articulate their experience of rape. It is apparent from the interviews that Chandhni, Jeeya and Sneh were drawing on existing discourses of honour and shame that acted as power mechanisms to prevent disclosure of sexual violence and to avoid stigma. They follow what Goffman (1963) referred to as anticipatory stigma wherein they limit or choose not to disclose because they believe that if their rape is disclosed, they will be stigmatized as responsible or unhonourable. This creates added pressure to remain silent in order to retain family honour. This is not unusual as following abuse, shame is often an affective element of stigmatization (Kennedy and Prock, 2018).

Sahay's (2010) study of Indian female sexual abuse victims observed that rape victims were silenced by family members, who would manage any attempts at potential rape disclosure by either hiding and/or denying the case of rape and/or compelling their daughter to keep the abuse a secret. None of the participants above stated that they were explicitly denied voice; however, Shahei's recollection of how her mother behaved indicates a broader pattern of how the women

implicitly understand silence from the behaviour of their family/community. Moreover, Jeeya's response indicates that it is the fear of being silenced by the family and community that keeps women silent. While Sneh feared that rape disclosure would elicit negative reactions from friends and family; consequently, she did not disclose their rape. Goffman (1963) explains stigma can be experienced differently depending on the concealability of the stigmatized trait. He differentiates between individuals who are *discredited* (whose stigma is visible or identified) and those who are *discreditable* (where the stigma is not identified and can be hidden) (Goffman, 1963). Shahei, Jeeya and Sneh explanations provide insight into why Dalit women rape victims in general may remain silent regarding their abuse. That is, they are already living with their stigmatised identity of 'Dalitness' which identifies them as discredited people within the greater Indian society. Whilst simultaneously they are also managing the discreditable stigma by attempting to conceal their trauma to avoid being further stigmatized.

In Chandhni's case, the community was aware of her rape—she was kidnapped and gang-raped by a group known as the Naxalites—because her case was reported to the police, and yet the community (her neighbours and extended family members) initially responded by avoiding her and vice versa in the hopes that if she did not talk about it, it had never happened. Chandhni's interview is interesting for several reasons. She explained that society does not want to know when a woman is raped, which is reminiscent of 'the belief in a just world' (BJW) (Lerner, 1966): this is when an individual's social perceptions and expectations are influenced by BJW, which can lead to victim-blaming and/or justifying why an offence may have occurred in society (Russel and Hand, 2017). This perspective can be understood as another mechanism of power that tells women to keep silent about sexual abuse. Chandhni suggested this when she stated that society was '*not ready*' to hear about her experience of rape, meaning that her community was

not able to acknowledge that a 16-year-old girl could be repeatedly raped by multiple men in their own village and/or did not know how to react. This type of response is not uncommon, wherein there is an inability for a loved one to acknowledge another person's trauma and may use strategies such as avoidance because they feel powerless and do not know how they can help (Ringer, 2018). This was also apparent in Chandhni's case[22]:

> *Chandhni: [The Naxalites] is a group who the police and the government are afraid of. The police won't investigate them because even some police are members of the Naxalite. They have overtaken our village for a long time now.*

Chandhni's contextualisation of her experience explains why the community may have not acknowledged her rape because the men who raped her were part of a powerful group that were connected with the police. India's Dalit community has limited access to resources (such as healthcare, credit, education, and employment) because of their stigmatised identity and their low social position (Virmani, 2020). Chandhni's description of the Naxalites suggests that the Dalit community may have felt powerless in the wake of her disclosure to the police and may not have known how they could help. As a result, Chandhni's rape experience was managed via shifting discursive spaces and social identities of caste, class, and gender.

This resembles what Mookherjee (2015) refers to as a *public secret*, wherein a community engages in an active 'not knowing'. Chandhni's community was aware that she was raped but did not allow itself to articulate this, which meant that it became a public secret. Mookherjee

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[22] The Naxalites is understood to be a rebel communist movement within India. It was initially founded on Maoist principles and hopes to achieve universal social justice (Suykens, 2015). However, Chandhni and some of the other women interviewed explained that various criminal sub-Naxalite organisations are armed, use violence and exploit people, as they have connections with various state authorities.

argues that 'public secrets' are strategies used to avoid taking action. Similarly, Sahay's (2010) study observed that family members often choose to remain ignorant of sexual abuse allegations made by female relatives because they are not in a position to take action against the perpetrators. She further identified that as a coping strategy, the rape victim's family members and relatives would ignore the allegations and/or state that they did not believe them; this response sought to manage the family's and the rape victim's experience of rape.

Another interesting point about Chandhni's story was how she expressed the community's primary concern about her physical body—they emphasised the fact that she was 'alive' and that this was 'good enough'. Similarly, Shahei's mother, who managed her daughter's physical wellbeing as if she had a physical ailment, would not acknowledge that she was a victim of rape. In Chandhni and Shahei's experiences indicate an attempt to disconnect the body from the soul. Chandhni stated clearly that members of her community wanted to be able to physically *see* what had happened to her—that is, they wanted to 'see' if her body showed signs of rape. And because rape is not always visually evident on the body in the same way as other types of violence, Chandhni's physical presence—the proof that she was alive—was enough to keep her public secret. Yet, one's body represent one's experiences and relationships with others, and other people's responses to one's rape influences one's sense of self—the body and the soul thus cannot be divided (Lennon, 2019). Chapter Six critically examines how the participants constructed their selves after their rape.

Conversely, Chandhni's case can also be understood as a process wherein the experience of rape transcended the individual to reach the community, and the community's way of collectively working through this trauma was via its silent presence. The community wanted to show its support for Chandhni, but it could only do so through its silent presence because of its own

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discredited experiences and fears of possible retaliation. Through this silence and this 'gaze', Chandhni became aware of their support. This suggests that silence as a strategy operates to exclude women from both private and public discussions of rape, consequently denying them access to justice and support and further isolating them from public space. However, a silent presence can also operate as a mechanism for collective emotional support when no words or actions are available. Being present and silent may also empower victims to make their own choices on what they want to do (Coalition Against Rape, 2021).

iii.   Disclosing rape to mothers and keeping it secret

Of the 28 women interviewed, 10 women had disclosed their rape to their mothers; after disclosure, the rape was never spoken about again and remained a secret between mother and daughter:

> *Jeeya: ... My mother did not even tell my father of this.*
>
> *Interviewer: You had discussed this with your mother?*
>
> *Jeeya: No. [pause] I mean to say that my mother thought it was better if we did not say anything.*
>
> *Interviewer: Why didn't she want your father to know?*
>
> *Jeeya: [pause]) I don't know. I think maybe he would have been embarrassed by what happened and she was not sure maybe how he would react. I don't know. I never asked her why.*
>
> *Interviewer: Do you talk with your mother about what happened after you told her?*
>
> *Jeeya: No, at first she did not believe me herself and then I think she was in a shock. We never talked about it after, but she always kept me away from him.*
>
> *-*

Interviewer: Have you talked to her about what happened?

Meenakshi: No, we don't talk about it. We have left that all behind us. She has gone through so much in her life, but she is happy now. I am happy.

Interviewer: Has she ever brought it up to you? I know that you said she didn't seem to be affected by it physically or didn't show emotion to it at that time. But after was it ever discussed?

Meenakshi: No, I did not talk to her about it … There was no need to bring it up to her, I wanted her to forget about it.

Jeeya explained that she had disclosed to her mother that her uncle had raped her, and her mother responded by not telling Jeeya's father and by performing the emotional and physical labour of this secret: she restricted the perpetrator's access to Jeeya to keep her physically safe. However, Jeeya did not talk about her experience of rape itself with her mother. Of the ten women who confided with their mothers regarding their rape, four of the mothers told their daughters not to tell their fathers and the other six told them not to tell anyone. This is supported by other research finding that mothers have told their children to not disclose sexual violence to their fathers in fear of their response and to maintain the family honour and dignity (Sahay, 2010). In other research South Asian mothers encouraged their daughters to remain silent in order to protect both the mothers and daughters' reputation (Gill and Harrison, 2019).

However, this can also be connected to the ideas explored in the previous section regarding the lack of words to name rape and the shame attached to rape. That is, it would be difficult for women in Indian communities to disclose rape to their fathers because women's bodies symbolise male and familial honour (Chakraborty, 2014; Tejero-Navarro, 2019). And keeping her daughter's rape secret can therefore be seen as a wife performing 'emotional labour' for her

husband, protecting him from shame and dishonour and managing her daughter's experience (Hochschild, 2012).

Meenakshi's story provides insight from a mother's perspective, as Meenakshi's daughter was sexually abused by her husband. Meenakshi used silence as a survival mechanism: to 'forget about it' and to 'be happy'. Remembering would bring sorrow, whereas silence could provide protection and escape from the traumatic memory of rape (Jean-Charles, 2014). While silence and forgetting are not the same, forgetting is connected to silence: trauma victims often use both as coping mechanisms and/or healing processes (Khan, 2015). Forgetting helps construct a new identity, making space for an individual to move on by leaving behind their 'pain' and 'trauma' and focusing on new and other relationships such as family, friendship, romantic relationships (Hirst and Yamashiro, 2017). This can explain why Meenakshi did not speak about her daughter's past but about who she was at the time of the interview—because both had left their 'trauma' in the past, and that traumatic experience did not define who Meenakshi's daughter was.

In South Asian cultures, it is typically mothers and/or mothers-in-law who convey, and hold knowledge of, the legitimacy of abuse for their daughters and their daughters-in-law (Ahmed, Reavey and Majumdar, 2009). That is that mothers and mothers-in-law are the ones who know about the abuse of their daughters and daughters-in-law have experienced. And they will often deploy discourses of family honour and shame cautioning them of their responsibilities to retain their family honour (Ahmed et al. 2009; Tonsing and Barn, 2016). Moreover, as they live in a world that is shaped by patriarchal, caste and heterosexual institutions, familial power (especially maternal power) can produce change and regulate the way in which women construct themselves and their options for resistance (Ussher, et al., 2017). This can explain why Jeeya's mother and

Meenakshi felt they needed to manage their daughters' physical and emotional wellbeing. Meenakshi had no familial support—she was ostracised by her natal family and her husband's family because she left her husband after he raped her daughter. This may account for why she was drawn to silence: she was drawing on her experience of speaking out, which resulted in ostracisation. Meenakshi drew on the materialities of her own life and her daughter's life in order to construct explanations that emphasised the constraints of speaking about sexual violence. This highlights the fact that mothers are in a difficult position, as they have limited resources and options to support themselves and thus rely on experience to protect their daughters, given the society in which they live. Moreover, they are simultaneously managing their own wellbeing. However, the consequences of avoiding the subject are that it this stops the victim from speaking and potentially from healing. Bahadaur (2020) argues that for marginalised women such as Dalit women, the materiality of speaking is important in order to make space to heal their historic suffering. By remaining silent, they perpetuate patriarchal and caste norms and further exclude rape victims. This leaves rape victims powerless and burdened with maintaining the secrecy of rape.

iv.   Being silenced - Police context

In this study, only seven of the participants' rape cases were reported to the police. In three of those cases, the women or their families attempted to report the cases themselves. In the remaining four cases, the police were notified by a third party—an upper caste landlord, a friend and, in one case, the hospital to which the victim was admitted after her rape. The three women who attempted to file a case against their perpetrator directly with the police were dismissed, and in two of the cases the police produced a different version of their experience:

Anju: The police were accusing me of lying. They kept saying I was lying. They said I was lying because my boyfriend must have broken up with me ...

Anju: They thought I was saying lies for revenge.

-

Poonam: No, the police did nothing but cause more problems. They began accusing my family had made up a story. But how could I make up some boys from another village ...

-

Malika: My husband, in-laws and a few relatives went to where he [the rapist] was living and they wanted to talk to him and his employer. But the employer's wife came out and began yelling at us, accusing me of lying. She was screaming at them and creating this big scene in front [of] everyone. Then she went inside and phoned the police, who is actually a relative of theirs. The police did not even listen to what we have to say.

Interviewer: What was the result of the case?

Malika: What result. Nothing happened. We just left it. That was it, the police were threatening us saying they will take us all to jail.

The common theme evident in these participants' stories was that the police did not believe them and accused them of lying. In the cases where the women reported to the police, the perpetrator was in an upper caste position and/or an authoritative position. The police response to the women's accusations was that they were making up their rape allegations out of spite and/or revenge. This is a common rape myth: that women lie about rape in order to target innocent men (Weisre, 2017). In the Indian context, research shows that many police officers believe that the majority of rape allegations are falsely made in retaliation or when an illegitimate affair has

become publicised (Human Rights Watch 2017; Oza, 2020). For Dalit women, this is especially significant, as their intersectional identities of gender, caste and class operate to discredit their allegations and to make it more difficult for their allegations to even be heard, let alone accepted (Oza, 2020). As noted in Chapter Three, Dalit women's intersectional identities mark them as 'deviant' and 'impure' (Gupta, 2015). In the context of sexual violence and rape, what they have gone through may not be perceived as 'real' rape by the police and the wider community (Venema, 2016; Gravelin, Biernat and Bucher, 2019; Dey, 2019), or they may not be perceived as what Christie (1986) conceptualized as 'ideal' victims (Islam, 2016; Dey, 2019). Wherein, he argued that some rape victims are not perceived as 'ideal' because they are seen as 'fair game' and/or as not deserving of sympathy from society—for example, sex workers or Dalit women (as cited in Duggan, 2018; Fohring, 2018; Dey, 2019). This can explain Malika's statement that 'Nothing happened' when she, her family and the police arrived at the perpetrator's home because the upper caste wife of the perpetrator's employer stated that Malika's family was causing a 'scene'.

Interestingly, some of the NGO staff interviewed had comparable perspectives. All the NGOs were financially operated by international based non-resident Indians and managed by either middle- or upper caste Indian men and/or women. On two occasions, I was told by two different NGO staff members that the women who sought the support/services of these NGOs may not always be '*truthful*' and may make up stories if they think it will secure them access to any sort of additional resources. These exchanges can also be interpreted as a mechanism for discrediting these Dalit women's identities because of their caste and to silence their experiences of rape.

Alternatively, two participants who disclosed their rape to the police were *not* discredited, even though their perpetrators were never arrested:

Interviewer: How did they [the police] make you feel with their questions?

Kajal: I don't know. I did not talk with them. I remember I was very scared but I was lucky I guess because we had known the officer and his family for many years. So the police were good with me. But mostly they did the talking with my father.

-

Aashi: The maalik [employer] had come to know. So I don't know exactly what happened, who had gone to the police or how they had decided. But yes the police had come to know.

Interviewer: Okay. Did they come to talk to you?

Aashi: No I don't think, I know my father and mother had gone to the police. My father's employer had taken them to file a report.

What stands out here is that these participants did not disclose their rape themselves. In addition, both received validation from an upper caste person who supported their claim. This validation shifted their identity from discreditable to that of a creditable, 'real' victim. In Kajal's case, she did not recall who had reported her case to the police but knew that her family had reported to an officer they knew. In Aashi's case, her parents and their employer reported the case. This illustrates that caste matters when a woman is raped and that the discredited identity of Dalit rape victims can be overcome if they receive validation from an upper caste person.

Moreover, both Kajal and Aashi were silent and 'non-existent' throughout the police disclosure process. Their parents sought the assistance of the upper caste, and only then were the victims' cases heard. Rape stereotypes are powerful mechanisms that regulate how a female rape victim should act (Bongiorno, Mckimmie and Masser, 2016). For Dalit women, this is compounded by their intersecting identities of caste and class. For example, Kajal and Aashi were both perceived

as silent and obedient, and they embodied submissiveness to transform their stigmatised bodies into those of 'real' victims.

Kajal and Aashi's experiences sharply contrast with those detailed in the previous section. Anju, Poonam and Malika were all denied access to justice—they were perceived as loud, disobedient, and crude, as they had represented *themselves* and spoken directly to the police, whereas Kajal and Aashi did not. This was reminiscent of the angry black woman trope discussed in chapter two. Similarly, Gupta's (2015) examination of upper caste reformist writers observed that they made *shifts* in the representation of Dalit women from the 1900's to 1940's in literature from polluting and evil to victimised and vulnerable to agents by the 1970's (Pratibha, 2019). While Gupta suggests that these were acts of liberal sympathy, it can also be argued that counter-conduct emerges here as a tool of governmentality that can occur in the everyday in the political context. Counter-conduct is a form of resistance, and it entails an understanding of how one conducts oneself and how this conduct could be done differently (Demetriou, 2016). However, resistance arises in relation to something or someone else and not in a vacuum—it seeks to transform or adapt to a circumstance that operates to conduct another or to conduct oneself (Lorenzini, 2016). In this context, the validation of a lower caste rape victim by an upper caste individual can be seen as a more complex mechanism for governance and the continuities of juridical power. The validation here can be understood as an extension of the pastoral power (Foucault, 2009) derived from caste by governing who gets to report what and who is identified as a 'real' rape victim who is credible and worthy of validation.

The disclosure experiences of these Dalit women and how they were perceived by those in authority positions expose the significant differences in power between the castes and the risks these women took in reporting their rape. Over the years, feminist researchers have identified

several reasons why women may not report sexual violence to the police, such as self-blame, not identifying the rape as violence, fear of not being believed, fear of retribution and/or lack of faith in the criminal justice system (Hengehold, 2000; Brooks and Burman, 2016; Russel and Hand, 2017). This is further explored in Chapter Six. For marginalised women such as Dalits, these reasons can be further magnified and/or compounded by their intersecting identities of caste, class, and gender because their experiences are not granted credibility and consequently their voices are silenced (Fivush, 2010).

v.   Being silenced - 'Code of silence' - community context

It was apparent from the interviews that participants had negotiated their rape disclosure through what can only be referred to as a 'cultural code of silence' wherein rape victims are prevented from speaking out about sexual violence because of social and cultural norms (Jeremiah et al. 2017). The below quotations demonstrate the participants' negotiating between their disclosure of rape and the community response:

> *Gulee: Do you know what people will say? What they would have said to my mamma and pappa?*
>
> *-*
>
> *Anju: I just couldn't tell anyone because I don't know how to explain to you.*
>
> *SM: you were scared?*
>
> *Anju: Yes, that is what I am saying. I was very scared. Because for the girl it would look bad to everyone.*
>
> *-*

Kameena: The way the community and people would look at me and think of me. How can I call police on my husband for this—what will I tell them?

The notion of silence was central to the interviews with all the participants. While it might initially appear that the participants may simply have been uncomfortable or scared to speak, their experiences highlight the association between rape and a patriarchal perception of women's positionality that constrains their right to speak (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2016). The participants hesitated to speak out—'I was very scared'—because it would 'look bad' for a Dalit woman to disclose rape. Their subjectivity was shaped by a societal 'normalizing gaze' (Foucault, 1979) that became internalised; for rape victims, this gaze becomes a mode of power that imposes self-regulations. The effects of the 'gaze' are crucial to their subjectivity, as they become self-diagnosing, self-scrutinising and self-analysing individuals (Hancock, 2018). The women in this study could not speak of their rape because of their concern about what people 'will say'. Their quotations are value statements representing the society in which they live, where men's rights— 'How can I call the police on *my husband*'—are valued more highly than women's rights to safety and to live without violence. The women's stories reflect their embodied experiences, where both their choice of language and their silence have been shaped by patriarchal discourse, fear and how society will perceive them. They expose how the 'community gaze' is constituted and how it operates to regulate women's bodies and voice. This may also explain why, prior to the interviews, I was also informed by the NGO staff to not probe the details of the women's experiences unless they voluntarily raised them—the staff felt that my probing might leave the participants feeling re-victimised. However, this can also be interpreted as another attempt at silencing the women or of the cultural code of silence surrounding sexual violence.

5.3 Being silent

There is a difference between being *silent* and being *silenced*, although both can signify either a loss of power or a shared understanding that voice is not needed (Fivush, 2010). This section begins by examining the notion of 'being silent', in which culturally dominant narratives support a shared understanding that certain subjects can remain silent. And that silence can thus also be seen as a mechanism for power where voice conveys a loss of power (Fivush, 2010; Wagner, 2012).

While some feminist research has posited silence as powerlessness, there are some instances in which silence can be a tool for resistance and healing (Parpart, 2010; Corcoran, 2018). Shahei shared a story illustrating how silence can operate in this way for Dalit women:

> *Shahei: There is one man who is always misbehaving, and one by one the women would quit and when we would say something to his wife she would make us come back. She would say that it was our job, or that she will watch over him but then she would leave us to him. After he misbehaved with me, I decided I am not going back, but now none of us will go back. All of us in our block decided we will not work in their house. The wife was begging us to send someone and she even said she will be sure to be home. She must have phoned me 100 times. But we all ignored her, we didn't answer her phone, and she would yell outside for us to come up if she saw us in the block and we just act like we don't hear her and say nothing because we decided that no one will work. She is crying to her neighbours, but everyone knows he is a bad man. But now they suffer because they have no help and you know these rich people they don't know how to do anything without our help.*

Notably, Shahei referred to her employer's sexual harassment as 'misbehaving' and she does not detail the nature of this 'bad behaviour.' As examined earlier in this chapter, there is a lack of

language available to women for this kind of behaviour and shame attached to speaking about anything of a sexual nature. Referring to sexual harassment in this manner suggests that sexual harassment by men against women has been normalised and can be explained away as almost child-like behaviour.

Shahei's words also illustrate how collective silence can operate as a form of resistance and a measure of safety and alternative justice. Here we can see that their collective silence are embodied actions, it is very much performative. The Dalit women collectively devised a strategy to resist sexual abuse and to use silence as a tool to make their unheard voices heard, indicating that silence can at times be more powerful than voice. The above quotation also highlights how Brahmanical patriarchy shapes Dalit women's experiences (Chakravarti, 2018; Bhopal, 2018). When Shahei and the other women spoke to the man's wife about her husband's behaviour, 'she would make us come back' and/or 'she would say it was our job'—thus the female employer would draw on her caste power to make the women return to work. This illustrates the graded inequality of gender-based violence as a mechanism of sustaining caste hierarchy (Rege, 2013), wherein the interlocking of caste, class and gender produces differences in privileges: an upper caste woman can ask a Dalit woman to stay in a sexually exploitative situation because that woman is Dalit and depends on the upper caste woman for financial security. This produces differences in subjugation for Dalit women based on the institution of Brahmanical patriarchy.

However, another layer of patriarchy is revealed here, as Shahei's story is yet another example of a woman performing 'emotional labour' (Hochschild, 2012): the wife was managing her husband's abusive behaviour towards the employees. It is through her micro performances (Raz, 2002)—saying that she would 'watch over' him and/or stay at home while the employees were working to ensure that they were safe to manage the situation and how everyone was feeling.

This exposes how 'emotional labour' veiled the wife's ethical responsibility, which was lost in the process and effects of performing the 'emotional labour' from which she was also benefitting (Ward and McMurray, 2016). Further, the husband was not being held accountable for his actions. This situation highlights how gender- and caste-based inequalities produce and distribute power within Indian society.

The complexity of Shahei's story also exposes the microphysics of power (Foucault, 1979)—while there was an apparent imbalance of power between the upper caste and lower caste women. However, Shahei's statement 'you know these rich people they don't know how to do anything without our help' recalls Foucault's (1979) notion of 'power/knowledge'. Shahei knew that she was in a position of power, since upper caste individuals rely on the Dalit to do jobs that they will not and cannot perform because the Dalit are 'impure' (Thorat and Joshi, 2015; Sharma, 2017). This explains the wife calling Shahei '100 times' and begging for one of the Dalit women to come back and work for her. Thus, with knowledge comes power. While Shahei's place in the caste hierarchy put her in a difficult position in terms of her ability to explicitly deny or reject the request of an upper caste woman, Shahei silenced that woman by ignoring her and denying her service rather than actually having to articulate the word 'no'. This can be interpreted as a mechanism of reclaiming power and illustrates the notion that 'power is everywhere' (Foucault, 1979).

Summary

This chapter began by examining the language that the women participating in this study used to speak about their personal experiences of sexual violence and how they disclosed rape. It identified that they chose specific words for their disclosure that allowed them to avoid saying

the words 'rape' or 'sexual assault' or having to describe the experience. Careful analysis of the words the women chose to describe and/or name their experience, the way in which they avoided naming their experience altogether, and/or their use of words to describe their own character or to ascribe self-blame revealed the patriarchal social structures and cultural context in which these women live. This chapter highlighted the fact that the participants often used words that were not always related to their personal experience, but to the impact their experience had on their family. This explains why the women chose words such as 'izzat' and 'my problem' and/or avoided giving their experience a name. The next chapter investigates how these experiences of rape have shaped the women's construction of self.

This chapter also identified that the subject of sexual violence is often connected to virginity and purity. The women in the focus groups expressed the view that sex is a taboo subject and is not discussed or taught at home or in the Indian education system, which is why they used words such as 'husband–wife relations' to articulate their rape—they were drawing on their existing knowledge and the words made available to them. The participants' experiences were thus shaped by India's patriarchal, caste and heterosexual institutions, which regulate how women construct themselves (Ussher, et al., 2017). This is the reason for the interconnectedness between marriage and rape disclosure and for some of the women describing rape as 'husband–wife' relations—it was difficult for them to see forced sex within marriage as rape. Chapter Seven addresses the implications of rape for a rape victim's marriage potential and/or marriage.

This chapter also identified that the women's experiences and accounts were often silenced by themselves, their family, their community, and the state. The chapter concluded with a discussion of being silenced and being silent, making a clear distinction between the two. While being silent is often misunderstood as powerlessness, it can also operate as a mechanism of

reclaiming power and as a form of resistance to subjugation. In particular, for the marginalised or the subaltern, voice may not always be a viable or available mechanism of power, but silence can be.

Chapter Six:

Construction of the self within marriage and other relationships

This chapter explores how the experiences of Dalit women have shaped their construction of the self. The data analysis revealed five major themes related to this construction: suffering, ostracism, responsibility, hysteria and depression, and practices of strength, resiliency, and agency. The chapter begins by examining how the participants drew on the discourse of suffering to locate their experiences of abuse and how the women viewed themselves post-rape. This raised questions about how the women want to be identified post-rape using the popularised terms of either 'victim' or 'survivor'. Analysing how their experiences were shaped by their social and political world offers insight into their sense of self and the implications of these insights for Dalit women. It was identified that they felt dehumanised, excluded and/or ostracised from social institutions such as their family and their community. The broader analysis reveals that all the narratives the women presented were rooted in patriarchal and caste discourses that functioned to maintain distinct gender- and caste-based power relationships. This explains why many of the women felt that they held some responsibility for their victimisation. Conversely, family and community members labelled some of the women 'crazy' because of their fear that these women would speak out about their experiences of rape.

6.1 Suffering, poverty, and fate

Suffering was a central theme in the data. The discourse of 'suffering' raised questions regarding how the women located their suffering post-rape.

> *Anju: We are nothing because we are Dalit. Everyone abuses the Dalit because they think they*
>
> *can do it. This is how we will live until we die.*
>
> *-*

Priya: I am victim. Every day I suffer.

-

Interviewer: You are so strong. You have gone through so much in your life.

Kajal: I am not strong. I am living day by day. I don't know how to explain this life that was given to me. I don't know but I am not strong.

-

Bhavna: We are in pain since so many years. We are all in pain. While that man sits comfortably in his home.

Bhavna: We are poor people, and we are illiterate. That is why we are treated like this; our whole lives we struggle. The struggle of the poor is the worst fate anyone can have.

-

Poonam: It is our fate to suffer.

-

Kameena: I am abused. I am abused for many reasons. I am poor. When you are poor, anything can happen to you. No one cares about the poor. Poor women get raped, kidnapped, taunted, and killed every day. No one cares. Every day I have to be careful what I am doing. This is not the kind of life I wish on anyone.

-

Jeeya: You know we have more problems also because we don't have the money or the education. This is how our life is to be. A life of abuse.

-

> *Anchal: No one cares for the poor. Even the poor don't care for the poor. In this world we are meant to suffer.*

Three main themes that can be identified: poverty, fate, and suffering. These are all connected to the women's intersecting identities of gender, caste, and class. As discussed in Chapter Five, in India there is a culture of silence regarding sexuality that shrouds the subject of rape in silence. In the above quotations, none of the participants, with the exception of Bhavna, included their experience of rape in the discourse of suffering. However, they did emphasise poverty—all of them argued that they were the victims of abuse because of poverty. Kameena emphasised this when she pointed out that 'Poor women get raped, kidnapped, taunted, and killed every day. No one cares'. Similarly, Bhavna located the abuse of Dalit women in the context of their socio-economic status. As discussed in Chapter Two, caste and class are connected. Poverty rates in India are highest among the Dalit and lead to housing, food, and health insecurity (Mandal, 2014a).

Further, the above quotations make it apparent that the participants felt a sense of *defeat* that caused them to perceive their 'suffering' as part of 'fate'. However, the consequences of drawing on the discourse of fate normalizes the caste system (Simon, 2021) and that the perpetrators of violence and oppression are not held accountable. This functions as a mechanism of self-government, meaning that the women do not have to act, speak out or make changes if fate has already decided their course in life. There is no sense of possible change, but rather an acceptance of their lives as Dalit women. Meaning that the women normalised their suffering, arguably because of their caste position. For example, Jeeya's statement 'This is how our life is to be'. A life of abuse indicates that the women were drawing on their communal history of exclusion, humiliation, subordination, and exploitation (Shah et al. 2006; Simon, 2021). In each

of the excerpts above the women use the words 'our' or 'we,' except for Priya and Kajal to describe their life. That is, they collectivise their experiences of suffering and fate and it is not individualised. They emphasise that their suffering is because of the political category of caste, opposed to individual failing (Simon, 2021). It has been identified that Dalit communities often express collective victimhood as a tool to produce a transformative collective identity (Vyas and Panda, 2019). This highlighting the power of caste and the way in which it manifests in the collective and rendering Dalit women's experiences silent. In this context, the caste system preserves patriarchal ideologies, which are used to legitimise power, hierarchy, and the distribution of unequal power structures (Mandal, 2013).

These themes of suffering, poverty, and fate form part of a wider discourse of caste, which may also represent the women's attempts to manage their own expectations of their lives. Placing their oppressive experiences of rape, abuse, and poverty at the hands of fate can be understood as a coping mechanism, whereby the women saw themselves as victims of fate rather than victims of rape and/or casteism: being born into the Dalit caste and facing all the ramifications that come with being Dalit was thought to be because of *fate*. Therefore, part of the women's identity was contingent upon suffering (Still, 2017; Paul and Dowling, 2018) because suffering was reproduced in all aspects of their lives. Thus, it can be argued that the participants used other oppressions to envelop their experience of rape and produce a 'subject position from which to speak' (Raman, 2020). This illustrates how governmentality operates through the institutions of caste (Chakravarti, 2020), class and patriarchy as disciplinary powers that shape Dalit women's subjective experiences of rape and poverty.

This raises the important question of whether the participants identified as victims or survivors or neither or both. At the time of the data collection, I, as a feminist researcher, thought of the

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women as 'survivors'. In the West, this has become a popularised term that is understood as empowering and as emphasising agency, resistance, and recovery (Papendick and Bohner, 2017). I directly asked the participants how they would prefer to be identified in the research: as victim, survivor, neither. If neither, then they would have been asked why not and how they would prefer to be identified. However, none of the women responded with neither. While there is extensive literature that identifies other ways in which women who have been raped may identify with such as victim-survivor (Papendick and Bohner, 2017; McGlynn and Westmarland, 2019) or neither victim or survivor (Williamson and Serna, 2018). However, it has been identified that in the U.S.A women of colour elicit less sympathy and experience more victim-blaming (Slakoff and Brennan, 2019). Similarly, in the context of India, Dalit women have similar experiences and thus they draw from their suffering to garner sympathy. Wherein Dalit research studies have identified that the terminology of victim is considered agentic that is rooted in a collective experience of victimhood (Vyas and Panda, 2019). That is by identifying their lived experiences from a place of victimhood transforms their experiences into a form of political assertion.

Only two participants responded with any more than simply 'victim'.

> *Chandhni: We are the victims of this life. Victim is more proper word for us because we are suffering every day of our life.*
>
> *-*
>
> *Aashi: I think it is better for victim because this is the wording that shows how our life is.*

This discrepancy between researcher and participant perspectives was disconcerting. It also raised the question of how to refer to these women who had been raped by men—while they

emphasised their strong feelings of victimisation and suffering, they also demonstrated resilience and agency in their post-trauma everyday lives.

Aashi and Chandhni encompassed all their experiences of 'suffering' when reflecting on how they wanted to be identified. They did not separate their experiences of rape from their experiences of casteism and poverty, instead conflating them all. Moreover, Kajal rejected being identified as 'strong', which implies that describing her as a 'survivor' would not be appropriate. All the women's responses above suggest that they manage their experiences via the panoptic presence of caste (Kumar, 2017). They strongly emphasised their 'suffering' as interlocked with their intersecting identities of caste, class, and gender; this located them in a continuous cycle of 'suffering' 'abuse' and 'victimhood' alongside positioning them as victims of rape. Consequently, their experience of rape could not be separated from their other oppressions, and nor were those oppressions mutually exclusive—rather, they were interconnected because they were all produced from Aashi's and Chandhni's intersecting identities as Dalit women. They drew on their caste position to locate their suffering, which is exemplified in Chandhni's statement that 'we are suffering every day of our life'. These discourses are produced through the structures of power and governmentality (Foucault, 1972), and experiences such as rape strengthened the women's belief that suffering is an inevitable part of their social location.

It is not uncommon for some women who have been raped to refer to themselves as 'victims' because they want to convey the fact that they are suffering and deserve compassion and salvation (Papendick and Bohner, 2017). Women of colour who have been raped are less likely to receive sympathy or attention and are more likely to be blamed for their victimisation (Slakoff and Brennan, 2019). This is particularly salient for Dalit women, as noted in Chapter Five, because their intersecting identities of caste, class, and gender position them as discreditable—

the abuse of Dalit women is thus regarded with disbelief or suspicion and/or ignored. Therefore, if they identify as victims, it can make space for others to acknowledge their experiences and feel compassion. One study by Hocket, McGraw and Saucier (2014) identified that the term 'victim' was associated with personal attributes, whereas 'survivor' was associated with accounts of outcomes and processes. This suggests that for Dalit women, transforming from 'victim' to 'survivor' is not possible because they receive no *acknowledgement* of their experiences and face an absence of outcome and due process when it comes to those experiences. This can explain why they rely on the discourse of 'fate': no 'real' outcomes are produced by sharing their experiences, so perhaps by describing themselves as 'victims', their injustices are more likely to be acknowledged.

This creates a paradox: while the participants identified as 'victims', from a Western feminist perspective, they would be perceived as 'survivors.' In the West, dominant rape discourses preference the term 'survivor' over the term 'victim' because it is argued that referring to women who have been raped as 'survivors' is more empowering and supportive and extends agency (Jean-Charles, 2014; Papendick and Bohner, 2017; Boyle and Rogers, 2020).

All the participants continued to 'live' their lives after their rape—they married, had children, and worked. The term 'survivor' thus seems more fitting, as these women survived their rape and continued to 'live' in society, despite its patriarchal and oppressive structures that have been historically sustained through violence as a mechanism of oppression (Ahammed, 2019). But this is where the distinction is made—there is a difference between 'living' and 'living with', and the latter may explain why all the women's perspectives aligned more with the term 'victim'. These women continued to live their lives after rape, even though they were still 'living with' oppression every day. Focusing solely on their rape would ignore them as individual subjects

whose rape was only one facet of their identities (Jean-Charles, 2014). Thus, for Dalit women, it would be problematic to refer to them as 'survivors' as it would take away from their other lived experiences and thus misrepresent their lives.

However, this also raises another challenge: one Dalit feminist critique of academia is that Dalit women are often portrayed as silently 'suffering' victims (Gupta, 2016). But it can be argued that these women are not silently suffering—rather, they are using their voice as a political tool to transform 'suffering' into raising political consciousness (Anandhi and Kapadia, 2017). The language is not one of *sorrow* but of *dissent*—they are using it to highlight their history of 'pain' and 'suffering'. This language of dissent (Haldar, 2019) is contextualised by their experiences of rape and oppression. This highlights the fact that Dalit women's experience of rape is multidimensional, and these women must negotiate both managing the complexity of their experience and identifying themselves within that experience.

6.2 Discourse of responsibility

The discourse of responsibility was a theme that was highlighted by participants when speaking of rape during data production and data analysis. Wherein all of the participants produced varying discourses of responsibility and/or self-blame.

The below quotations from Urmila and Meera illustrate the different ways in which the women took partial responsibility and/or blamed themselves for their rape:

> *Urmila: Yes, because there was no need for me to go. I should not have gone and met him there.*
>
> *Interviewer: But that was not your fault. You would not have known what he was going to do?*
>
> *Urmila: It does not matter; I should not have gone. He was a boy and even so older than me. When we are young, we don't know of such consequences of our actions. Girls need to protect*

themselves and be safe. That does not mean he should do that, but you know we have to be extra careful. I learned that the hard way because I made a mistake.

-

Meera: The people started to ask questions, you know. How was it possible? I know I should not have talked to them. I don't know why I did that. I can't remember why I did. They started to ask many questions, but everyone was looking at me. Same question—asking me why I talked to them.

Urmila's experience recalls a common rape myth with regard to acquaintance rape. Victims of acquaintance rape are more likely to be held responsible for their assault (Gravelin, Biernat and Bucher, 2019). There may be varying degrees of responsibility wherein the victim's choices or actions may be perceived as having contributed to their rape. Urmila's story exemplifies this: she argued that she 'made a mistake' by meeting her male friend after school. Similarly, Meera also took some responsibility for her rape, with her statement 'I should not have talked to them' suggesting that her speaking to her perpetrators was an invitation for them to rape her. Both women indicated that society's perception of rape victims is influenced by victim credibility (Phillips and Griffin, 2015; Morabito, Pattavina and Williams, 2016; O'Neal, 2019; Oza, 2020). Dalit women's subjectivity is interconnected with a history of Dalit women being constructed as discredited bodies, because their bodies are highly sexualized and sexually polluted (Choudhary, 2020).

Dalit female rape victims often occupy a subject position within the practice of responsibility, becoming the subject of self-regulation. Urmila validates this idea, arguing that young girls are incapable of making 'good' choices because they are 'unaware' of the consequences of those choices—therefore, they need to regulate their bodies. This type of discourse can be understood as a mechanism for women to regain power over their experience and uphold some agency.

Notably, this also suggests that they Urmila and Meera did not see themselves as victims. This seemingly contradicts the findings given at the start of the chapter showing that the participants identified more as victims. However, careful analysis suggests that the women may have felt the need to present themselves as victims because they wanted their painful experiences of violence and oppression to be heard and seen, as historically these experiences have been denied, ignored and/or silenced. But they also needed mechanisms to help them live in a world that oppresses them and denies their experiences. By taking partial responsibility, the women are drawing from the discursive resources that are available to them. It has been identified that those who blame themselves for rape do so to maintain some power and agency over the outcome of their experience, and this empowerment also builds confidence in how to avoid future victimisation (Perilloux, Duntley and Buss, 2014). This explains why Urmila made it clear that she had *learned* from her mistake and that girls had to protect their bodies from men to prevent further victimisation. This highlights the complexity of sexual violence and the trauma it wreaks on a person's selfhood—on how a person sees themselves and how others see them. These types of discourses are problematic, as they do not hold the perpetrator of the violence responsible, but the victim. Although Urmila did acknowledge that her perpetrator bore some of the responsibility, she ultimately maintained that it was up to girls and women to self-regulate their bodies in order to protect themselves from violence.

6.3 Practices of ostracism

For centuries, social ostracism has been used as a common mechanism of exercising caste power when Dalits violate any caste codes (Pal, 2014; Diwakar, 2020). Moreover, as identified in Chapter Five, a woman's body after rape is perceived as impure, a stigma that operates to regulate women's bodies. This section argues that given the stigma attached to raped victims'

bodies, some Dalit families have also co-opted social ostracism as a regulatory tool to manage women's bodies and simultaneously retain family honour. Samuel (2020) argues that exclusionary practices such as ostracism are not reserved only for *between castes*. Rather, the manifestations of caste are maintained because these practices have become socially accepted and normalised within and between castes, thus becoming customary and shared practices.

All the participants were either married within a year of their rape or sent 'away' to live with relatives as a consequence of their rape—the exception was one participant who was married at the time of her rape. Bhavna, whose daughter was raped, explained why she sent her daughter away to live with her parents in their village:

> *Bhavna: I cannot protect my own child and the police are unwilling. What choice did I have? He [the rapist] has ruined her, but at least I can spare her over there [the village]. I don't know what they [the rapist's family] are capable of, so it is better if she stays there and is safe.*

In the above quotation, Bhavna negotiated her subject position between three different discourses—protection, blame and shame—to justify why she had to send her daughter away. She began with the discourse of protection, stating that she was unable to *protect* her daughter from the perpetrator. She also called attention to the practices of impunity when she noted that the police would not provide support. As discussed in Chapter Three, Dalit women's subject position makes them more vulnerable to sexual violence (Diwakar, 2020), and this is in part due to systemic practices of impunity given to perpetrators of sexual violence against Dalit women (Pal, 2016, 2018). The way power relations operate between the Dalit, the police and the upper caste can explain how Bhavna negotiated and contested the interview question about why she sent her daughter away after her rape: Bhavna drew attention to the lack of police support and the caste dynamic between herself and the perpetrator. These all point to the feelings of

powerlessness and contestation in her statement 'What choice did I have?' regarding how to manage the situation and protect her daughter. These discourses of protection and practices of impunity demonstrate the pervasiveness of casteism and the implications of how these discourses locate Dalit women and girls in more vulnerable positions of violence, such as rape and child marriage.

Bhavna also called attention to the discourse of shame when she stated that her daughter was 'ruined'. The stigma of sexual violence only functions to objectify female bodies by reinforcing the notion of 'purity'. The shame of sexual violence apparent in Bhavna's words justified her decision to send her daughter 'away' and ostracise her from society. At the same time, she was attempting to negotiate her subject position as a parent doing what she could with the limited choices made available to her.

However, during the interview, Bhavna's friend who she had brought along with her to the interview exposed her lack of honesty: she did not send her daughter to live with her grandparents but arranged her marriage.

> *Bhavna's Friend: She is not gone to live with the grandparents. That is not true. We all know this. They arranged her marriage. It is better for them, you know… She is scared to tell because she married her underage.*

Bhavna did not deny this claim but chose to remain silent, which served as confirmation. However, regardless of which course of action Bhavna actually took—sending her daughter to live with her grandparents or arranging her marriage, even though she was an eight-year-old child—both are problematic for Dalit female rape victims. There is a common belief in Dalit communities that marrying their daughters at a young age will protect them from rape (Mahato, 2016). A girl child also adds an added economic 'burden' because girls are not income producers

like male children (Begum, 2016; Mahato, 2016). Bhavna's friend made it apparent that despite the illegality of child marriage, it is still practised, and quite possibly Bhavna did not see the arrangement she made for her daughter as a child marriage but as a marriage of necessity to maintain her family's financial security and honour. This implies that the discursive and material differences produced by caste and class inequalities meant that Bhavna was unable to tell the 'truth' about her daughter's whereabouts because she feared the judgement that might follow and the potential legal repercussions.

Many child marriage cases in India remain unreported (UNICEF, 2020; Trinh and Zhang, 2021) however the state of Rajasthan, India recently passed a new bill in September 2021 allowing the registration of child marriage (India Times, 2021). The intersection of poverty, patriarchal cultural relations and lack of education increases a Dalit girl's vulnerability to child marriage. In Bhavna's case, a combination of economic power and cultural practices shaped her decision. When I asked Bhavna's friend why it was better for Bhavna to have her daughter married at a young age, my question was initially met with silence from both women. However, Bhavna's friend then explained, 'How can they watch her while they are working?' This highlights the fact that both protection and economic factors were an integral part of the decision. It also illustrates the aforementioned financial constraints placed on Dalit parents, and particularly Dalit mothers. Dalit families cannot afford the privilege of mothers staying at home to care for their children, which is why Bhavna's family needed to come up with a solution to protect their daughter from future violence. However, the implications of such choices are that young Dalit girls become at risk of further sexual violence and exploitation when they are married young. Chapter Seven undertakes an in-depth examination of the construction of marriage post-rape.

Bhavna's description of her daughter as 'ruined' also signifies the shame that informed her decision to have her daughter 'sent away' and married. As Chapter Five points out, the discourse of shame is a prominent one that features in all aspects of how rape victims are perceived; consequently, it governs how women conduct themselves. When individuals such as Bhavna draw on the discourse of shame, it operates as function of government of the self and of others and becomes an exercise of power. Chapter One notes that women are socialised to protect their and their family's reputations (Gill and Walker, 2020), and this can explain why Bhavna believed that her daughter was 'ruined' by rape: both her daughter's and her family's reputation were negatively affected by it, and thus Bhavna arranged her daughter's marriage. A consequence of honour and shame discourses in this context is that families will often attempt to hide or punish any sexual indiscretions made by or to women before they become public knowledge to save their reputation (Cooney, 2019; Gill and Walker, 2020). As a result, women become more vulnerable to exploitation and violence. The consequences of such discourses for female rape victims are that they further stigmatise the rape victim to such an extent that if a girl is raped, she loses both her honour and her value. The preference for boys in India are often motivated by economic, social and cultural beliefs. Wherein boys are seen as an asset to the family, as they are income producers, they carry on family lineage, they perform religious roles and they are perceived to hold a family's strength (Sekine and Hodgkin, 2017; Acharya and Welsh, 2017), whereas girls are considered more of a liability (Begum, 2016; Mahato, 2016)—for Dalit girls, early marriage can be viewed as an asset to their family, because if a girl is married young the parents do not run the risk of having to pay for their daughter be married in the event that she is raped. In this case, the value of Bhavna's daughter was not just emotional but also monetary. It was more beneficial for the family to have their daughter married because

they did not have the financial means to take care of her at home. Therefore, Bhavna used child marriage as a mechanism for reclaiming family honour and managing economic obligations.

As a Dalit mother, Bhavna was doing what was within her knowledge and power to protect her daughter, which meant relying on a common cultural practice—child marriage— (Mahato, 2016; Sekine and Hodgkin, 2017) to ensure that protection and maintain the family honour. Bhavna managed her intersecting identities of caste, class, and gender, along with her role as a mother, by negotiating the discourse of responsibility in order to protect her daughter and blame the police and the perpetrator. Being a mother to a Dalit rape victim is challenging because it involves navigating layers of injustice and oppression. Consequently, Dalit female rape victims are more vulnerable to other forms of violence and exploitation because they are more likely to endure violence at the hands of perpetrators and to face stigma and shame.

Yet this raises concerns regarding consent and coercion in the context of marriage. It has been argued that consent and coercion should be viewed as two ends of a spectrum, with varying degrees of socio-cultural expectation, power, persuasion, pressure, threat, and force in between (Anitha and Gill, 2017). In Bhavna's case, her daughter was well under the age of consent at the time of her marriage—it would thus be impossible to assume that her daughter exercised her right to give 'free and full' consent to that marriage (Save the Children, 2014). Instead, there was a clear power distinction between child and parent, with the latter using child marriage as a mechanism of sexual regulation. Alongside the normalisation of child marriage in Dalit communities, this influenced Bhavna's decision to force her daughter into a child marriage.

Chandhni's and Poonam's subjective experiences offer further insight into why Dalit families may send their daughters 'away' after rape. Chandhni, who was 15 at the time of her rape, and Poonam, who was 16, shared their feelings of ostracism from their communities; consequently,

their parents sent them away to live with relatives in another village. After several months of living with relatives, Poonam's marriage to a boy in the village was arranged:

Chandhni: I was happy to go because I could not have a life in the village anymore. Everyone was seeing me as though I was some different kind of being. If I stayed, no one would look at me the same anymore.

Interviewer: Why is that? Meaning how would they look at you?

Chandhni: I don't know. I would always be the girl who was kidnapped ... People started questioning how I was let go and why I was let go ... Others would say 'poor girl, what is going to happen with her life now?' You know our villages are so small, so you cannot even hide, and people will never forget anything.

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Poonam: [pause] I think it let me move on and get over what happened. If I had stayed in the village, I would have maybe never gotten over it. I have seen many girls over the years in the same situation as I was once, and the ones who never could move on always found it the hardest. I know many girls who have become depressed and committed suicide because they just stayed in that time in their head.

Both women used discursive frameworks to negotiate both constructions of their experiences of social exclusion as 'victims of rape' and their own subject position within and outside of their families and communities. They did not construct their parents' decision to 'send them away' negatively, suggesting that they had some agency in this decision. Instead, they both referred to being sent away as a positive act, exposing the way in which 'technologies of the self' permitted the act of being sent away (even if the choice was initially made by their parents) to transform their body and soul into a state of peace. By leaving the village, they actively resisted their

stigmatised identity. If they had stayed, they would always have been perceived as the girl 'who was kidnapped and raped'. Both rape victims explained that their community would 'never forget or get over it', meaning that they would always be stigmatised as a victim of rape and becomes a 'master status' (Goffman, 1963). As discussed in Chapter Five, forgetting is often used as a coping mechanism and allows individuals and societies to construct new identities (Hirst and Yamashiro, 2017). Both Poonam and Chandhni suggested that leaving their villages gave them the opportunity to reconstruct their identities rather than surrender to the social stigma that would have left them feeling powerless. They used ostracism as a mechanism to transform and empower themselves through reconstruction.

Poonam's and Chandhni's stories are reminiscent of Mookherjee's (2018) work on public memories of the sexual violence that occurred during the Bangladesh war of 1971. She argues that the practice of remembering is the mechanism by which resistance is understood to be encoded. Poonam highlighted this when she stated that many female rape victims commit suicide because they cannot 'un-remember' the trauma of rape. Similarly, for Chandhni, there was nowhere for rape victims to *hide*, meaning that people would not forget. Therefore, while the act of 'leaving' is a consequence of being ostracised, it is *also* an act of resistance against trauma and stigma because it acts as a mechanism of protection from the stigma of rape. This is not uncommon, as for many rape victims, 'withdrawal' from friends, family and community is said to be a trauma-induced response (Hetu, 2014). However, it is vital to understand the power of the family and community responses to rape because the repercussions of those responses include being stigmatised, being ostracised from family and friends, being silenced as a rape victim, and having to accept the impunity of those who perpetrate sexual violence.

Poonam's and Chandhni's communities' responses to their rape were informed by common rape myths. In Chandhni's case, this became apparent when her community began to question how she was able to escape her perpetrators. This type of questioning is problematic, as it insinuates that the victim has played a role in her victimisation and/or it negates her experience altogether (O'Neal and Hayes, 2019). Chandhni insinuates that the community's suspicious perception of her prompted her to accept her parent's decision. Poonam pointed out that she knew of other girls who were raped and became depressed and/or committed suicide because they could not move on from their experience. This implies that rape was not uncommon in her community and that she used her existing knowledge to inform her choice to leave. She gained that knowledge by observing the experiences of other women who were stigmatised after being raped, which led to their depression and death. This illustrates regulatory practices of power, such as observations and assessment (Foucault, 1979): Poonam watched women commit suicide because of their stigmatised identity. Thus, producing self-regulating bodies as the outcome of social ostracism operates as a disciplinary practice, constructing rape victims as 'docile'. This reveals the power of rape responses from institutions such as the family and community and how these responses govern rape victims' bodies.

Chandhni also drew from the practices of dehumanisation in her talk, which reinforced her acceptance of her parents' decision, when she stated that the community perceived her as a 'different kind of being' after her rape. Awasthi (2017) argues that sexual violence is the product of a dehumanised conception of female bodies in the first place and that 'dehumanising' a woman denies the agency of personhood, causing others to question whether she is really exercising agency. This highlights that society is disciplining at the site of the 'soul' rather than

at the site of the 'body' (Foucault, 1979). Chandhni was not coerced to leave, but she began to accept and view her ostracism as a consequence of rape.

It has been identified that women are more sexualised than men because women are often perceived as hypersexualised in various ways, such as with media imagery often featuring nudity and/or provocatively dressed women (Bernard and Wollast, 2019). The bodies of Dalit women are perceived as the site of extreme violence (Pal, 2018), and this perception can shape the way in which their bodies must negotiate respectability. Chandhni explained that she would always be perceived as 'the girl who was raped'—therefore, by leaving, she would have the opportunity to transform herself and leave behind the stigma of rape. Living in the village as a female rape victim was also characterised by material contingencies, such as Chandhni's mental health and her relationships within the community. Drawing on this type of discourse both rationalised and allowed her to accept her parents' decision.

Similarly, Poonam and Anju expanded on why leaving the village after their rape was important for their sense of self.

> Poonam: What I mean to say is that when a woman or a girl has been abused, she needs to start fresh and start over again, and she should never look back on her old life. That one does not exist anymore because every time she will look back she will only have negativity. If I would have stayed in the village after, I don't know what would have happened to me. I would have gone crazy by tormenting myself.
>
> Interviewer: I don't mean to sound ignorant, but I am trying to understand why?
>
> Poonam: I was weak and naïve then, and I would have allowed it to get inside my head. At that age, we are all so sensitive, so any look from someone or any comment would have stayed with me.

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> *Anju: You have to leave those kinds of thoughts and all memories behind you. It is like you never existed before.*

Both Poonam and Anju expressed the view that rape victims needed to 'forget' their experiences and *transform* themselves into a new person. This exposes how disciplinary power is exercised at the site of the 'soul' (Foucault, 1979). Poonam argued that by leaving the village, she was protecting herself and her identity from becoming unpredictable and abnormal, otherwise 'I don't know what would have happened to me. I would have gone crazy'. This suggests that she was beginning to feel estranged from her sense of self, which challenges thoughts of normality; the only way to keep herself 'normal' and/or 'sane' was to leave. This type of self-talk can be understood as a mechanism of disciplinary power that is exercised at the site of the 'soul' and produces a transformed self-governing subject (Foucault, 1979).

Interestingly, Anju and Poonam almost seemed to negotiate *ostracism* as a form of atonement for rape. Poonam rationalised that she was 'protecting herself' from depression or suicide. At the same time, she and Anju both maintained that one must eliminate one's personhood when one chooses to start afresh: 'she never looked back on her old life. That one does not exist.' Similarly, Poonam talked of her 'old self' as though it never 'existed', implying that a transformation of self needs to take place in order to move forward in life and that constructing a new version of the self must begin with abandoning the old self. The way in which both women emphasised the abandonment of their past lives was particularly intriguing: it initially seemed as though this was coming from a dark and painful place and could have been perceived as a symbolic death or suicide of the self. However, as Poonam made clear, the old self was 'weak' and 'naïve', and a rebirthing would result in a new and more powerful self.

Poonam and Anju were not the only participants to express this sentiment—many of the others described similar negotiations for a transformation of identity post-rape:

> *Priya: My father does not talk to me. It has been so long that now I cannot even remember what it felt like to be his child ... When I think about this, it makes me upset ... But since then, I also have a new life. I am not the same child anymore. He does not know what I have done or who I am now. He has no idea that I am the mother. He has three of his grandchildren, I have good paying job also. He knows nothing of this ... Didi, he would never, never in his dreams think that I am living in Delhi.*

Priya talked about being ostracised by and estranged from her father. However, she also demonstrated that a process of contestation and transformation had taken place since then: 'I am not that same child anymore. He does not know what I have done or who I am now.' This suggests that she was no longer a helpless child rape victim but had transformed into an adult—an adult who was also a wife, a mother to three children, an employee and a metropolitan.

This highlights the politics of *representation*, and it recognises representation as a consequence of discursive formations. Representation—which can be understood as an instrument through which meanings, associations and values are socially constructed (Pan, 2021)—has historically been challenging for Dalit women. The power of representation is fundamental here: Priya and the other women were acutely aware that rape victims represent dishonour, meaning that for their families, the rape of their daughter became a matter of shame from which they could not escape. Similarly, Priya's quotation above suggests that rape victims appear to be represented by a singular identity, with no acknowledgement of their ability to transform—and that is problematic. Priya challenged being assigned a fixed identity by her father, arguing that she was much more than a victim of rape and that there is power in intersectional representation.

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6.4 The construction of the 'crazy' woman

This section explores the different ways in which the participants constructed themselves, and were constructed by society, as 'crazy'. This notion of being represented as or feeling 'crazy' is reminiscent of the 'hysterical' woman diagnosis that has historically been deployed when women have particular symptoms or act in ways that make males uncomfortable (Cohut, 2020).

All the participants talked about how the experience of rape left them feeling embarrassed, depressed, 'mental' and 'crazy':

> *Anju: Actually, I feel embarrassed to go to a doctor. Sometimes I feel I am a mental patient, just need to come out of depression.*
>
> *-*
>
> *Meenakshi: It is hard for women to leave such situations. I was going mental—I just wanted to throw myself away and die. So many times I thought I will kill myself. But I had to tell myself to be strong for my daughter. When we left, I did not know where I was going. I was gone mental for some time. People would say 'she is the crazy woman dragging her daughter around'. People would ask where my husband was, and I would say he died.*

Both Anju and Meenakshi drew on the discourse of the 'hysterical' woman and other 'psychological' discourses that pathologise femininity to explain how they were constructed by society and how they felt. Anju felt powerless to seek medical support, and Meenakshi initially felt powerless to leave her abusive husband. The consequences of this powerlessness were that the women felt both overwhelmed and stigmatised. Their stories are consistent with feminist research on stereotypes of the 'hysterical' rape victim and on the gendered assumptions that underpin the idea of an 'emotional' woman who is incapable of making decisions for herself (Brownmiller, 1975). For centuries, these types of psychological pathologies of femininity have

been deployed as powerful diagnoses to silence and regulate women's experiences (Randall, 2014; Micale, 2019). Similarly, Anju and Meenakshi projected these discourses onto their own experiences. For example, while Anju was aware she needed to see a doctor, she did not go out of a sense of embarrassment; consequently, she found it difficult to manage her depression and thus described herself as a 'mental patient'. Meenakshi recalled the discourse of 'hysteria' in her statement 'I was going mental', and in addition, society located her as 'hysterical' because her behaviour was considered against the norm for women. It was as though she began to question her sanity because of the way she was perceived in addition to having to manage her trauma.

She would tell people that her husband had died because she was alone, unaccompanied by a male and appeared directionless. Indian society thus assigned her the label of 'crazy' because a woman out in public without a husband or other male representative is characterised as hysterical or broken, which demonstrates how patriarchal societies attempt to deploy the 'hysterical' diagnosis to regulate women's bodies. While labelling Meenakshi 'crazy' allowed others to make sense of why she was alone, it also served to regulate other women's behaviour, and thus to disempower them, because they would not want to be assigned the same label.

However, Meenakshi's story also points to the fact that was reflecting and finding 'purpose' to live, to resist and to carry on. She described her daughter as the reason why 'she had to stay strong', which shows resistance and agency. By turning her 'gaze' (Foucault, 1973) inward, separating her body from her identity, and becoming her own object of analysis to be classified, examined, and analysed, Meenakshi was able to seek transformation of the self. This was also the case for some of the other participants, for whom their children, and in one case religion, gave them a new sense of purpose.

Kajal: But then after our first child, I was so happy. I felt it was blessing on my life. I was thanking God that some good has finally come into my life.

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Sneh: I turn to God. Before I never prayed. I did not see how good prayer can be for me. I talk with God every day and I feel protected now.

Thus, it can be argued that by reclassifying and re-evaluating their lives and taking on new roles, these women were able to find another place within society that gave them purpose. Yes, they were victims of rape, but they were also mothers and/or devotees of God. This is consistent with other data showing that women who occupy a number of different roles tend to cope better with trauma and they have overall better wellbeing (Thoits, 2012).

Conversely, some of the other women resisted and challenged the psychological discourses and the labels assigned to them:

Priya: I was not gone crazy. I was in my senses, maybe if I had gone completely crazy then my family would have taken me to the doctors, but I was not gone completely crazy to them. [pause] I don't know. At that time, I wanted nothing. I wanted to just run away or even die. Not because of marriage but because of everything that happened. I did not know even know what to do. I was nothing.

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Chandhni: I was feeling very bad for so long, I would think what has happened to me? Nobody would talk to me, just staring. Then I would get angry and say what are you staring at? I'm not a ghost. I have not gone mental I can see you?

The above quotations illustrate the consequences of society categorising and labelling rape victims in a particular way. The responses that Priya and Chandhni received from their families and communities meant that they had to separate the 'truth' of their experiences from the 'hysteria' of their victimisation. For both women, how they were coping with their experience of rape and their perspective on whether they were experiencing a mental breakdown were at odds with the perspectives of their families and communities. The women resisted a label that sought to discredit their claim of rape, and both felt the need to defend themselves: 'I have not gone mental—I can see you.' Priya boldly called her family out by suggesting that if they 'truly' believed she had gone 'crazy', then they would have at least taken her to see a doctor. This indicates that society attempts to construct victims of rape as hysterical and incompetent to silence them from speaking about their experience of sexual violence. Hengehold (1994) argues that the 'hysterization' of women during rape trials seeks to demonstrate that they lack self-knowledge. As a result, women experience self-doubt and begin to question and/or second-guess themselves.

Priya's story is complex because while she criticised her family for calling her 'crazy' and challenges them during the interview, but she does not in the family setting where it may have had more of an impact or where she will know it won't. And she also states she had feelings of depression and suicide. Her family suggested she was not displaying enough instability—in essence, that she was not 'crazy enough'—to warrant medical attention. Yet the diagnosis of 'crazy' would discredit Priya within society, thus rendering her silent and ensuring that she did not receive adequate treatment. This presented a paradox for Priya: while she was exercising agency and contesting the label of 'crazy', she was simultaneously feeling unstable and struggling to cope with her trauma. This reveals the severe mental health implications of the

silence around sexual violence. In Priya's case, her depression may have been because she was never able to talk about her feelings and thus internalised them—as discussed in the previous chapter, the participants were never asked about their trauma, and even when their abuse was reported to the police or a doctor, a parent often spoke on their behalf. This made it extremely difficult for the participants to share or even demonstrate trauma. While the concept of trauma is a westernised concept, and it can be questioned whether participants understand their own experiences in terms of trauma. Most of the research on trauma presents western views of autonomy wherein individuals are self-reflective and more willingly to communicate their feelings, and state of mind (Maercker, Heim and Kirmayer, 2018). This research recognizes that in Eastern cultures, such as in India, expressing and or sharing feelings regarding trauma is not part of the culture (Maercker, Heim and Kirmayer, 2018). And that individuals define, experience, understand, and communicate trauma differently depending on the sociocultural context (Rechsteiner, Tol and Maercker, 2019; Gilmoor, Aithy and Regeer, 2019).

The dilemma Priya faced was how to resist a stigmatised identity while also reaching out for help. This is further illustrated by her statement 'I was nothing'. She dehumanised herself by describing herself as 'subjectless' to make sense of living with a family that was not acknowledging her nor her experience. Thus, she occupied the subject position of pseudo-existence, wherein she sought to resume power over her body even if it may have resulted in suicide. Conversely, Chandhni resisted society's attempt to dehumanise her when she declared that she was not a 'ghost', in essence making her subject position clear: she was not 'dead to the community'. These participant stories illustrate the complexity of using psychological discourses when speaking about women's experiences of rape, as these discourses have historically been used as tools of women's oppression and silence (Showalter, 2020).

6.5 Agency, strength, and resilience

Despite their experiences of sexual violence and the associated stigma and shame, all the participants revealed some form of agency, strength, and resilience in different contexts.

> *Malika: I am not scared of anyone. I will shout and point fingers at any man who thinks he can abuse me. I will tell the whole world of his sins. He was only so lucky because he had the support of his employers. Otherwise, my family would have hung him upside down.*
>
> *Interviewer: Why do you think some women or girls are too scared to tell anyone?*
>
> *Malika: [pause] If they are young girls, then they are not knowing what to do. I am old enough. I am knowing what is happening, and my husband and my family are also good to me. I am knowing they will support me.*

Malika explicitly stated, 'I will shout and point fingers at any man who thinks he can abuse me. I will tell the whole world of his sins'. This not only shows resistance but also contestation, as Malika was issuing a challenge to any man who tried to abuse her. But Malika's case differed from the other participants in several key ways. She was raped by a man who worked for her landlord and was one of the only participants who was very vocal about her abuse, exuding a strength and confidence that manifest differently than the other women. What particularly stands out about her case compared with the others is that she had the support of her family: her husband and his family wanted the man who raped her to be punished for his crime, even marching down to the rapist's home to demand justice. This suggests that perhaps Malika's self-confidence was facilitated by her strong social support system. Other research clearly validates this: women who have strong social support from family, friends and/or community show greater resilience than women who do not have this type of support (Brewin, Andrews and Valentine,

2000; Machisa, Christofides and Jewkes, 2018; Gregory, Johnson, Feder, Campbell, Konya, and Perot, 2021; Kuo, LoVette, Slingers and Mathews, 2021).

Malika was also the only participant who was an adult at the time of the rape. She was thus more mature, with knowledge of her own body and an understanding of rape that teenage girls who are still biologically developing and learning to understand their bodies may not share (Townsend, 2016; Mathews, Hendricks and Abrahams, 2016). Lastly, and arguably most importantly, is the fact that when Malika was raped, she was already married and had children. This means that she may not have feared the potential stigma (Kennedy and Prock, 2018) that might cause her to lose out on future marriage prospects. In India, a woman who is unable to fulfil the two roles expected of her in life—wife and mother—is often stigmatised as 'incomplete', 'inept' and/or even 'deviant' (Bhambhani and Inbanathan, 2018). In Malika's case, she had already fulfilled her *purpose* in life and therefore did not have as much to lose as the other participants.

While Malika's case is unique, some of the other participants also demonstrated strength and resistance. Participant, Nindhni, remembered her rapist attempting to rattle her sense of self.

> *Nindhni: But after, when I told my sister and he came to find out he hid his face. She protected me and dared him to go near me again. One time he dared to challenge her and he had come to help my father and he made a remark to me in passing. My sister was watching and she came running at him. He ran so fast. And we just laughed at him. I still remember that day.*

Nindhni had confided in her sister that a family friend's son had been sexually abusing her when she was a child. Her sister's social support empowered Nindhni to laugh in the face of her rapist.

Similarly, when Kameena ran into her ex-husband's friend and he attempted to coax her into a sexual encounter, she both resisted and challenged him:

Kameena: I saw one of his friends recently. He is a guard at one of the building complexes I have to walk by, and he walked up to me and said 'good morning' with this stupid look on his face. And I said tell your mother good morning.

Interviewer: What was that about?

Kameena: That is how the stupid men think they can behave with women. They try to make us nervous. But I have no fear of them anymore.

Kameena resists the man's attempt to harass her by talking back to him, negotiating space by drawing on traditional gendered discourses. In India it is women who uphold family honour and therefore women are to be respected. For Dalit women, there is an added component wherein Dalit communities have spent decades trying to construct a respectability for Dalit women into the public sphere (Paik, 2016a). Here Kameena claims her space by making him aware that women are the ones who uphold honour and therefore she should be respected: 'Tell your mother good morning.' This served to remind him that he had women in his life and should be more respectful. Kameena's, Malika's and Nindhni's experiences both deviated from the notion of victimisation. Kameena said 'I have no fear' of men anymore, and Malika said, 'I will shout and point fingers at any man who thinks he can abuse me'. Both women conveyed strength, recovery, resiliency, and power that are indicative of what a survivor needs to do in order to manage their trauma (Papendick and Bohner, 2017).

While many of the participants identified, and preferred to be referred to, as 'victims', these examples show that some of them may in fact have identified as survivors. Foucault would reject the notion of an 'inner' and 'outer' self, as the individual is not an autonomous subject (Bevir, 1999). However, as explored in Chapter Five, he did speak of counter-conduct as a tool to understand how one conducts oneself and if this can be changed (Demetriou, 2016). This

contradiction between the participants wanting to be perceived as victims yet exuding strength and survival in their daily lives can be explained by counter-conduct: the women were actively engaging in purposive action methods of resistance that were critical to their empowerment (Paik, 2014, 2016).

This does not mean that women were autonomous subjects, but that they were utilising different methods of resistance that were still situated within the parameters of government. One such method was perhaps to highlight their victimisation and pain in order to garner sympathy (Gupta, 2016), consideration and compassion in the hope of obtaining justice and changing how they were treated. That the women were exercising agency and power by managing how they were represented is context specific. That is their mechanisms of agency and power were constituted through practices of subjugation or liberation—they drew on their existing knowledge of suffering and being silenced and then transformed it to effect change by identifying as victims. However, this identifies that the ways in which Dalit women represent themselves and exercise agency are often contradictory: while voicing their pain and suffering and wanting to be identified as 'victims', they also spoke of, and demonstrated, strength and power (Gupta, 2016).

Adding complexity to this analysis is the fact that while Malika, Nindhni and Kameena showed resistance and agency that was empowered by social support, their resistance to abuse and patriarchal discourse was also limited and context-specific—both Malika and Kameena were living with spouses who were physically and sexually violent towards them, and they suggested that it was part of their marital duty to accept this. This indicates that their beliefs and behaviours towards violence were still largely shaped by patriarchal discourses (Tonsing and Tonsing, 2019)—they would accept abuse from their husbands because it was part of their role as a wife, but they would no longer accept abuse at the hands of other men. Chapter Seven examines the

construction of marriage after rape and how the participants' experiences shaped their relationships.

Summary

For the Dalit women who participated in this research, their construction of the self varied according to the context of their experience, who they were speaking to and what they were intending to achieve from that interaction. Their subject positions were also diverse and conflicting, depending on context (Sausse, 1974), which is why most of the women self-identified as victims, but the way many of them spoke and acted ran counter to this characterisation. Careful examination of this revealed that the women outwardly identified as victims because they hoped it would cause their experiences of suffering and abuse to be acknowledged—but when reflecting inward, they drew on 'survivor'-type discourses as a coping mechanism to resist and contest exploitation by other men. The different contexts in which the women found themselves frequently offered the participants various restrictions and obligations that shaped their subject position. Therefore, some seemed to treat social ostracism as an opportunity for transformation because they felt that if they had stayed in their villages, they would have succumbed to depression or even suicide.

All the women talked about the instability of their sense of self post-trauma, and many felt depressed, anxious, and 'crazy'. However, they also actively tried to resist the label of 'crazy' to guard themselves from being further discredited. Many of these feelings of instability stemmed from the dominant discourse of 'victim-blaming'. This discourse also exposes how some participants could challenge men who attempted to abuse them again and yet would continue to accept physical and sexual abuse at the hands of their husbands. Yet despite their personal experiences of trauma, the majority of the women demonstrated resilience and strength. Some

found this strength by focusing on other aspects of their identity, such as being a mother.

Although not all the women showed agency and resistance, those who did were generally those

who had a support system in place.

Chapter Seven

Construction of the self within marriage and other relationships

This chapter examines how participants construct the self within marriage and other relationships following sexual violence. It uses discourse analysis to examine the participants' experiences and understanding of the self and of their relationships in the context of their family and community and the state.

Marriage is a significant social institution in India and across the world (Lal, 2015). Women in India are socialised from a young age to understand that their value stems from becoming someone's wife and becoming a mother (Basu, Zuo, Lou, Acharya and Lundgren, 2017). One of the central themes of this chapter is how the experience of rape has shaped Dalit women rape victims' marriage and their relationship with their significant other through the discourse of respectability. The first section examines how young Dalit girls are socialised to become wives. The second section addresses the different ways in which Dalit women, because of their intersecting identities, must negotiate respectability within their relationships compared with other women. The chapter then explores how Dalit women carry the stigma of rape into new relationships and how they construct marriage after rape. Next, it details the construction of marital rape. Finally, it examines the self in terms of exercising agency within marriage and other relationships.

7.1 The construction of the 'good' wife

This section begins by discussing the production of gendered roles and norms in Indian society that shape the construction of marriage and intimate relationships in adult life. It does this by examining the mechanisms that have shaped Dalit women's construction of their roles as wife and mother.

In India, the instituitions of marriage and family shape traditional heterosexual gender roles and marital relations (Bhat and Ullman, 2014). More specifically, they produce young girls and women who become devoted wives to their husbands. The below interview excerpts describe the different normalisation practices that socialise young Dalit girls to become 'good wives':

> *Anju: I remember when I was 15 I put this really beautiful dark red lipstick on, my friend gave to me. And when I came home my mom slapped me so hard and made me wipe it off. My mother said red lipstick is reserved for married girls or for those who work on the street. I never wore lipstick again until my marriage.*
>
> *-*
>
> *Kajal: We would get in so much trouble me and my sisters if we were laughing too loudly or having any fun. My mom used to say to me* 'itna hasaa math kar. Jis ladki ke daaath tange huey hai, ussey koi shaddi nahi karega'*, which translates to 'This much laughing is too much. A girl who has her teeth hanging out (laughing) will not marry.'*
>
> *-*
>
> *Poonam: My mother started teaching me and my sisters how to cook as soon as we could walk. She always told us what will your mother-in-law say if you don't know how to cook and take care of the house.*
>
> *-*
>
> *Devika: I used to go and get the water from the landlord's house and do all the cleaning and cooking since [the age of] six or seven. While my brothers would be running around. I would get so angry ... But my mother said this is my job I have to learn.*

Gender roles are the culturally constructed roles that male and female members of society are expected to perform (Birhan and Zewdie, 2018). The above quotations demonstrate how Dalit

girls are socialised in accordance with societal cultural standards that entail preparing young girls

for the duties of being a wife and mother (Lundgren, 2015). A woman's identity in Indian society

is predominantly derived from marriage and maternity (Bhandari and Hughes, 2017); thus,

emphasis is placed on teaching girls how to become 'good' wives and mothers. Furthermore,

because patrilocality—wherein married couples reside with the husband's parents—is a common

practice in India, young married women are more vulnerable to further social and mobility

restrictions (Anukriti, Herrera-Almanza, Pathak, and Karra, 2020). This means that they are also

socialised from a young age to accept rather than challenge disciplinary practices from their

mothers-in-law (Rew, Gangoli and Gill, 2013).

The social construction of a 'good wife' and the experiences Anju, Kajal, Poonam and Devika

described having within the institutions of the family and marriage can be understood as modes

of disciplinary power (Basu et al. 2017). This involves gender inequality being maintained

through an imbalance of female power and the management of female bodies by society (men,

mothers and mothers-in-law in particular) —for example, Devika being assigned the duties of

fetching water, cooking and cleaning while her brothers were free to play, or Poonam's mother

questioning what her future mother-in-law would say to Poonam if she did not learn how to cook

and clean. Poonam's excerpt illustrates the way in which mothers prepare daughters for marriage

and show them how to behave with their future mother-in-law. Indian mothers typically prepare

their daughters from a young age for the roles of both mother and wife (Rew, et al, 2013; Basu et

al, 2017). The young married woman is joining a household with established positions of power,

and as the newest member, she occupies the lowest rank in the family (Rew et al. 2013). Indian

women achieve prestige and power as the mothers of sons, and this often produces rivalry

between a mother-in-law and a new daughter-in-law who moves into the family home (Gangoli,

2016). This socialisation to which young Dalit girls are exposed before marriage prepares young women to accept these power differentials and the ways in which mothers-in-law manage the behaviour, dress, and attitude of their daughters-in-law (Rew et al. 2013). However, this also implicates women, mothers in particular, as the primary agents in reproducing patriarchal practices; and mothers-in-law engage in patriarchal power struggles by employing disciplinary tactics that uphold male interests and oppress younger women in their family (Gangoli, 2016).

It has also been identified in the literature, that in India, girls' gender roles are still more rigidly enforced than those of boys (Basu et. al, 2017). The socialisation of young girls is deeply rooted in family honour and cultural norms, and these factors shape the way in which girls internalise their abuse as their own fault—in turn, they can become complicit in their own suppression (Gill, 2009). Girls are considered responsible for family honour and status, and thus their behaviour and movements are closely monitored (Gill, 2013). Furthermore, because Dalit women's bodies are heavily politicised, protecting their honour is seen as a symbolic endeavour to restore respect to the entire community (Paik, 2014). As examined in Chapter Three, Dalit women face the added obstacle of Dalit patriarchy, which they must navigate alongside Brahmanical patriarchy. It has been argued that the social construction of gendered identities is shaped by social stratification (Basu et. al, 2017).

Historically, Dalit women have attempted to address casteism by 'redressing' their attire. During the colonial period, Dalit women's clothing was restricted (they had to remain bare-chested in public) to make their identity known in public spaces. It was through their attire that Dalit women's sexuality was constructed; over time, it was normalised as promiscuous and sexually available (Gupta, 2014). In India, women display respectability mainly through markers that connect them to the family and the private sphere of the home—for example, matrimonial

emblems (Phadke, Ranade and Khan, 2009) and/or, as Anju described, red lipstick. The interview quotations point to the different ways in which these participants' mothers managed their behaviour, dress, and actions in accordance with patriarchal beliefs about how women should behave. Basu et al.'s (2017) study of gender socialisation among the urban poor in Delhi explains that mothers established dressing norms for girls by covering the girls' bodies to safeguard them from unwelcome sexual attention. The authors identified that in lower income Indian households, clothing restriction is a primary mechanism of constructing gendered identities and shaping young girls into 'respectable' women. Similarly, Anju's mother implied that red lipstick was reserved for married women or sex workers, drawing on notions of sexuality by claiming that the colour red represents 'sexuality' and that if Anju, a Dalit girl, wore red lipstick, she would draw sexual attention to herself. Red lipstick thus symbolises a married woman's sexual unavailability to other men and an unmarried woman's availability to men as a sex worker.

Within the home, women in India in general must also adhere to patriarchal gendered norms of how they are valued as a mother and a wife. Because the institution of marriage is founded on the subjugation and servitude of women, the traits of a 'good' wife are normalised and constructed through discursive practices (Ghosh, 2021). This explains why Anju's, Kajal's, Devika's and Poonam's mothers concentrated on socialising their daughters in ways that appear to replicate the practices of upper caste women but that can also be seen as an act of transforming and resistance to caste (Gupta, 2014). Therefore, the participants faced greater scrutiny from both their families and communities to uphold gendered roles under the "caste" gaze'. This is evidenced by the way in which Dalit communities have, for decades, employed women's bodies as mechanisms for social upliftment (Paik, 2014a). They operate as agents of change and,

consequently, their bodies have become more regulated for the *politicisation* of caste identity (Paik, 2014): outside their home, they must navigate the social stereotypes of being perceived as sexually available, unclean, polluted, and dirty, and therefore they must modify how they dress and behave (Gupta, 2015a).

However, this also implicates Dalit women's mothering practices. Motherhood is commonly idealised and essentialised, but these perspectives often fail to consider the different types of mothering practices that are found in different social groups (Chantler, Gangoli and Thiara, 2018). The mothering practices of Dalit mothers are differently located to those of Brahman mothers—therefore, the former may stress more compliance with patriarchal gender norms and values as a mechanism of addressing caste. This is not to say that Dalit mothers are denied agency, but they are restricted and must navigate between patriarchies to make space for themselves. This illustrates how the intersection of caste, class and gender limits Dalit women's choices and freedoms both in the private and public spheres (Jamwal, 2017).

This suggests that the power of patriarchy is so strong that the women who are suppressed, such as Dalit mothers, become the groomers of suppression (Rew et al. 2013). The interview quotations at the start of this chapter indicate that it is primarily women (mothers) who socialise and reinforce patriarchal discourses and practices with their daughters in accordance with societal expectations. All the participants in this research spoke very little of their fathers; when talking about their families, they primarily focused on their mothers. Fathers were only mentioned if participants' mothers had told them to hide their experience of rape from their fathers (in Meenakshi's case, her daughter was raped by her father). Indeed, employing surveillance to regulate women's bodies is not restricted to men because disciplinary power functions to produce a 'master gaze' that includes women performing the male gaze. It is this

transference of the male gaze onto women that creates a state of mechanical power (Ghosh, 2021). This is not a new finding—in India, it is primarily the mother's role to teach her children, particularly girls, to align with the normative sexual and social gender norms and values (Gangoli, 2016; Basu et al. 2017). However, fathers have a more authoritative role—they are typically the ultimate decision-makers and can openly disapprove of mothers' teaching practices (Cislaghi, Bankar, Verma, Heise and Collumbien, 2020). It has been argued that women comply with patriarchal structures and employ patriarchal practices because doing so allows them to gain social status (Catherine and Mannell, 2016). But mothers will still use strategies to make decisions for their children with which a father may disagree, such as not telling the father if they know he may disapprove of a particular practice (Cislaghi et al. 2020).

The experiences of Poonam, Devika, Anju and Kajal draw attention to the notion that 'training' a good Dalit wife and daughter-in-law starts with managing her speech, body, and movement in the social world (Gupta, 2014). The four participants' quotations at the start of this chapter demonstrate how men and women come to internalise and reproduce patriarchal norms through differential gender treatment. They illustrate how patriarchal teaching practices produce 'good wives' and that women are also disciplinarians if the role of wife is challenged. Women's complicity in reproducing patriarchal practices sustains both caste and patriarchal institutions (Mishra, 2019a), wherein patriarchal and caste-based purity and pollution regulations, as well as marriage norms and values, are connected to the teachings women receive specifically from other women. The participants' mothers taught them how to cook and clean and how to dress as 'good girls', and if they violated these norms, they were disciplined (such as Anju being slapped for wearing lipstick). The four women all described different ways in which disciplinary power operated as a patriarchal tool to define what is and is not acceptable behaviour for women.

Furthermore, the women's quotations suggest that their behaviour, mannerisms and dress were under constant surveillance, which normalises patriarchal power (Ghosh, 2021). Consequently, it normalises how women internalise and reproduce patriarchal beliefs and practices.

7.2 The role of the mother-in-law

While Indian mothers are the primary caregivers, they are also the primary agents of socialisation for young children. However, in addition, the role of the mother-in-law in Indian households is that of a distributer of patriarchal power in the marital home (Kohli, 2016). In Indian families, women are placed in a hierarchy based on their maternal status, marital status, age and other factors. (Menon, 2009; Allendorf, 2017). These status rankings provide different access to power and resources, which can create tension between female family members. In return, this reproduces patriarchy, as the higher ranking women function as proxies for male power (Ghosh, 2005).

None of the participants in this study mentioned any abuse or serious issues with their mothers-in-law and only two of participants mentioned their mothers-in-law. However, there were underpinnings of patriarchal power being transmitted via these mothers-in-law:

> *Azura: She is always saying I am wrong when me and my husband get into a fight. Even when I am not wrong. She never tells him to be quiet but always will tell me to stop. But he is her son, naturally she will side with him. What can you do? [Pause.] It could be worse so many girls have such bad mothers-in-law.*

> *Lakshmi [who was being physically abused by her husband and was told the following by her mother-in-law]: 'As his wife, this is a part of marriage you have to accept' … My mother-in-law would beat her son and yell on him to stop when he would hurt me. But at same time tell me to stop yelling at him and say I am at fault.*

Both Azura and Lakshmi echoed Ghosh's (2005) argument that mothers-in-law act as proxies for their sons to reinforce patriarchal ties within the household. The two women described how their mothers-in-law placed the blame for their sons' violence with their daughters-in-law. Lakshmi's mother-in-law gave contradictory messages: while she intervened when her son physically attacked his wife (her daughter-in-law), she still attempted to instil patriarchal power by suggesting that Lakshmi practise various mechanisms of silence, obedience, and acceptance of abuse to avoid household conflict. For example, she advised Lakshmi to stop defending herself and stated that domestic violence was a part of married life.

Indian families produce and reproduce patriarchal knowledge that privileges and locates male experience and power the top of the hierarchy (Garrity-Bond, 2018). The above quotations demonstrate how patriarchal power is constructed from the knowledge of others (including women) and operates to reproduce patriarchal power. The pieces of advice from the participants' mothers and mothers-in-law were perceived as 'acceptable' forms of knowledge, and that is how patriarchal power is sustained and reproduced in Indian households. However, Azura did contest this: she rejected her mother-in-law's words as an 'acceptable form of knowledge' when she stated that her mother-in-law would side with her son because of their biological connection. She explained that her status as daughter-in-law left her feeling powerless. While it appears that both mothers-in-law in the above quotations empathised with their daughters-in-law by showing empathy with them over the hardships of being a woman, they simultaneously limited their resistance to patriarchy by silencing their daughters-in-law. Both participants articulated feeling a sense of pressure from their mothers-in-law to appease their husbands. According to Rew et al. (2013), mothers-in-law play an integral role in patriarchal family dynamics by making sure that their daughters-in-law do not ruin their family honour. Thus, they play an active role in

managing and regulating the behaviour of their daughters-in-law in accordance with societal norms. This can explain why both Azura and Lakshmi were blamed for their abuse and were advised by their mothers-in-law that abuse is a part of marriage. Azura normalised the violence she experienced by comparing her situation to other women who were worse off and stating that nothing could be done except tolerate the violence. This suggests that over time, the acceptance of violence is normalised, which further constrains women's power and choices within marriage.

In India, marriage is not only a union between a couple but also a union between a woman and her husband's extended household (Rew et. al, 2013). It has been argued by outsiders that Dalit women live in more egalitarian households and that Dalit patriarchy is perceived as more 'democratic' (Saha, 2017). However, examination of the literature indicates that these discourses arise as a result of comparing Dalit householdss with upper caste households, where patriarchal power is very explicit. Dalit households, where women work outside the home and contribute financially, are often *misinterpreted* as more democratic. However, what is ignored is that it is a *necessity* for Dalit women to work—meanwhile, inside the home, patriarchal practices are very much the norm. In middle-class Dalit families, there is a trend for Dalit women to stay at home, which leads to greater restriction of movement (Still, 2011). For example, only one participant (Jeeya) did not have a job outside the home—she was the only participant who moved to Delhi with her parents after she was raped but before she married. Her natal family was considered lower middle class and she married into a family of similar class status. She stopped working as a house cleaner after she was married because her husband did not want her to work outside the home; rather, he wanted her to manage the household and care for their children.

7.3 Construction of marriage

One of the central themes produced during the interviews was the idea of staying in abusive marriage post-rape: 12 of the participants stated that they were currently living with abusive spouses and felt compelled to stay in those relationships because of their stigmatized identity as rape victims. For example, five out of the aforementioned 12 participants drew on discourses of stigma and gratitude that regulated their reasoning for staying in these abusive marriages post-rape. Two were repeatedly told by others how grateful they should be that someone had married them post-rape:

> *Meera: When I got married I remember the landlady talking with my grandmother and me and saying that she was happy for me and that I should be grateful of how my life has turned out and I should pray to God and thank him for my life and marriage.*
>
> *-*
>
> *Urmila: My mother will tell me to listen to my husband even if that means that I cannot see them. He does not want me to visit my family. He is very controlling. But she tells me that I have to accept this because of what happened to me. That I am lucky that a marriage has happened with me. I have to make him happy.*
>
> *-*
>
> *Poonam: I am not happy in my marriage but this is the best I could get it. I have no option but to stay. My family will not take me back if I leave.*
>
> *-*
>
> *Kameena: How can I leave him? I cannot divorce twice?*
>
> *Interviewer: Why not? If he is also abusive. Why stay?*

> *Kameena: No no I cannot do this. People already talk about my first divorce. And for second time? No no no.*

The above quotations all describe how the women carried the stigma of rape with them into new relationships and consequently felt compelled to stay in those abusive relationships. This suggests that they entered and stayed in unhealthy marriages because of that stigma and their own and others' presumptions of burden and obligation. To understand why Urmila, Poonam and Kameena remained in these abusive marriages, we must understand their choices as 'burdened decisions' (Lentz, 2018). That is, they were obliged to stay with their husbands because they carried the burden of shame. They were reminded by family members and society that their status as 'married' held weight and that they should feel 'gratitude' for that—to deviate from it would be detrimental. Meera described overhearing that she should be 'grateful' to even be married; Urmila's mother dismissed her son-in-law's abuse by advising her daughter that she was 'lucky' to be married and should therefore tolerate the abuse.

Interestingly, these women were very explicitly told that they should be grateful to be married because of their stigmatised identity as rape victims. This is not uncommon, as it has been identified that rape victims will often stay in abusive relationships because of shame and stigma, and this functions to normalise and/or minimise the violence they have experienced (Holland and Cortina, 2017). These types of discourses regulate women's bodies in abusive relationships and uphold patriarchal heterosexual marriages. If women are guided to believe that they owe their husbands, the process of self-regulation begins, wherein they will tolerate abuse and will not seek help. However, for women who remain single, pursuing marriage when they are older or divorced are often stigmatised by society as deviant or are seen to be 'flawed' in some way such

as having a disability, while women who never marry are often viewed with suspicion and/or scrutinised by others (Simpson, 2016).

Furthermore, each of these discourses sustains Dalit patriarchy by operating from the intersecting vulnerabilities of caste, class, and gender through the institution of marriage. That is, society insists that the institution of marriage be upheld without considering the effects of the abuse that occurs within that institution. Indian women are less likely to divorce because of the stigma attached to divorced women (Thadathil and Sriram, 2019). This can explain why Kameena feared the community 'gaze', explaining that community pressure kept her in her marriage. Similarly, Poonam explained that her natal family would not support her if she left her husband. In both of these cases, the women experienced social pressure from society and their natal families to reconcile with their husbands after an abusive episode. In India, the notion that divorce is not a viable choice for women is a popular one because of the cultural convention that having a husband is the only source of security for women; consequently, they are compelled to reconcile with their abusive husbands (Goel, 2005; Bhandari and Hughes, 2017).

For Dalit women, this is more complex, because in Indian society, Dalit women are often deemed as impure by the upper caste (Gupta, 2015a); often, the higher rates of divorce and second marriages within Dalit communities are used to substantiate these beliefs about Dalit women (Twamley and Sidharth, 2019). Therefore, Dalit women are under more pressure to regulate their behaviour to resist those stereotypes and uplift the community; their families attempt to resist the stigma of caste and rape, and consequently, they reproduce patriarchal notions to gain respectability within society. The above-quoted participants described various strategies that different institutions (family and marriage) deploy to manage and regulate

women's bodies. While none of these participants were *forced* to stay in their abusive marriage, they felt ashamed, compelled and/or constrained to do so because they carried the stigma of rape.

While many of the participants talked about being physically and sexually abused by their husbands, none explained why they stayed aside from stating that abuse was 'a part of marriage' and/or that 'this happens in marriage'. This is not unusual: a common belief among South Asian communities is that a woman must learn to live with domestic abuse (Shankar, Das and Atwal, 2013). This suggests that violence within Indian households has become normalised and that women come to accept it as 'part and parcel' of marriage, which is problematic because it (re)produces cycles of violence. It also means that from a young age, girls learn that abuse is 'a part' of marriage. This does not mean that they 'accept' the abuse, but it does mean that they are limited in their ability to make decisions such as leaving their spouse, as was the case with Kameena and Poonam. Furthermore, because they have seen their mothers and/or other women in their respective communities tolerate abuse and/or be advised to stay in abusive marriages, they become socialised to find different ways to resist and negotiate their position in the family.

Interestingly, the Meera, Urmila, Kameena and Poonam's construction of marriage seems contradictory or questionable compared with what was identified in Chapter Six. This earlier chapter identified that some of the women believed *entering into* marriage after rape gave them the opportunity to reconstruct their identities and shed the stigma of rape as opposed to living with a stigmatised identity in their respective communities. However, in this chapter, it can be seen that Meera, Urmila, Kameena and Poonam's were still restrained in other ways because of their stigmatised identities, albeit in a different context, and that marriage did not actually offer them the opportunity for transformation or reconstruction of their identity.

Entering marriage after rape protected the participants from societal shame and a *perceived* status of honour because marriage assigned them the new labels of wife and mother. The institution of marriage is so powerful in India that a woman earns dignity and social respect via her marital status (Biswas and Mukhopadhyay, 2018). In fact, some women's families have guided their daughters to *marry their rapist* to legitimise their experience of rape through the institution of marriage (Basu, 2011; Randall and Venkatesh, 2015). Similarly, in a study of women with mental health conditions, the women believed that their marital status protected them against social stigma because their status as a 'wife' overrode their mental health status (Sharma, Tripathi and Pathak, 2015). This is problematic, as it shows marriage being employed as a solution for women who have been raped as a mechanism to shed the stigma of rape. And also a shield against the 'crazy' label examined in chapter six. However, despite marriage, their rape is still used against them to justify further surveillance and regulation by their parents, spouse, and in-laws, and even themselves, to stay in unhealthy marriages. Furthermore, in the present study, the transformation of the self that the participants had hoped would occur through marriage did not necessarily take place because the women still carried the burden of rape stigma into marriage and therefore had to find new ways to resist and contest that stigma in the context of their marriage.

7.4 Carrying the stigma of rape into marriage

In Indian society, the institution of marriage is so powerful that it governs women's lives from birth to death (Sev'er, 2008; Ahmed-Ghosh, 2009; Biswas and Mukhopadhyay, 2018). This section examines how some of the participants felt obliged to stay in abusive marriages because of the stigma of their past abuse; they carried the burden of their rape with them into other relationships, including marriage and various familial relationships.

In the Hindu religion, marriage is seen as a rite of passage for women (Rew et. al, 2013).

According to Rao, Vidya and Sriramya (2015), the patriarchal construction of marriage is also

shaped by religious and social authorisations. Wherein *The Hindu Laws of Manu* states that a

woman has only three stages in her life: an unmarried girl, a married girl, and a widow. The fear

of remaining unwed is so strong that some parents seek advice about how to secure marriage for

their daughters from spiritual leaders. Priya explained how her mother believed that her rape

brought bad luck to Priya and the family:

> Priya: *My mother was worried for me and my sisters … Someone told my mother that I was to*
> *carry a bag of rocks until my marriage was arranged. I was carrying for so long and they had tie*
> *it around my waist with a string… I had to because of what happened they were thinking that I*
> *was giving bad luck. So this is like what you will say to take the bad luck away off from me. I had*
> *to carry this rocks. I had to sleep with them also. I was not allowed to remove them from my*
> *body. It felt like punishment for me.*

Carrying the weight of the rocks appears to be an extension of coercive power, symbolising the

stigma of rape. This physical burden was an act of purification for Priya's 'impurity' and was not

only physically constraining but also served as an instrument of omnipresent surveillance. The

physical duty of carrying the rocks functioned as a constant reminder of Priya's rape—the rocks

were a form of disciplinary power that further subjected Priya to correction, judgement, and

surveillance (Havis, 2014). This reveals how the stigma of rape is reinforced through spiritual,

cultural, and social practices; over time, women experiencing this stigma begin to believe that

they are impure, and/or they carry the weight of this stigma into other aspects of their lives and

into their relationships. Priya's carrying of the rocks around her waist can be interpreted as

another form of public shaming that has been adopted in the Dalit community.

However, it can also be argued that this purification practice is used as mechanism of change and contestation of the caste system—that it is not about public shaming but about resistance to casteism and pollution. Historically, purification practices were only available to upper casted communities (Hibbs, 2018); Dalit men have also been found to treat Dalit women as untouchable (Hibbs, 2015). Because Dalits have historically been constructed as impure from birth, adopting upper caste 'purification' practices, and making these practices their own can be seen as form of contestation and transformation (Still, 2017). For Dalit women, gender and caste are synonymous (Arya, 2020), and their response to violence is made more complex because of that intersection. Consequently, non-Dalit feminists can view Dalit women's responses to violence as difficult, contradictory, and confusing. As a result of this complexity, strategies that may contest casteism also normalise the idea of women carrying the burden of rape and produce a cultural practice of victim-blaming (Narayan, 2018). Misogynist practices thus operate to sustain the subordination of women in society (Krishnan, 2015). Victim-blaming can occur in a number of different ways, including explicitly (e.g., a woman being told that she is at fault for her rape) or explicitly (e.g., a woman being told that she is at fault for her rape through religious or cultural practices). For example, Priya was not explicitly told that she had brought shame to her family or that she was at fault for her rape—but she was told that she was 'bad luck' for the family because she was raped. Such practices disregard male violence and blame the victim (Thapar-Bjorkert and Morgan, 2010).

It is through these types of practices that women are constructed as gendered subjects within society—they face underlying management of their femaleness and sexuality and are told that because they have been raped, their female bodies need purification for men to want them. These ideals of womanhood are constructed through familial, religious, and socio-cultural discourses

(Kavoura, Ryba and Chroni, 2015), and this leads to practices such as carrying rocks around one's waist as a form of 'purification' or otherwise 'punishment' for rape. It is through such practices and mechanisms that women learn the cultural values, expectations, and ideals of marriage: that is *their* burden to bear that stigma and shame. This, in turn, veils the larger issue of sexual violence against Dalit women and girls.

i.   Intimacy post–sexual violence and disclosing rape to intimate partners

Of the women interviewed for this study, only two directly described the ways in which they carried the stigma of rape into their marriages in the context of intimacy:

> *Priya: When we were first married, I did not want him to touch me. But I had no choice and I did not tell him, but he did know.*

> *Priya: After some time, this thinking goes … but I have never wanted him too close to me because of what happened. It makes me feel dirty inside.*

> *-*

> *Shahei: I was so scared when he would come to me. I would jump, and I would make reasons to him so he would not come to me. But you know you can only do like this for some time and then you have to do these things because it is part of marriage.*

Priya and Shahei shared some of the effects their experience of rape had on intimacy during their marriage. Both women explained that despite feeling the traumatic effects of rape and not wanting to be physically touched, they could not say 'no' to their husbands, as sex was a part of their marital duty. In both cases, it was difficult for myself and Priya and Shahei to classify this as marital rape: both women felt obliged to have sex and were not coerced nor forced into it. They did not say no because for women in India, the role of wife is how they obtain meaning in

life (Biswas and Mukhopadhyay, 2018), and it is these patriarchal beliefs that restrain women's voices. Even though Priya stated that she had never formally disclosed or spoken about her rape, she claimed that her husband 'did know' that she was raped. This can partly be explained, as examined in Chapter Five, by the culture of silence that surrounds sexuality; women in particular do not share their experiences, thoughts or feelings regarding sex and intimacy. However, aside from the physical effects of rape, victims also face both immediate and long-term psycho-social effects, such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Jiloha, 2015; Chaudhary, Bakhla, Murthy and Jagtap, 2017; Potter, Howard, R., Murphy, and Moynihan, 2018; Carey et al., 2020; Schou-Bredal, Bonsaksen, Ekeberg, Skogstad, Grimholt, Lerdal and Heir, 2020; Potluri and Patel, 2021) and these are exacerbated by the culture of silence. These effects can be carried into other relationships, including a woman's relationship with herself. Victims of sexual violence can thus experience a lower quality of social, family, and interpersonal connections as well as sexual dysfunction (Schou-Bredal, et al., 2020).

Very little research examines why and how previous sexual assault impacts post-sexual intimacy and relationships. However, decreased sexual intimacy is often associated with stigma and the ways in which society responds to rape victims, who can face damage to their reputation (izzat), victim-blaming, ostracisation and/or mental health issues or physical inability due to injury. (Turchik and Hassija, 2014). Each of these factors can contribute to and shape a rape victim's subsequent relationships. Other researchers have also identified that some rape victims may experience an increase in sexual activity, which allows them to feel more empowered by managing their own sexual activity (O'Callaghan, Shepp, Ullman and Kirkner, 2019), and/or drug and alcohol dependency stemming from insecurities caused by shame. This was not

observed in the current research, and again this may be because women in India do not openly discuss sexual activity.

Many of these different responses and coping strategies are exacerbated because of the limited disclosure of sexual violence to intimate partners. However, other factors can shape a rape victim's reasons for not disclosing to an intimate partner. In the present study, most of the participants did not formally disclose to their husbands themselves; only four participants did so. Malika was raped while married, as discussed in Chapter Six. Kameena was divorced but had remarried and was raped by her ex-husband. Chandhni disclosed to her husband, however their marriage was a love marriage, and she has a strong connection with her partner. Kajal disclosed only after her husband questioned her a year into their marriage. In fact, Kajal's husband had been made aware of her rape before their marriage was arranged, but the two of them had not spoken about it:

> Interviewer: Have you ever talked to him about your abuse?
>
> Kajal: [pause] No I don't think so. I think maybe in the beginning when we were married after a year or so he asked me what happened and I had told him.
>
> Interviewer: How did he react?
>
> Kajal: He did not say anything. He is the opposite of me, he keeps everything inside and says nothing.

Partners often have negative reactions to the rape disclosure of an intimate partner: common responses included victim-blaming, shaming, treating the victim differently and being generally unsupportive (Ullman & Peter-Hagene, 2014; Relyea and Ullman, 2015). In Kajal's case, although her husband initially asked her for details of her rape, when she told him he reacted

with silence, which can broadly be classified as being unsupportive. Kajal explained away his silence as his way of coping with discovering the details of her rape. However, his response is indicative of the silence regarding sexual violence in Indian culture, which further denies women's voices and experiences.

Since none of the other participants disclosed their rape to their husbands, they were not met with negative reactions. Most were willing to state why they did *not* disclose: fear of being blamed or shamed and/or fear of how their husbands would respond. For example:

> *Urmila: I would never tell him. I think he would be very angry with me. I don't know what he will do.*
>
> *-*
>
> *Manju: [shaking her head] No what will I say to him after this many years? No, he will question me so.*
>
> *-*
>
> *Jyoti: I did not tell him. I don't think I would want to tell him.*
>
> *Interviewer: How come?*
>
> *Jyoti: [pause] I don't know. I think I will be ashamed by telling him. I don't think he will also like to know.*

The fear of disclosing rape to an intimate partner can be associated with the stigma and shame of the rape itself. Both stigma and stigmatisation are vital in generally shaping a rape victim's thoughts and behaviour (Kennedy and Prock, 2018). All the study participants who did not disclose to their husbands explained that this was because they believed they would receive negative reactions. This indicates that they anticipated stigma based on prior experience.

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Anticipating stigma is the fear that if the victim tells others about their experience, they may be stigmatised, perceived as inferior and/or held responsible for their rape (Goffman, 1963; Overstreet and Quinn, 2013). This is evident in the above quotations—for example, Manju stated that her husband would 'question' her about her assault. This demonstrates the power of stigma and stigmatisation and its shaping of how rape victims carry the burden of their rape within their relationships in silence.

As examined in Chapter Five, many of the participants experienced the stigma of rape from family members and their community, leading to social ostracisation; thus, they understood the ramifications of what rape disclosure could do to their relationships. Furthermore, rape disclosure may have led to further victimisation, as many of the participants were in unhealthy and violent marriages at the time of their interviews. This, alongside patriarchal beliefs that rape victims are impure and the ways in which the participants may have perceived themselves (such as the believing that they are to blame for their rape) can explain the reluctance to disclose. The institution of marriage is so powerful that the participants feared risking the sanctity of their marriage by disclosing their rape. This illustrates the complexity of forming and constructing relationships in the aftermath of sexual violence.

7.5 Construction of marital rape

This section addresses the issue of marital rape. In India, there is a widespread belief that rape cannot occur within the confines of marriage (Bhat and Ullman, 2014). As a result of such cultural beliefs and misconceptions, many women do not receive support when they are subject to marital rape (Das, 2010). Moreover, many women do not perceive marital rape as rape.

During the interviews, three of the women described experiences of marital rape, although they did not acknowledge their experiences as such. However, the implications of this are that if

marital rape is not identified as rape, women will be less likely to seek help or encourage other victims to do so.

The below quotations demonstrate how marital rape was disclosed during the interviews and the participants' perceptions of marital rape:

> *Interviewer: We were talking about how he abused your daughter before the break, did he also sexually abuse you as well?*
>
> *Meenakshi: [pause] He was always drunk, but I was his wife. It was not the same.*
>
> *-*
>
> *Kameena: He is not a bad guy, it happens sometimes. He does not misbehave with me all the time, it is when he is drunk. Otherwise he is good.*
>
> *Interviewer: He does this when he drinks?*
>
> *Kameena: [pause] It is not like such abuse. It is part of marriage.*

Both Meenakshi and Kameena excused the sexual violence that occurred within their relationships as a normal aspect of marriage. This is not uncommon—often, gendered norms, such as women's submission to their husbands, are an integral part of women's experiences of sexual violence (Burkett and Hamilton, 2012; Nigam, 2015). Women's observation of these types of norms may shape their beliefs about what constitutes sexual violence (Burkett and Hamilton, 2012). Meenakshi specifically differentiated between her husband's sexual abuse of her daughter and his abuse of her, indicating that these acts were distinct from one another based on the victim's relationship to the perpetrator. She was very explicit when defining rape within this context: while the sexual abuse of her daughter was rape, marital rape was not abuse. Similarly, Kameena explicitly stated that marital rape was a part of marriage. Similar to the

discussion above regarding domestic violence, both women suggested that rape was part and parcel of marriage.

Their beliefs are consistent with the *IPC* (as discussed in Chapter One), under which marital rape is legal. Some researchers argue that South Asian women do not always disclose sex offences because they do not believe that this type of assault constitutes rape (Cowburn, Gill and Harrison, 2015). The above-quoted participants seemed to draw on 'real' rape narratives and myths that are dependent upon socio-cultural norms and practices. These narratives, in turn, draw on beliefs that rape is only 'real' when the perpetrator is a stranger (Estrich, 1987). Furthermore, there is also a widespread but erroneous notion that sex is something done to women by men (Gavey, 1992; MacKinnon, 1983). In the context of India, after marriage, men are not required to obtain sexual consent from their wives, as a woman is obliged to have sex with her husband at any time (Kim, 2018). The female body is thus viewed as an object rather than a subject (Bhattacharyya, 2015). Limiting what constitutes rape and who constitutes a 'real' victim serves to reproduce and sustain patriarchal narratives that operate through India's legal and familial institutions.

McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance (2011) refer to accounts such as given by Meenakshi and Kameena as unacknowledged rapes, whereby a woman does not state she has been raped yet describes experiences of forced sexual intercourse. It has been argued that forced sex is common in relationships in patriarchal societies in which men rely on a sense of sexual entitlement over women (Abrahams, Jewkes, Hoffman and Laubsher, 2004). There is a distinct imbalance of power between Indian men and women: the men are often the decision-makers in the home, and part of this decision-making includes managing their wives (Leslie, 2019). For example, who and where she can meet, her dress style, and when, where, and how sex happens are all things

managed by the man in the home. Over time, this management of women's bodies has constructed gendered roles that have become normalised within society. It has also been found in the literature that societies with strong patriarchal beliefs are less likely to perceive intimate partner violence as violence and are more likely to hold women responsible for their abuse as a result of failing to fulfil their marital duties (Tonsing and Tonsing, 2019). Women thus come to accept these types of sexual practices as a normal part of married life. Both Kameena's and Meenakshi's quotations indicate a relationship between their acceptance of marital rape and patriarchal social norms—both women normalised marital rape as a part of marriage because the perpetrator was their spouse.

The above quotations also illustrate how power operates—how it is diffused and embodied in discourse, knowledge, and regimes of truth (Foucault, 1978). The notion that marital rape is not rape because consent is not required has become a regime of truth because that knowledge has been constituted through acceptable institutions such as the law. These 'truths' are a consequence of discourses and institutions that are then often reinforced in greater Indian society. Consequently, these narratives legitimise male power and privilege and simultaneously disempower women by restraining their agency: making sex compulsory in marriage without consent (Mandal, 2014), limiting women's ability to seek justice and thus creating space for further victim-blaming.

7.6 Agency and revictimisation

When examining Dalit women rape victims' relationships post-rape, it is imperative to unpack their agency. At first glance, it may seem that the participants in this study had no agency and were forced to stay in abusive relationships and/or unhappy marriages because of the stigma of rape. However, women's agency while they are managing physical and sexual abuse in the home

is often associated with their attempts to minimise violence and safeguard their children (Meyer, 2016).

Undeniably, the participants faced social and cultural constraints on their agency because of patriarchal societal beliefs and values. However, as detailed in Chapter Five, many of them, upon reflection, argued that being married and/or leaving their village post-rape was better for them—they believed it would allow them to 'forget' their trauma and reconstruct their identity, and this suggests some agency. Similarly, divorce (although not desirable) is said to be more socially accepted in Dalit communities than others (Paik, 2009; Chaudhary, Kunwar and Pal, 2011; Still, 2019). However, though divorce was an option available to all the participants, only Kameena had gone through with it—and she felt unable to leave her second husband due to cultural and social expectations. Conversely, Meenakshi's experience was unique: she was aware she would not be able to divorce her husband because of her family, so she left him:

> *Meenakshi: I don't know. They would talk to him perhaps, but I would have been forced to go back and stay there.*
>
> *Interviewer: Even knowing what he had done to your daughter?*
>
> *Meenakshi: Yes, because my husband would have started causing problems with them then. He would have made us come back. Then who knows what would have happened.*
>
> *Interviewer: Can you explain, why you think they would not have understood? Or made you go back?*
>
> *Meenakshi: I don't know. I then did not even know how to tell my family or anyone what he had done. I could not bring myself to say it and even now it is very difficult. Then what would have happened to my daughter. I was so scared and angry at that time.*

Meenakshi chose to cut ties with her family because she believed that they would force her to return to her husband. She explained that if she had returned to her natal home, her husband would have harassed her and her family, and therefore it was better for her to simply leave on her own. This is not uncommon, as discussed above - divorcing a spouse is often not an option because it is not supported by a woman's natal family (Inman and Rao, 2018). For South Asian women, the social stigma of being divorced or leaving a spouse increases their risk of vulnerability to and tolerance of violence. Despite this violence, South Asian women are reluctant to leave an abusive partner because the institution of marriage is so sacred.

However, even without the support of her family and with limited financial means, Meenakshi left her husband, her home, and her village with her daughter, and they walked away. She had no means of transportation, but they eventually made it to Delhi, where they have resided ever since. She had been saving her own money over the years, keeping it hidden from her husband. Those savings were originally intended for her daughter's wedding, and she was afraid that her husband would spend them on alcohol. She used that money to escape. What stands out here is Meenakshi's courage and her determination to give her daughter a better life. She demonstrated resiliency and agency in deciding to leave her husband. However, her actions may contradict Foucault's assertion that taking care of others should not come before taking care of oneself, as ethically the self takes ontological priority (White, 2014).

From a feminist perspective, a sense of self is established and maintained only when certain kinds of interactions with others are in place (White, 2014). Therefore, ontologically, relationships with others come before the relationship with oneself. This can be said for marginalised groups in particular, such as Dalit women and specifically Dalit mothers. In Meenakshi's case, she endured years of abuse at the hands of her husband but did not leave him

until she found out that he had been sexually abusing her daughter. She put care of her daughter before care for herself, knowing she was taking a risk by leaving. Therefore, it can be argued that the ethics of care for the self in itself highlights patriarchal beliefs. Women have been socialised to be caretakers and to place others first: husband, children, parents, employers, and friends (Nichols, Gringle and Pulliam, 2015; Saigaran and Karupiah, 2020). This is evident in Meenakshi's case and for many others who prioritise their family's needs before their own.

However, Campbell and Mannell (2016) point out that often, in the context of violence against marginalised women in the home, agency is conflated with specific action, such as leaving and/or reporting the violence to the police. Yet this is not always possible, as Dalit women face *multiple* oppressions—social, economic, and cultural—that restrain them from taking such action. Other forms of agency are also frequently overlooked, as they are often implicit. Many women in general negotiate agency in their marriages in other ways, such as by choosing how they respond to violence—for example, with silence. Women may also choose where they will work, how they will raise their children, what to feed their families and so on.

> *Sneh: I tell my daughter that she is to complete her studies. My in-laws and husband tell me that it is a waste of time. But I'm saving little by little so I can keep her in school. He doesn't like that because he wants to spend the money. But I hide it away.*
>
> *-*
>
> *Lakshmi: I buy the food and do the cooking, and I just leave his food for him when he is home. I don't know when he will be home or not. I do everything in our house.*
>
> *-*

Meera: Some days I will take on odd jobs, so I am working later and don't have to see my mother-in-law for so long. She does not say much because I am bringing in money but inside she does not like it.

Agency is frequently exercised in small and everyday forms that are not obvious (Sehlikoglu, 2018; Enns, Diaz and Bryant-Davis, 2020). Similarly, the ways in which the participants in this study practised agency were often implicit and hard to see, particularly from an outsider perspective. The women described subtle ways of making their own decisions, despite knowing that this was frowned upon. For example, Sneh and Meera practised agency by navigating the beliefs of their husbands and in-laws. Sneh described negotiating education for her daughter despite financial constraints, strategising how to save money for this purpose by hiding it from her husband so that he would not spend it. During a break in the interview, Sneh shared high hopes of her daughter becoming a teacher or a doctor—she did not want her daughter to live the life that she had been forced to live. Sneh said that she would do everything in her power to realise this desire.

Dalit women's subjectivities are more complex than those of upper caste women; it is their struggle against victimhood and vulnerability that shapes their agency (Paik, 2018). Sneh recognised and reflected on her struggles—she wanted to evoke change in her daughter's life, which was a form of purposive action. Thus, Dalit women's actions and practice of agency are not always an extension of the self but is part of the larger Dalit community (Paik, 2018). Conversely, Lakshmi was already making the majority of decisions in her everyday life because her husband was often not at home. But all three of the above quotations illustrate the challenges Dalit women face in the context of their multiple, intersecting identities—Dalit, woman, wife,

mother, daughter, daughter-in-law, employee—and the everyday actions they take to make space for themselves and their children.

Paik (2018) argues that Dalit women reconstruct their own subjectivities by employing a 'technology of the self' that includes their respective communities. Sneh, Lakshmi and Meera adopted various techniques, such as taking on new jobs to limit the time they had to spend with abusive family members, making choices for their household, or discreetly saving money to ensure their children could attend school and transform their lives for the better. These strategies simultaneously challenged both Brahmanical and Dalit patriarchy, highlighting that when these women were speaking to their sense of self, they were not being submissive to men, in-laws or even the upper caste. Rather, they were challenging, contesting, resisting, and negotiating agency in different ways that served them and their families. While the process of socialisation is complex, these participants made space for transformation of the self and of their children using different technologies of the self (Foucault, 1997).

In the context of abusive marriage, some of the participants used a number of strategies to resist and contest their abuse, including avoidance, silence and/or seeking support from family members. For example:

> *Priya: He is good to me mostly. If I know he has been drinking. I go to sleep early then so I don't have to talk with him.*

> *-*

> *Malika: I said to him I don't want to listen him and I went to my mother-in-law and told her of what he was doing to me. My brother-in-law will take him at times for the night if he is behaving very badly.*

-

> *Kameena: I hit him back and tell him I can leave anytime. But I won't do it. I just say to him*
> *because I get angry why he is hurting me. He does think for some time 'will she leave me'?*

These participants had different ways of articulating resistance that they had produced and reproduced over the course of a history of trauma within their material, cultural and maternal contexts. All the participants illustrated how they negotiated, strategised, and took critical action to transform their relationships of abuse into more liveable partnerships. Critical action here refers to either an individual or collective action that is taken to effect social change (Cannizzo, 2021). For example, Malika sought support from her in-laws when she could not manage her husband's drinking and abuse on her own. Kameena physically fought her husband back and used tactics such as threatening to leave him in the hope that he would stop. Priya used avoidance to resist abuse from her husband by going to bed early. Each of these women deployed different tactics to manage their abuse, and this illustrates that their agency was based on their location within both Dalit and Brahmanical patriarchal arrangements of power (Sen, 2017). It is challenging to understand women's agency, particularly when they are managing domestic and sexual abuse in the home. As discussed in Chapter Three, Dalit women must navigate both patriarchal culture and multiple oppressions (Arya, 2020), and through their experiences they find different ways to construct and reconstruct new and existing relationships. Each of these techniques, while subtle, is produced by the self to transform that self and obtain a state of security (Foucault, 1997). This indicates that to understand Dalit women's needs and the structures of marginalisation and oppression to which they are subject, it is necessary to unpack Dalit women's agency in its *multiple forms* as opposed to *only* examining the constraints that they face and the freedoms they enjoy (Rao, 2015).

7.7 Negotiating respectability

Dalit women are located as the subaltern (Chakraborty, 2016; Choudhary, 2018) in every social context because of their intersecting identities, and therefore they must manage and strategise social structures differently, compared with women from other castes (Choudhary, 2018). This section explores the various ways in which Dalit women must negotiate *respectability* in modern Indian society.

The participants were forthright regarding what made them different from others both inside and outside their communities. Often, they had to strategise and negotiate respectability in various ways because of patriarchal structures of gender and social structures of caste and class in Indian society:

> *Anju: We work harder than anyone else. Even so, as a woman, because we are poor, we have to be careful not look at them in the eye, because they think we are being so bold. I keep my eyes down while I'm working.*

> *Interviewer: Looking at someone is being bold?*

> *Anju: I don't know how to explain. If I look at them they think I am going to do something bad to them because I am poor. I work hard and they know this and tell me they have high thoughts of me because I don't get involved with them so much.*

> *-*

> *Lakshmi: She wanted me to clean her toilets. I said to her no—I will clean your house. But I will not do the toilets. We are not doing that no, they think that because we are poor that we will do anything for them. But I have some standards and even so now most of us refuse to clean toilets. We won't do that.*

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Meenakshi: I tell my daughter to keep herself tidy and looking clean when she is at work. She works in a beauty salon and many high-fi [upper class] women come to her. If she keeps herself presentable then they will not say anything negative. Sometimes they are looking for something to complain on and first thing they will complain on is appearance.

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Kameena: He knows what has happened to me and uses that as an excuse to say things when he is mad with me. It hurts me when he does this but I don't show him my feelings. I show him I don't care.

These participants articulated how they navigated and negotiated their gender, caste and class positions within society and the home. However, with the exception of Kameena, they also highlighted the way in which caste power was reproduced when they managed their own behaviour (Chakravarti, 2012)—for example, Anju stated that she did not look her upper caste employer in the eye. Rao (2017) argues that caste is produced by sexual regulation, wherein the caste system is sustained by regulating women's bodies. But it also seems that the women in this study were contesting, resisting, and negotiating the concept of respectability. For example, Lakshmi refused to clean toilets, a job traditionally reserved for Dalits because they were constructed as polluted and impure (Thorat and Joshi, 2015; Sharma, 2017). Thus, she was not only contesting her caste position but was simultaneously negotiating respectability.

Similarly, Meenakshi expressed the notion that respectability for Dalit women could be obtained through dress and overall hygiene, countering the stereotype of Dalit women being 'dirty' and 'polluted'. Both Lakshmi and Meenakshi appeared to be trying to negotiate for the respect of the upper caste by contesting and negating gendered caste stereotypes. These stereotypes portray

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women in Dalit communities as transgressive agents who are further restricted and managed in terms of their moral authority and taught the body politics of modesty and respectability through mannerism, hygiene, and clothing (Paik, 2014). Therefore, Dalit girls and women must navigate and manage themselves differently to obtain respectability.

Srinivas (1978) called this process 'Sanskritization', wherein lower caste people will reconstruct practices, beliefs, customs, and their way of life to emulate the upper caste. Similarly, Still (2011) contends that the concept of respectability was never traditionally associated with Dalit women and that the performance of respectability is a strategy Dalit women use to obtain a life of self-respect. Similarly, Phadke et al. (2009) posit that Dalit women 'manufacture' respectability by dressing a certain way or not laughing too loud so as to be perceived as 'docile'. That is, they perform upper caste–like practices to obtain the respect of the upper caste (Twamley and Sidharth, 2019). However, it can also be argued that Dalit women are not simply mimicking upper caste traditions and practices but are asserting their distinct politicised identity. This is evident in Lakshmi's statement that Dalit women will longer clean toilets, which suggests that these women are setting boundaries and developing their own 'politics of culture' (Still, 2017).

Summary

This chapter began by explaining how Dalit women are socialised to become 'good' wives—this is particularly salient for rape victims, as their experience of rape is compounded by socially constructed and gendered expectations of women that operate through both Dalit and Brahmanical patriarchy. These narratives of what a 'good' wife does and how this serves the institution of marriage is constructed in a specific way in the context of India, privileging male experience and power (Garrity-Bond, 2018). Consequently, this affects the way in which

marriage is constructed for Dalit female rape victims—they are made to feel obliged to their husbands because they are 'lucky' to be married given their stigmatised identity. This locates rape victims in vulnerable positions, restraining their voices and actions and compelling them to stay in abusive relationships.

Next, the chapter examined how the participants' experiences of rape affected their marriage. It revealed that some of the participants who were uncomfortable with intimacy were nevertheless compelled to have sex with their husbands, as they believed it was their duty. However, this was not classified as 'marital rape' per se by the participants themselves, as the women were not coerced or forced into having sex. Their husbands were primarily unaware of their feelings because the women did not disclose their rape—they were reluctant to do so because they were anticipating a negative reaction from their spouses. Three of the participants were revictimised through experiences of marital rape, but none acknowledged this forced sex with their husbands as rape. This is because there is a belief that rape cannot occur within the boundaries of marriage in Indian society (Bhat and Ullman, 2014), and this is codified in law under *IPC 375*. As a consequence, many women are victims of marital rape and do not receive support (Das, 2010).

However, despite the challenges the Dalit participants faced in their everyday lives, they also drew attention to the various ways in which they practised and negotiated agency. This demonstrates that Dalit women are not the silent, submissive females that others may perceive them out to be. Rather, their intersecting identities of caste, class and gender have shaped them into empowered and resilient women who are not submissive to their partners, families and/or the upper caste. They are creative and can negotiate space for themselves and a future for their children by setting boundaries and transforming the Dalit identity.

Chapter Eight
Discussion and Summary

This final chapter begins with a discussion of the four predominant themes identified in the previous chapters—shame, izzat, silence and the institution of marriage—and their implications for female Dalit rape victims in the context of their family, their community and the state. The chapter also highlights the substantive and original contributions this thesis makes to knowledge about understanding Dalit women's identities from an intersectional framework. In addition, offers new insights into methodological contributions to knowledge about ethical practices of transnational researchers. It then reflects on researcher positionality and performativity in the field and how this shaped the production of data and the knowledge generated with the research participants. It also highlights the original methodological contributions this research makes to knowledge. Finally, the chapter addresses the limitations of the research and proposes recommendations for policy and the prevention of sexual violence against Dalit women.

8.1 Predominant themes: Shame, honour, silence and the marriageability of rape victims, and substantive contributions to knowledge

This research has examined the experiences of Dalit women rape victims in the context of their family and community and the state. It aimed to investigate how Dalit women rape victims articulate their experiences of sexual violence; to examine how these women's construction of the 'self' was created in relation to their caste, class, and gender; and to analyse the relationships and/or disconnect between the women's experiences and the response of their family, community, and the state. The research has identified four predominant themes—shame, honour, silence, and marriageability—that emerged as result of the above aims.

In Chapter One, these four themes were identified by examining various sexual violence laws and reforms in India. Some of these laws not only restrict women's subjectivity but also restrain women's ability to live within patriarchal structures. For example, Indian society places a high value on female *virginity*, which is used as a tool to regulate female bodies through discourses of shame, honour, and purity (Dey, 2018); this sustains patriarchal power. This is evidenced by the exception of marital rape made under the *IPCs. 375* definition of female rape, which objectifies women as the sexualised property of men—their value is derived from their virginity, which indicates the difference between an 'honourable' and an 'unhonourable' victim (Pathak, 2016). This chapter also highlighted the targeted violence committed against women's bodies during partition, when the recovery practices normalised the female embodied experiences of nationalism (Menon and Bhasin, 1998; Butalia, 2000; Saint, 2020). Women's bodies thus became the symbolic sites of male, national, community and family honour (Chakraborty, 2014; Tejero-Navarro, 2019). Consequently, women's experiences of violence during partition were often silenced or muted (Menon and Bhasin, 1998; Mookerjea-Leaonard, 2014) in order to suppress the trauma within their bodies and to reconstruct their experiences—that is, to construct new identities and positions for these women within their family and community and the state (Pandey, 2001; Saint, 2020). For example, many women were subjected to violence upon returning home to deconstruct their newly acquired identities after converting religions, marrying enemy men and producing children (Dey, 2018). Wherein pregnant women were forced to abort, women who had become mothers were forced to leave their children in Pakistan and many women were forced into arranged marriages (Tejero-Navarro, 2019). Silencing violence post-partition functioned to 'other' the women who survived the violence inflicted upon them (Nagappan, 2011).

Chapter Two examined the Hindu caste system, explaining how this system manages various social institutions, such as marriage and the family. The caste system has also produced the social construction of the Dalit, and the government of the Hindu caste system has been sustained through discourses of purity and pollution (Muthukkaruppan, 2017; Bapuji, 2020). These discourses separate and socially elevate those who are considered as pure. Constructing Dalits as polluted has introduced other negative connotations of *shame* attached to the Dalit body (Paik, 2017). These connotations operate as tools of power that substantiate various cultural practices, such as endogamy, that also reproduce a homogenised system of power (Abraham, 2014).

By identifiying the history and the complexity of Dalit identity(ies), Chapter Two also highlighted the collective historical struggle of subjugation and oppression that Dalits face in India. It also exemplified the collective history of resistance, confrontation and contestation of casteism and its subjugation. For example, the Ambedkar movement's rejection of Hinduism through mass religious conversion from Hinduism to Budhhism was used by many Dalits as a strategic tool of resistance to deconstruct the caste system (Ghadage, 2020).

Chapter Three explored Dalit feminism, revealing how Dalit women's experiences are often silenced and/or muted within both the Dalit culture and the women's movement in India. This points towards the need for, and the necessity of, Dalit intersectionality that centralises Dalit experiences around the intersection of caste with their various other identities (Senanayake and Trigunayat, 2020). Dalit feminists argue that Dalit women face double patriarchy—Dalit patriarchy and Brahmanical patriarchy—in that they are doubly oppressed by upper caste men and by Dalit men (Pawar, 2015).

Chapter Three also examined the misrepresentation of Dalit women's need to find work outside the home due to financial constraints. It detailed how Dalit women are perceived as having more 'freedom' and/or being part of more 'democratic' families compared with upper caste women (Paik, 2016). However, what is often ignored by this romanticised notion of 'freedom' is that it comes at a price. It has been noted that child marriage is considered customary or traditional for many Dalit girls, as Dalit parents cannot 'protect' their daughters from rape if they are working outside the home (Torri, 2009; Irudayam, Mangubhai and Lee, 2011). Therefore, the assumption that Dalit families are more 'democratic' fails to recognise that work is a necessity for them (Rao, 2015), and alongside that necessity of work make these other forms of abuse both inside and outside the home more likely (Diwakar, 2020; Vandana, 2020). This circumvents the twin notions that Dalit women have more 'freedom' and live in more 'democratic' families (Paik, 2016).

Chapter Four described and explained the epistemological and ontological assumptions that underpin this research thesis: intersectionality, feminist theory, social constructionism and CDA. It also explained the qualitative research methods that were employed for data production: participant observation, focus groups and semi-structured interviews. And explained the qualitative research methods that were employed for data production: participant observation, focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The employment of CDA alongside with the qualitative research methods created space to recognise silences when participants were articulating their experiences. As the researcher, I was informed of the way in which silence and space are needed for participants who are sharing sensitive experiences of sexual violence. The chapter also explained the ontological and epistemological assumptions of this thesis: the research assumes a relativist position and acknowledges that we understand our world through

socially constructed discourses. However, ontologically, it reflects realism because our social constructions and interpretations of the social world are also based on some aspects of a structured reality (Rutten, 2019). Finally, Chapter Four outlined the fieldwork and recruitment process, identifying the gatekeepers to whom I was connected through the various NGOs with whom I was working.

Chapter Five identified four themes that emerged when the Dalit women articulated their experience of rape. All the participants demonstrated clear discomfort when talking about their rape, and none named it directly as a form of violence. Instead, they used words such as 'izzat,' 'my problem' and 'husband–wife relations'. These word choices indicate the shame and stigma a connection between sexual violence and marriage. The participants thus placed the responsibility for the rape on themselves, with their main concern being the implications that the rape would have for their izzat and future marriageability.

Consequently, this constructed a culture of silence and the censoring of talk about sex and sexual violence. This was further evidenced by many of the elder NGO staff and participants, who responded by stating '*Ladkiya aisi baate nahi karti hain*' *(*girls don't speak about that) when they discovered what I was researching. This demonstrates the discursive associations between sexual embodiment and shame that, in turn, produce secrecy and a culture of silence (Ussher, Perz, Metusela, Hawkey, Morrow, Narchal and Estoesta, 2017). Many of the participants described several different ways in which their experiences were silenced by family members either speaking on their behalf, urging them to be quiet and/or ignoring them. Moreover, the police were complicit in silencing Dalit women's experiences through different mechanisms, such as not believing them and/or reproducing their accounts with new narratives that misrepresented the women as vengeful because of their intersecting identities of caste, class and gender and thus

discrediting them as legitimate victims. The rape of these Dalit women was thus not perceived as 'real' rape (Venema, 2016; Gravelin, Biernat and Bucher, 2019; Dey, 2019). However, many of the participants used silence as a form of agency and resistance against sexual violence. For example, participant Shahei shared a story of a previous employer who had been sexually abusing Dalit women housecleaners and collectively the Dalit women devised a strategy to no longer work for the man using silence as their tool. Because they were unable to vocally deny the upper-caste man and his wife, they ignored their pleas for someone to come clean their home and consequently manage to keep themselves safe from sexual abuse. This illustrating the way in which silence is utilized in place of voice as a mechanism of power (Wagner, 2012).

Chapter Six connected these four themes to the different ways in which the women spoke about and constructed *the self*. This chapter explored the women's experiences post-sexual violence and the different ways their families and communities responded to their rape shaped their social and political world. Many of the participants were dehumanised, excluded from, and ostracised by their family and their community. This is strongly reminiscent of the sexual violence Indian women experienced during the post-partition recovery mission (Menon and Bhasin, 1998; Mookerjea-Leaonard, 2014; Saint, 2020). This chapter also identified that within a year of their rape, all the participants were either married or sent away by their families to live with relatives in an attempt to manage humiliation and retain honour. These disciplinary practices reveal the different ways in which the stigma of sexual violence objectifies the female body and reinforces patriarchal beliefs such as 'purity'.

A consequence of these disciplinary practices and the women's experience of rape is the various ways in which the women constructed the self. One of the significant findings of this chapter, and a substantive contribution to the knowledge, is how the participants *chose* to identify *as*

victims when asked how they wanted to be identified in the research. This contradicts the popular Western use of the term 'survivor' for those who have been raped—this term is understood to be more empowering and supportive of recovery, resistance, and agency (Papendick and Bohner, 2017). But the participants in this research centralised their victimhood around their suffering, wherein they saw their suffering as interconnected with their intersectional identities. Yet they also displayed actions of survivorship—for example, one participant, Kameena, challenged her abuser's friend when he attempted to coax her. This contradiction can be explained by the notion of counter-conduct, wherein women actively participate in purposive resistance strategies to empower themselves when they are identified as victims (Paik, 2018). Thus, this research uncovers and contests the dominant narratives that represent Dalit women as silently suffering victims (Gupta, 2016). The participants were using their 'voice' and their experiences of 'suffering' as political tools of transformation to raise political consciousness (Anandhi and Kapadia, 2017).

Chapter Seven detailed how the four themes of shame, honour, silence, and marriage were evident in how the women constructed the self post-rape in the context of marriage and their roles as wife and mother. It has been argued that in India young girls' socialisation is heavily anchored in retaining family honour, and this honour depends on their behaviour (Basu, Zuo, Lou, Acharya and Lundgren, 2017). All the participants described the differences between how Dalit boys and Dalit girls are raised. All girls are socialised by shaping their identities into the roles of wife, mother, and daughter-in-law from a young age (Lundgren, 2015). The participants identified that their mothers were the primary teachers of these patriarchal practices. This indicates that women's bodies are managed and regulated *by other women* through patriarchal discourses that are rooted in locating women in the private sphere of the family home (Ghosh,

2021). The consequence of such discourses, when they are intersected with the stigma of rape, make women more vulnerable and susceptible to abuse. For example, some of the participants described being physically and/or sexually abused by their husbands. However, they felt confined to their marriage because of the shame of rape, which was connected to how they were raised: to believe that it is a woman's marital duty to tolerate such abuse.

These patriarchal duties were so deep-seated that many of the participants did not perceive sexual abuse within marriage as abuse, which highlights the process of self-regulation. It also reveals the misguided nature of their belief that taking part in an arranged marriage after rape would transform their identities and shed the stigma of rape through their 'moving on' and/or away from their village. The notion that they could eradicate their experience of rape and construct new identities, such as wife or mother, was unfounded because they carried the stigma of shame into their marriage. And that stigma placed them at risk of being more susceptible to abuse. Their rape was used against them (either by themselves, by others or both) as a mechanism of disciplinary power that operated to regulate and manage them into complicity. This demonstrates how both stigma and stigmatisation play a role in shaping the perceptions and conduct of rape victims (Kennedy and Prock, 2018).

These findings demonstrate how the women's families and communities, and the state were drawing on cultural practices, norms and beliefs that often were rooted in rape myths that produced feelings of shame and self-blame. This not only *oppresses* Dalit women but is also *reproduced* by Dalit women. As all three empirical chapters show, the participants often pointed to their mothers as the ones who advised them to remain silent about their abuse (Chapter Five), prepared them for marriage (Chapter Seven) and arranged their marriage post-rape (Chapter Six).

This exposes how women internalise and reproduce patriarchal beliefs—over time, they became normalised practices.

However, it should be made clear that these same mechanisms of discipline and regulation also shaped the agency that made space for the participants' transformation, with the very sites of victimhood transformed into bodies of resistance (Kannabiran, 2006). This highlights the substantive contribution this research makes to knowledge: that Dalit women's identities are complex, and these women are shaped by their experiences in the context of their family and community and the state and by their intersecting identities of gender, caste, and class.

8.2 Transnational researchers' performativity in the field, positionality, and reflexivity

The research sought to analyse how the experiences of female Dalit rape victims were shaped by India's sexual violence discourses in the context of the women's family and community and the state. And as discussed in Chapter Four, the knowledge produced from this thesis is understood to have been *co-produced* by the researcher and participants. This is important to identify, particularly for Dalit women—historically, Dalit women's experiences and voices have been silenced (Mukhopadhyay, 2018). Moreover, as examined in Chapter Five, the stigma and shame connected to rape and the intersecting identities of gender, caste, and class these women have encountered in their life means they have been further subjected to silence. Because I was a transnational researcher from the West researching in the East, this raised the question of whether knowledge could be co-produced—although I am female and of Indian ethnicity, my lived experiences are very different to those of the study participants. Thus, choosing a theoretical framework that would allow both researcher and participants to develop knowledge from a shared 'reality' was imperative (Harding, 2020). However, as also mentioned in Chapter

Four, two important reflections that need further discussion to answer the above question are as follows: How and where do *researchers* such as myself fit within these broad categories of Eastern and Western feminism? And how does this impact traditional ways of understanding researcher positionality?

As a feminist researcher, these were important questions for me to reflect on. Without a doubt, I do question, and constantly reflect on, my positionality as a Western researcher researching women in the East. I have read countless postcolonial critiques examining how researcher identity and positionality might shape research ethics, theoretical frameworks, research methods and the interpretation of identity politics (Spivak, 1992; Bhattacharya, 2007; Darder and Griffiths, 2018; Sharma and Kumar, 2020). I have also read substantial evidence suggesting that when researchers and participants are ethnically matched, participants may open up more and disclose more information, therefore producing a more comprehensive understanding of the data (Bhopal, 2010). However, in the context of this study, it was not enough to focus on the commonalities between researcher and participants because our lived experiences were so different that we did not have that much in common at all. As I entered the field, I came to understand that very little could have prepared me for knowing how to balance the identity politics that would arise through the performativity of everyday customary practices. Moreover, I realised the substantial need to examine participants' construction of the transnational researcher.

Feminist researchers, particularly those from the West, spend an enormous amount of time focusing on our privilege (rightfully so) and how we may affect participants in terms of representation and ethics and how they operate in the context of the research. However, there is a lack of consideration on the part of western researchers and institutions regarding how researchers such as myself are constructed by participants and what impact that may have on the

knowledge being produced (Cho and Yi, 2019). Focusing on similarities of ethnicity and gender can mislead researchers into thinking that we will be perceived as 'insiders'. In fact, I would argue that it is even *more* challenging being a transnational Western researcher with similar ethnicity to the participants and that it requires even *more* reflexivity because it carries another layer of privilege.

During data production, I reviewed the interview transcripts with the participants to ensure that I had recorded their thoughts accurately. During all face-to-face interactions with participants, I was conscious of my dress and mannerisms and found different ways to negotiate my intersecting identities in a respectful way—for example, when I undertook my first field visit into the Delhi *jugghis*. This was a challenge for me, as I am a germaphobe and have always carried hand sanitiser with me, even before the days of Covid-19. As I walked past a mountainous pile of trash to reach the *jugghis*, there were flies swarming around, and the pungent smell of garbage sent a shiver down my spine that cannot be captured in words. However, I was also very aware that I was being observed, and I did my best to act as though the trash had no effect on me. It was very much a performance, as on the inside I wanted to swat the flies away, cover my nose, and turn around and shout to the autorickshaw to not leave me there.

Interestingly, the autorickshaw driver who had brought me to the jhuggi was very hesitant to take me there. When I gave him the address, which was written on a piece of paper, he initially said nothing, but as we reached the area, he appeared convinced that he had brought me to the wrong address. I noticed him staring at the paper and then circling the block. He stopped several other rickshaw drivers and had them look at the address before even consulting me about where I was going. Then he proceeded to tell me that I had the wrong address, and he nearly convinced me.

He had me call my contact and then he asked to speak to her; she told him where I was going. After hanging up, he turned to me and said, 'I don't want to go there'. He then refused to drive me, which meant I had to call my contact again so she could talk to the driver once more. The driver then very reluctantly drove me to the jhuggi, all the while shaking his head and repeatedly saying, 'You shouldn't go there. Who told you that you should go there?' He waited for me outside until someone came out to greet me and then he yelled to them, asking if he should stay.

There were also several occasions during the fieldwork phase of the research when I was offered tea, water, or juice, which is a customary way of welcoming someone into your home in India. But I am a Westerner with an extremely weak stomach and had been taught, ever since I was a youngster travelling to India with my parents, that I was to drink only bottled water and not to eat outside our home. Yet here I was sitting in the jhuggi and being offered a beverage in a tiny, dusty plastic cup. I was very hesitant, worrying that it would upset my stomach, but I politely accepted. In fact, I would always drink the customary tea or beverage that I was offered because I did not want to disrespect anyone and have them think that I was rejecting the beverage due to my nationality, caste, or class position. That is, I was very conscious of my researcher identity as an upper caste female from the West and how my intersecting identities privileged me in many ways.

One interaction in particular, with the coordinator of the CC NGO, made me reflect on my Western identity. Several NGOs in New Delhi have started creating sex-education programs for young women as a tool to foster gender equality (Gabler, 2012; Ismail, Shajahan, Sathyanarayana Rao and Wylie, 2015). This was also the case for the CC NGO with whom I was working. After my two months of observation and teaching English, the program coordinator asked if I would teach a sexual harassment course, which included a number of elements that

would part of the aforementioned sex-education programs. The course emphasised what the coordinator referred to as 'good touch' and 'bad touch' and described what to do if someone touched you inappropriately.

The participants ranged in age from 21 to 47, and many were married. But the course content was reminiscent of one I was taught in kindergarten (where the children were age five) in Canada. I was surprised by what the coordinator was asking me to include in this course and asked if it was too 'basic' for women of this age. I was told that these women would never have been taught sex education and what to do if someone harassed them. Furthermore, the NGO, never having taught such a course before, thought I would be a good fit to teach the course for several reasons, including the fact that I had become comfortable working with the women and that I was undertaking research on sexual violence. The final reason is one I continue to reflect on: I was a Westerner, and this type of 'behaviour' was normal *over there* and therefore would be easier for me to teach. When I asked the coordinator what she meant by that, she explained that by 'normal behaviour' she was not referring to sexual violence but rather to sex—talking about sexuality and promiscuity.

As an Indo-Canadian woman, this was news to me—I grew up culturally Sikh, and even in Canada, discussions about sex, let alone expressing sexuality, certainly did not happen in my household. Conversely, sex education at school was taught to students from the ages of five to 16. Yet I was *not* comfortable speaking about sex or about expressing sexuality, let alone promiscuity. Therefore, there was a disconnect between the way I was being perceived in India—because I was from the West—and how I saw myself.

Reflecting on this interaction, I noted that it was similar to the way in which the Indian government officials speak negatively about Western influence on Indian youth. For example, on

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New Year's Eve 2017 in Bengaluru, India, there was a mass molestation of women by men. The state's official response was that 'Western' influence caused the molestation incident because of the way the women were dressed and because they were out late at night (Hindustan Times, 2017). The Samajwadi Party's Maharashtra Unit Chief Abu Azmi stated that 'Partying late night in half attire, blindly following western culture, has never been our culture' and that 'When a few women in half dress come out on streets at late night with their friends, such incidents do occur' (Hindustan Times, 2017).

While the coordinator of the CC NGO did not state that my Western influence would have a negative impact on my teaching, this was implied, and it fed into similar narratives that Western culture is more provocative—such as the coordinator associating my Western identity with being more sexual. In the Indian context, all Western women are sexualised and misrepresented as overtly sexual, as evidenced by Bollywood movies and music videos in which white women are often portrayed as highly sexual and are frequently scantily dressed in mini-skirts and/or drinking alcohol (Webb, 2016; Delaney-Bhattacharya, 2019).

I had other, similar experiences during my research. I was often referred to as '*Angrazee*' (English), '*firangi*' (foreigner) or '*ghoree*' (white woman). There was one boy who studied at the AA NGO whom I would see every day, but we never spoke with one another. Each afternoon when he would get on the autorickshaw to go home, he would yell out 'Bye, Angrazee'. Many of the participants, and others within the various Dalit communities, commented on my marital status. Many were shocked that I was a woman in her thirties who was single, had no children and was travelling alone. Several of the elderly Dalit women pointed out that by the time they were my age, they were already grandmothers. Many participants were also concerned with how my parents felt about my single and childless status. While in part I could relate to this, telling

them that my mother *was* concerned, I also explained that in Canada, getting married in your thirties and having children later are quite normal. This indicates that while my ethnicity may have helped to get me 'in' and relate to the participants in some ways, I was still very much an outsider.

In other instances, I observed that women within the various Dalit communities would ask me for advice or general information on fashion, business ideas and, more importantly, medical or legal advice. In one instance, while I was visiting one of the jhuggis, an elderly woman summoned the *firangi* to her place to see if I could check her blood sugar levels because she was feeling 'weak'.

Each time I was asked for this sort of guidance, I would have to remind those asking that I did not have that type of knowledge, and nor was I in a position to offer such advice. It is important to reflect on these experiences because Eurocentrism has produced the 'othering' of those in the East and has constructed binary ways of knowing the world from a European and/or Western perspective, which often constructs the West as superior (Burney, 2012). As can be seen from the above examples, some of the participants, and others within the community, perceived me via these binaries, constructed perceptions and ways of 'knowing' the West.

Reflecting on these experiences compelled me to consider what impact my Western presence had on both the participants and the data production. Often, the women and children would touch my hair and comment on my fair skin colour; I thus became acutely aware of the different shades of brown and the fact that the women were all a darker shade of brown than myself. I also observed, after a few weeks of working at the CC NGO, that some of the younger women began changing the way they dressed, putting on more makeup and even braiding their hair in a similar way to mine (a side French braid). I was told by one of the NGO employees that this was because the

women looked up to me and were trying to emulate me. I questioned how I had become a role model in such a short time and, more importantly, why me? I struggled with how I was being constructed by the participants to the extent that they wanted to model themselves after me.

What made this more complex was that I do not identify, and nor have I ever been identified by others, as 'white' in Canada or while studying in the United Kingdom. In the West, I have always been identified as 'Indian' or 'Indo-Canadian' and have always been considered 'brown', and I have encountered and confronted racism in various ways throughout my life. I have been referred to by derogatory words such as 'Paki', 'Hindu', 'rag-head', 'shit-skin' and more. This demonstrates how the perceptions of skin colour shift on different continents and how researchers can hold several (and shifting) identities (Milligan, 2016). I found this challenging because I had assumed that I could draw on my 'shared' social identities of being a woman and being 'Indian'. However, I was constructed with imperialist powers and was unprepared for it. This construction is problematic for me as a transnational researcher exploring sexual violence in the East: it is unclear what influence my identity and positionality had on the participants and vice versa as well as on the data production and analysis. This raises questions about how colonial discourses shape a researcher's identity, positionality, and research practice (Mangat, 2018). It has often been suggested that a white researcher's research is veiled in white methodologies and examinations—they ask 'white questions' that privilege and normalise their own positionality (Carrington, 2008). However, I argue that there are similar consequences for transnational researchers of similar ethnicities to their participants because their 'body'—skin colour, hair, dress, and accent—locates them in the place where those perceptions are first constructed: the West.

It appeared that my nationality, the colour of my skin, the way I dressed, my gender (a female, and one travelling alone to another country), my marital status (single) and my accent shaped the way in which I was perceived and consequently gave me intrigue, authoritativeness, wealth, and a sense of beauty and power—that is, I was embodying *imperialism*. And this is why, as a Western feminist researcher, it is important to acknowledge and reflect on the genealogies of decoloniality and to analyse how imperialist power structures may reproduce Eurocentric hegemonies (Tlostanova, Thapar-Björkert and Knobblock, 2019) in the context of data production and analysis. It is important to acknowledge the differences between me and the participants to remove ambiguity because these differences shaped the way the data were produced and interpreted.

From a social constructionist epistemological approach, the mere interaction between researcher and participant constructs and produces 'shared' knowledge (Campanario and Yost, 2017). Some argue that researchers can use different techniques to facilitate the co-construction of knowledge, such as photo-linked interviews (Milligan, 2016). In this research, I reviewed the transcripts with the participants, paraphrased during the interviews to ensure that I was understanding them correctly, and gave the opportunity to edit, change or add to their interviews.

Conversely, I argue that while these techniques enable the researcher to make choices in their research design and positioning to shift relationships within the field (Milligan, 2016), the question that still remains is whether using reflexivity techniques is enough to allow co-contribution to take place—ultimately, the way the research is interpreted and presented lies with the researcher. Moreover, while the researcher may be practising reflexivity and reflecting on their own positionality and how they believe they are being perceived by the participants, the participants are not required to do this; therefore, the relationship between researcher and

participants and how it is being impacted by this relationship remains unknown. Very little research has examined how transnational researchers negotiate their identities during the research process, or how their identities influence knowledge production (Cho and Yi, 2019).

What may be beneficial is for researchers to identify and reflect on their positionality and power *with* participants and to engage in what I would call 'co-reflexivity' practices. If the research is being identified as a co-contribution of knowledge, this may require the participants to also engage in some reflexivity—for example, engaging in a discussion of researcher–participant positionality and power *with participants* before and after the interviews. This would require more time, as it is important for participants to be able to think about their positionality and to practice it through a follow-up interview to see if any of their responses have changed and/or if they want to add/edit anything.

While I have identified a way for researchers to practice reflexivity that may be beneficial to qualitative research, it requires further research to determine how it can be implemented and practised and how co-reflexivity can shape knowledge production. Thus, the methodological contribution of this thesis is to offer insights into the challenges facing transnational researchers producing research in the East and to suggest how we can (un)learn Eurocentric and Western feminist methodological practices and recognise and address our privilege, positionality and power while producing knowledge. This would yield different opportunities to practise reflexivity with participants in order to uphold co-production of knowledge.

i.   Are transnational researchers imposing Western research ethical practices in the East?

This section examines Western ethical research practices that research students must implement while in the field in Eastern countries with differing cultural and social practices and economic inequalities. It first addresses western universities in general requirement of seeking written consent from participants.

As discussed in Chapter Four, obtaining consent in India was challenging. In some instances, participants were reluctant to sign the consent form; some refused, and others may have signed because of the relationship they had formed with me and their belief that they could 'trust' me. As a feminist researcher, this does not sit well with me. Drawing on postcolonial feminist critique, I question whether Western researchers are imposing Western ethical practices on Eastern participants. Jonsen (1978) referred to the term *ethical imperialism* to denote the imposition of one's disciplinary regulations onto another (as cited in Schrag, 2010). As discussed in the previous section, as a transnational researcher, I was embodying imperialism through my physical body, accent, education, and other qualities. The natural question to ask next was how this shaped the research practice.

The signing of consent forms for this project raised both ethical and moral dilemmas. First, it led me to question whether my active presence as a transnational researcher contributed to why the participants signed the forms. How could the participants trust someone they did not really know? As a feminist researcher, that was a heavy burden to carry. Conversely, I also felt uncomfortable with the notion that the participants may not have been comfortable with signing but did so anyways because they wanted to take part in the interview.

Most of the participants questioned why a signature was required and why they could not just give verbal consent. I explained to them that the purpose of the consent form was to protect both them and me. According to Canadian Research Ethics Tri-Council Policy (2018), when a participant signs a form, they demonstrate consent. The signature operates as a form of evidence that consent was demonstrated (Xu, Baysari, Stocker, Leow, Day and Carland, 2020). The participants would also be protected because a consent form acts as vessel that formally acknowledges their protection through, for example, anonymity (Xu, et al., 2020).

What makes this more complex is that many Dalits harbour a general distrust of authority, as they have experienced authority figures altering and doctoring 'administrative paperwork' to misrepresent claims. For example, one woman who refused to sign explained that her uncle was misled into signing over property rights to an upper caste neighbour who wanted a partial piece of her uncle's land so that he could instal a water pipe. The police sided with the upper caste man because he had the signed 'papers'; the woman was told to never sign official documents from then on. Moreover, the NGO staff were also not supportive of the consent forms as they did not understand how 'a piece of paper' could protect anyone. Bhattacharya (2007) argues that when the researchers and the researched have to negotiate ethical practices, such as a consent form, it can disrupt qualitative inquiry and raise concerns of academic trustworthiness and transferability.

Upon reflection, Western university requirements of 'consent' must be re-evaluated when researching in the East. The process of consent needs to be considered in the context of a constructed reality with subjective meanings and not from an objective standpoint (Subramani, 2019). Therefore, consent should be obtained depending on the context and the situation; in some cases, verbal consent should be considered.

I also argue that PhD students may possess some naivete and a fear of not fulfilling university requirements, as there are layers of authoritative power between the student and the university. In my case, as a student experiencing her first time in the field and in a different country, and whose subjective knowledge of consent has been constructed and informed in the West, I was not confident to contest Western ethical research practices when I received pushback from potential participants and NGO staff. Written consent was how this has always been done (Xu, et al., 2020), and in my naivete I did not question it. At that time, however, I was confident in the power of signing a 'piece of paper' and that this would offer 'protection'. Today, I am no longer confident in this. However, due to my recent experience and the new knowledge I gained from it, I recommend that Western universities be more flexible and examine how some research practices may make researchers complicit in practising imperialism, veiled in ethics and moral dilemmas, through their research. Therefore, the methodological contributions to knowledge and the recommendations that can be drawn from this are that transnational researchers must situate their research and ethics *within the country of study* and not bring presumptive colonial practices to the East.

8.3 Research limitations

This research features a number of limitations that need to be addressed. First, to address is what could appear to be a potential limitation. In that the empirical data produced is not 'plentiful,' but that perception would be based on a profound misunderstanding of the nexus of both the topic, and the participants and researcher. The nature of the subject of sexual violence is veiled in silence and thus appearing to show less data. Throughout data production both the participants and the researcher experienced silence. The participants experienced silence in various contexts throughout their lives and I was often silenced by participants, indicating that they were not

comfortable speaking to certain lines of questioning. However, the data is a co-product of an ethical and sensitive feminist researcher. The role of a researcher examining sexual violence is challenging because there is always underling risk of retraumatizing their participants. This was further compounded as I was unsure whether the participants would seek out the counselor made available to them should they feel they need to speak with someone. And I was not confident that the safeguards put in place by Western university ethical standards of practice would match their needs as Indian women. But equally I was also aware that as Dalit women there were also limited safeguards in India that would also match their needs. Therefore, as a feminist transnational researcher, I had to take that into consideration, and I needed to 'tread carefully' and ensure that the interviews did not come across interrogatory and insensitive. Consequently, this may have also added to the silence during data production. However, the silence within the data is actually an integral part of the data.

Second, for most of the interview participants, the experience of rape that they articulated to me was based upon their reflections on their past as far back as 10 to 20 years ago. As discussed in Chapter Five, most of the participants had been raped in their teenage years. Thus, this research does not necessarily accurately reflect the experiences of rape victims in Delhi, India today. However, by incorporating a multi-method approach, the use of focus groups created space to understand how Dalit women spoke about rape in the present; consequently, the focus groups were used in place of pilot interviews. Adopting a multi-method approach allowed for cross-analysis of the production of themes, and each method informed the design of the next method. For example, the focus groups informed me of customs and appropriate language to use during the interviews.

Third, this research could also have explored the experiences of Dalit women from more diverse class backgrounds. Including upper and middle-class Dalit women could have provided further insight into the intersections of various Dalit women's identities. However, the research did incorporate a variety of gatekeepers, and participants were recruited through multiple NGOs as opposed to just one. This method of sampling from a variety of organisations was based on the notion that certain populations, such as women who have been abused, would be more challenging to access (Ellard-Gray, Jeffrey, Choubak and Crann, 2015). Thus, incorporating participants from different organisations made space for multiple points of view.

Finally, the study has several limitations with regard to its research methods and researcher positionality. First, as a Western researcher with Indian heritage, I primarily speak English and Punjabi. While I can understand Hindi, my speaking is limited, and therefore I had to rely on a translator. This may have had an impact on participation, as some participants may not have wanted to disclose to one person, let alone two (the second being the translator), and/or they may not have felt confident and/or comfortable speaking through a translator. Moreover, the use of a translator may have affected the overall knowledge being produced, as some data may have been 'lost in translation'. However, the translator was known to many of the participants, and this relationship thus acted as a support system (Kalra and Bhugra, 2013). As discussed in Chapter Four, the presence of the translator and the mere act of translation also informs knowledge production (Mandal, 2018).

I recommend that future researchers avoid focusing on the 'number' of study participants, as there is no 'ideal' number of participants. If I had to undertake this research again, I would have aimed for a sample size of six to 10 participants, conducted more in-depth interviews and undertaken multiple interviews over time. Some recommend that a sample size of 20 to 30

interview participants is ideal for generating multiple narrative accounts (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar and Fontenot, 2013). However, adopting a more purposive sampling method would yield more information-rich data (Etikan, Abubakar and Alkassim, 2016). In this study, focusing on fewer participants and more interview time could have generated more enriched data and allowed for more profound data production to gain more insight into participant perspective. For example, a few participants had more to share than others and were more accessible and available to meet multiple times. However, due to my time constraints, as I was conducting multiple interviews, we could not meet more than once. In addition, because of their availability and scheduling, interviews with some participants had to be cut short. Finally, some participants were not as open as others and did not want to share as much, so very little data was produced from their interviews. Upon reflection, fewer participants may be considered in the final write-up depending on the usability of the data produced (Morse, 2000; 2015).

8.4 Recommendations for policy and prevention

What can be drawn from the main themes produced from this research is that the quality of life and status of Dalit women are intimately tied to the intersections of their caste, class, and gender. It would be naive and insufficient to state that society needs to annihilate the caste system, as Dalits have historically been contesting and challenging these notions for decades. However, what may be beneficial for Dalit women specifically is a policy that can help prevent sexual violence against them.

My recommendation is to have comprehensive sex education implemented and practised as part of the curriculum in both the private and public education systems in India. Furthermore, this sex education should not be limited to safe practices and biological functions of the body (Das, 2014). Rather, it needs to include education regarding rape and rape myths, the concept of

consent, sexual orientation, gender discussions and healthy male–female relationships (Basile, Smith, Breiding, Black and Mahendra, 2014; Das, 2014; Nieder, Florenz Bosch, Panaiota Nockemann and Kartner, 2020). Implementing comprehensive sex education as part of the education system will allow space for change to occur in Indian society over time. In addition, young Indian boys and girls will gain knowledge of their sexuality and gender relationships as well as their sexual and reproductive rights (Das, 2014).

As examined in Chapter One and Chapter Five, currently in India, any discussion of sex and sexuality is considered taboo; this has helped prevent sex education from becoming part of the Indian school curriculum. It has been claimed by those in government and in wider society that sex education is incompatible with 'Indian values' and will encourage promiscuity and reckless sexual behaviour (Das, 2014; Ismail et al., 2015; O'Sullivan, Byers and Mitra, 2019). This is not surprising—according to Foucault (1978), the genealogy of sexuality was interconnected with government and biopower, wherein sexuality came under the regulatory powers of the state. Public schools are sites of discplinary power that regulate sexuality through various discplinary practices. In India, numerous examples of talk about sex being expressly forbidden in classrooms illustrate how the Indian state addresses sex education, and biopower influences what is taught in Indian schools and how female bodies are regulated, insinuating that sex and sexual behaviour are unacceptable outside of marriage.

For example, Chapter Five revealed that for many focus group participants focus, their knowledge and experience of sex and sexuality was limited to the institution of marriage and was constructed within their marriage to their husbands. This is problematic, as socio-cultural norms and practices in India have historically privileged male agency over women's. As examined in Chapter Seven, many participants noted that the social construction of the 'good' Indian wife

included gender-specific roles (Birhan and Zewdie, 2018) that located them in the private sphere of the home as 'wife' and 'mother' (Lundgren, 2015). This, compounded by Dalit women's intersecting identities, leaves Dalit women vulnerable to sexual violence from both Dalit men and upper caste men.

The fact that violence against women is not about sex but about power is well researched (MacKinnon, 1995; McPhail and Beverly, 2016). However, in the context of India, I argue it is more complex than that. When it comes to rape, both power and sex are intricately connected to the way in which power is diffused and how sex has been socially constructed to privilege men. Moreover, this notion also ignores the intersectional identities of marginalised women, whose sexuality and sexual 'availability' is intricately tied to the institution of caste. This means that to understand how power is diffused when it comes to sexual violence, we need to include discourses of sex, sexuality, and intimacy in examination of violence against women. Separating sex and power and making them distinct entities in the context of rape only perpetuate the 'silence culture' surrounding sex and sexuality and, consequently, rape.

Moreover, separating sex and power does not facilitate examining how the various institutional powers, such as caste, class, family, and marriage, not only construct but also perpetuate violence against Dalit women by limiting sex and sexual intimacy to the institution of marriage. As examined in Chapter Five, many of the participants had trouble articulating their experience of sexual violence because they were ashamed and embarrassed to talk about the sexual aspects of rape. Furthermore, Chapter Seven identified that many of the participants did not perceive marital rape as *rape* because in the context of marriage, sex, whether by force or not, was simply considered an integral part of their role as a wife. Therefore, it must be recognised that sex and power are intricately connected, as power in this context is asserted through the act of rape.

However, there is substantial evidence that *sex education* can operate as a mechanism of sexual violence prevention (Tripathi and Sekher, 2013; Santelli, Grilo, Choo, Diaz, Walsh, and Wall , 2018; Kumar and Chandran, 2020). It can empower girls and women by educating them about their sexual rights, thereby enabling them to protect themselves (to some extent) against unwanted acts of sexual violence (Ismail et al, 2015). Research shows that when young girls and boys received education and skills training on how to say 'no' to sex, it operates as a preventative tool against sexual assault later in life (Santelli, et al., 2018).

For girls and women who have been victimised, sex education could help them articulate their abuse in a way that is not clouded by shame. By understanding that they have the choice to say 'no' and to call sexual violence by its name, they will learn to no longer connect rape to izzat and sharam. They will also learn that they do not have to use protective strategies such as avoidance to resist abuse, as explored in Chapter Five and Chapter Seven. Some of the focus group participants also stated that sex education in school would be beneficial, as they were not taught about sex at home. This is consistent with other research: in a 2018 survey of 1,140 Indian adults, the majority supported the concept of sex education being implemented in the curriculum (O'Sullivan et al., 2019).

Comprehensive sex education should also educate boys and men about the unacceptability of misogynistic, sexually aggressive attitudes and violence against women (Oster, 2017)—because rape is not just a female problem. Rather, it is a male problem that has privileged boys and men, allowing them to occupy space and female bodies because of their gender, caste, class, and marriage. Successful resistance to male privilege, misogyny and violence against women requires men's participation (Ellito, 2018). This is not to say that men are not affected by rape, but substantial research on the incidence of sexual violence does suggest that women are affected

by sexual violence much more frequently (Decker, et al., 2014). Consequently, it is women—and in this research, Dalit women—who become responsible for protecting their bodies by deploying different preventative strategies (Nieder, Muck and Kartner, 2019).

More importantly, sex education can also facilitate identifying and actioning intersecting risk factors, such as caste, that make Dalit women more vulnerable to rape (Das, 2014). Therefore, it may be possible to simultaneously address the institution of caste and the implications the caste system has on violence against Dalit women in India. As discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, historically, caste-based agitation—specifically Dalit female agitation—has often been met with contestation and/or silence by the Indian women's movement in India and by Indian men (Vandana, 2020). Therefore, implementing sex education for all, irrespective of caste, class, and gender, may over time lead to an ideological shift that is not rooted in opposition between castes and/or gender. Sex education could thus play an integral role in normalising power and influencing what is acceptable behaviour (Ellito, 2018).

The implementation of sex education would operate as a form of resistance. Yes, it would be slow at first, and it would take time and effort to transform the current regimes of sexuality, caste, and gender. But the exercise of resistance *does* take time, and it is produced from, and functions through, discourse and institutions (Lilja, 2018). As discussed in Chapter One, the practices of discipline and surveillance that are operated by institutions such as schools produce the 'obedient' citizen who observes social norms. This suggests that if India's public and private schools both adopt comprehensive sex education to evoke social change, they can be seen as 'sites of resistance'—because the way in which a society thinks and talks about sexual violence both affects and reflects on how that society reacts to sexual violence. And to resist gender and caste-based sexual violence in India, an alternative discourse of power needs to begin. Therefore,

new sexual discourses can be tools to deconstruct sexual norms or beliefs while also constructing alternative understandings of sexuality and violence. The institution of education would be a key source of power/knowledge and would have an impact across the general population to produce a shift between ideological discourses and political 'reality'.

Conclusion

This research has outlined the various ways in which female Dalit rape victims constructed their experiences of rape in the context of their family and community and the state. It argued that their experiences must be understood through an intersectional lens that locates their experiences in the context of their caste, class, and gender. This thesis drew on postcolonial feminist critique, intersectionality, and social constructionism to obtain knowledge of how Dalit rape victims' experiences are shaped by India's sexual violence discourses: honour, shame, and marriage. A number of regulatory institutional practices were identified—such as 'arranged' marriage shortly after rape, being sent away to live with other family members after rape and the silencing of rape victims' voices—that shaped the women's experiences and subjectivities.

Disciplinary practices and discourses produced from the institutions of caste, family and marriage restrained the subjectivities of the women in this study. However, they also negotiated space for subjectivity with creative strategising, negotiating and resistance. The research contested the notion of Dalit women being represented as silent and submissive in the face of oppression by drawing attention to the complex nature of the subaltern. Chapter Five identified that silence was often imposed on the women not only directly by family members, the community, and the police but also more indirectly because they lacked the language to describe or state that they had been raped without being made to feel ashamed.

However, the women also used silence as a tool of power and as a mechanism of agency: they actively chose to be silent and to withhold information as a function of healing and resistance (Parpart, 2010). This highlights the difference between being silenced and being silent. Similarly, Chapter Six revealed that the women preferred to be identified as *victims* because they live in a world that denies their experiences—therefore, by choosing how to be identified, they could manage the way in which they were represented and thus transform their suffering into resistance. Chapter Seven explored how the women who were in abusive relationships managed their physical and sexual abuse by minimising the violence and protecting their children.

These actions illustrate the ways in which Dalit women negotiate and exercise power and agency in the everyday. Dalit women's quest for equality and the right to live in India's private and public spheres without fear of rape and/or abuse is difficult and challenging because it is intimately linked to the need for a shift in knowledge across Indian society.

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Appendix A: Participant Consent Form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: How are the experiences of Dalit women shaped by India's sexual violence discourse, within the context of family, community, and the state?

<u>Brief Description of Research Project, and What Participation Involves:</u>

The following research project will involve approximately 25 semi-structured interviews with Dalit women in Delhi India. The research project is aiming to understand how Dalit women's experiences are shaped by the conversations around sexual violence in India. By including the family, community, and state context I will be analysing the connection of gender, caste, class, and religion. The participation will involve approximately a one hour sit down interview with the researcher, with the possibility of two follow-up interviews. The interview will be audio recorded and include note taking by the researcher. As a participant, you will have every right to withdraw at any time and do not need to provide a reason to why. In addition, as a participant you will have the right to make changes, elaborate or remove any part of the interview transcript. Although, you have the right of withdrawal at any time the data may still be used in a collated form, as it will not be possible to remove data from a written report.

Investigator Contact Details:

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Consent Statement:

I agree to take part in this research and am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point without giving a reason, although if I do so I understand that my data might still be used in a collated form. I understand that the information I provide will be treated in confidence by the investigator and that my identity will be protected in the publication of any findings, and that data will be collected and processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and with the University's Data Protection Policy.

Name ………………………………….

Signature ………………………………

Date ………………………………………

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries, please raise this with the investigator (or if the researcher is a student, you can also contact the Director of Studies.) However, if you would like to contact an independent party, please contact the Head of Department.

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शोधकार्य में भाग लेने वाले का अनुमति फार्म

शोधकार्य का शीर्षक: परिवार, समाज और राज्य के संदर्भ में भारत के यौन उतपीड़न की शिकार दलित महिलाओं का अनुभव।

शोधकार्य का संक्षिप्त विवरण और शोधकार्य में भाग लेने वाले की भूमिका

इस शोधकार्य के दौरान भारत के दिल्ली शहर की लगभग 25 दलित महिलाओं से साक्षात्कार किया जाएगा। शोधकार्य का उद्देश्य, भारत में होने वाले यौन उतपीड़न के संबंध में दलित महिलाओं के अनुभावों का मूल्यंकन करना है। शोधकार्य को परिवार, समाज और राज्य के संदर्भ में करने से मैं लिंग, जाति, वर्ण तथा धर्म का विश्लेष्ण करुंगा/करुंगी। शोधकार्य में भाग लेने वाले को लगभग एक घंटे के तक अन्वेषक के साथ बैठ कर साक्षात्कार करना होगा तथा हो सकता है के इसके बाद दो बार फिर से साक्षात्कार किया जाए। साक्षात्कार के दौरान आपकी आवाज़ रिकार्ड की जाएगी तथा अन्वेषक आपके द्वारा प्रदान की गई जानकारी को लिखित रूप में नोट करेगा। आप किसी भी समय बिना कोई कारण बताये इस शोधकार्य को छोड़ सकते हैं। इसके इलावा शोधकार्य में भाग लेने वाला व्यक्ति के पास साक्षात्कार के दौरान पूछे जाने वाले प्रश्नों को बदलने, विस्तृत करने यां छोड़ने का अधिकार होगा। हालांकि, आपके पास शोधकार्य को छोड़ने का अधिकार होगा परंतु आपके द्वारा शोधकार्य को छोड़ने के पश्चात भी आपके द्वारा प्रदान की जाने वाले आंकड़े तुलनात्मक अध्ययन के लिए प्रयोग किए जा सकते हैं क्योंकि लिखित रिपोर्ट को मिटाना असंभव है।

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अनुमति

मैं इस शोधकार्य में भाग लेने के लिए से तैयार हूँ, तथा मुझे पता है कि मैं किसी भी समय बिना कोई कारण बताए इस शोधकार्य को छोड़ सकती हूँ, यद्यपि मेरे द्वारा प्रदान की जाने वाले आंकड़े तुलनात्मक अध्यन के लिए प्रयोग किए जा सकते हैं। मुझे पता है के अन्वेषक के द्वारा मेरी जानकारी व पहिचान गोपनीय रखी जाएगी तथा किसी भी प्रकाशण में मेरी पहिचान सार्वजनिक नहीं कि जाएगी और डाटा प्रोटेक्शन एक्ट 1998 तथा विश्वविद्यालय की आंकड़ों को सुरक्षित रखने की नीति के तहत ही आंकड़े एकत्र किए जाएंगे व इन आंकड़ों का मुल्यांकण किया जाएगा।

नाम _____

हस्ताक्षर _____

तिथि _____

कृप्या नोट करें: यदि आपके मन मेन किसी प्रकार की कोई भी शंका है तो आप अन्वेषक (यदि अन्वेषक विद्यार्थी है तो आप अध्ययन के निर्देशक से भी संपर्क कर सकते हैं) से किसी भी प्रकार का प्रश्न पूछ सकते हैं। हालांकि, यदि आप किसी स्वतंत्र संस्थान के संपर्क करना चाहते हैं तों कृप्या विभाग के मुखी से संपर्क करें।

अध्ययन के निर्देशक का पता   विभाग के मुखी का पता
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Appendix C: Focus Group Interview Schedule

1. What is your name (you do not need to give real name)
2. Where do you live in the city?
3. Were you born in _____ city?
4. Where are your parents from? State and City
5. What is your age?
6. What is your religion?
7. What is caste/class status? SC, OBC, ST BC other – please elaborate

Opening Research Questions:

1. What do you think is the meaning of sexual violence against women?
2. Do you know of anyone who has had an act of sexual violence committed against them? Yes or No
3. If so, what was the act? Can you explain what happened? Eve teasing, Harassment, Molestation and/or Rape other – please explain
4. Did they know who their attacker was?
5. Can you provide any details of the attacker? i.e. religion, caste and class etc.
6. Did they report to the police?
7. What was the outcome if they reported to the police?
8. If reported to the police, was the police helpful? Please explain in both cases if helpful or not
9. If they did not report to the police, then why did they not report to the police?

Broad research questions:

1. Do you feel safe as a woman in the city? Do you feel safe going out alone?
2. If you do not feel safe, why do you not feel safe?
3. Do you think young women should be home by a certain time? If so what time? And why?
4. Are certain parts of the city safer for women than other areas?
5. Which areas?
6. Why are the above listed areas safer than others?
7. Do you think some women are targeted for sexual violence, more than others for certain reasons?
8. Please explain why you think some women are targeted more than others and for other reasons such as caste, class and/or religion?
9. Do you think society behaves differently towards specific groups of people?
10. If so which groups of people are treated differently?
11. Why do you think society behaves differently?
12. What can be done to change the way society behaves towards certain castes/class?

State/Government Questions:

1. Do you think the police handle sexual violence cases effectively? Please explain why?
2. What do you think the police or government can do to reduce sexual violence against women?

Community/Family Questions:

1. Do you think it would be easy for a woman/girl to tell her parents or family if she has been a victim of sexual violence?
2. If you do not think it would be easy, can you explain why?
3. What do you think is the role of a woman in society?
4. What do you think is the role of a woman in her house/home?

Other questions

1. Is today's society making progress in keeping women safe?
2. How do you think things could change to improve the lives of women?
3. What can the government do to make these changes happen?
4. What can you do to make change?
5. Did you hear about the Nirbhaya case? (Delhi gang-rape victim in bus)
6. What do you think about the case?
7. Why do you think she was targeted?
8. Why do you think the case became so big in media and with community and globally?
9. Do you think anything has changed since that case?

Appendix D: Semi-structured Interview Schedule

Warm up questions to begin

1. What is your name (pseudo)
2. How old are you
3. Are you originally from Delhi? If not, how long have you been here? Why did you move over?
4. Did you go to school?

I will then move into more personal questions

5. Are you married?
6. Do you have any children?
7. What is your religion?
8. I will then remind them of why I am here and what my topic is and ask if they can share any of their personal experiences?

Depending on the individual I may start by bringing up a case? Such as the Nirbhaya case or Kafee the Dalit girl who was also raped. Take their thoughts on it and then relate that back into their own experience.

Depending on what they share and how or what they share, will take us most likely into four different aspects a. gender b. religion c. caste d. class

Gender related questions

9. Did you tell anyone of the rape? (I will ask this because many women often say no because of the shame or stigma attached), this way I can move into asking more probing questions
10. Why did you feel like you could not tell anyone?
11. If they did tell someone, I would ask who? What was the outcome of them telling
12. Did they help you? How did they help?
13. Do you feel you couldn't tell anyone because... again would be summarizing what they are telling me. Could be because she's a woman and would impact her future i.e., marriage, izzat, her family etc.
14. What is the role of a Dalit woman? Both in private and public realm
15. Do you think being a Dalit woman makes you more or less vulnerable to abuse?
16. Do you think being a Dalit woman impact government help i.e., police? Why?

Religion related questions

17. You mentioned your religion… Depending on their answer i.e., Christianity or Buddhism I will then ask if and when they or their family converted? That will move into why they converted. More than likely this will take us into the issue of caste.
18. How has changing your religion changed you? Are you perceived any differently?
19. Do you have any regret of changing your religion?
20. What effect does religion have on the hinsa (violence) of Dalit women?

Caste related questions

21. Are you treated differently because of your caste? If so, how? In what way?
22. Do you feel you were targeted because of your caste? If so, why? (Again, I would not ask this question directly, it would be through what they bring up.) These would be more paraphrasing type questions, so I could probe more and get more specifics.
23. How do you think your caste has shaped you as a woman?
24. How do the upper caste treat you? Do both men and women of the upper caste treat you in similar ways?
25. What about the government? Do their initiatives help you in any way?

Class related questions

26. What do you do for a living?
27. Is that what you wanted for yourself? Did you have different aspirations?

Other questions

28. Is today's society making progress?
29. How do you think things could change to improve the lives of Dalit women?
30. What can the government do to make these changes happen?
31. What can you do to make change?

Date of interview: February 22nd, 2017 [First of two interviews with Chandhni]

Interview Time: 1:00-2:30pm

Name of interviewer: Sunny Mangat

Interview Location: Inside the CC NGO.

Interviewee: Chandhni (pseudo)

Chandhni had requested that her cousin Shanta (pseudo) to be present during the interview. Chandhni was told that she did not have to answer any questions she did not want to, and that she could end the interview as she wanted. Chandhni hesitated when it came to signing the confidentiality form, and she only did so because Shanta reassured it was okay for her to do so. Chandhni also refused to the sign her real name and signed with the Pseudo Chandhni.

Preliminary Interview Questions:

1. What is your name (pseudo): Chandhni
2. How old are you: 27 years
3. Are you originally from Delhi? No
4. Where were you born? [removed for confidentiality purposes]
5. Where do you live in Delhi? Trilokpuri
6. How long have you been here? 8 years
7. Why did you move over? I moved here with my husband
8. Did you go to school? 9th grade
9. Do you have a job outside of home? No, not anymore
10. Are you married? Yes
11. Do you have any children? 0
12. What is your religion? Christian

Interview Questions:

Interviewer: I'm going to start by asking you some general questions and then we will move into more specific questions. Ready?

Shanta: Yes ma'am

Chandhni: Nodding. Yes

Interviewer: Have you heard about the Nirbhaya case that happened a few years ago in Delhi? The rape on the bus?

Chandhni: Yes ma'am I have heard.

Interviewer: What did you think when you heard about the case?

Chandhni: Pause. I don't know. It was really scary to know what had happened to her. Everyone was feeling bad about what had happened to her.

Interviewer: Why do you think she was raped?

Chandhni: Deep breath. Ma'am because the boys who attacked her were not good people, they are horrible.

Interviewer: There have been quite a few cases in the media since that case?

Chandhni: Yes, these kinds of cases happen all the time. There is a case happening just on the other side of where we live.

Interviewer: What happened?

Chandhni: This girl is saying that she was abused when she was coming back from work.

Interviewer: Does she know who it was?

Chandhni: I don't know some group of men, on the crossing they all gather there and it happened when she was walking past them. They chased her down and grabbed her, but she was able to get away.

Interviewer: That is really scary. Can you explain to me why you think some men think they can do that to a woman?

Chandhni: They have no respect and no fear.

Interviewer: No fear of what?

Chandhni: They think they can do what they want because they will not get into trouble for these things.

Interviewer: The men in the Nirbhaya's case are in jail, they got in trouble.

Chandhni: Pause. That is only because the case was all over the media and the people got angry. All of India was behind that girl. The police had to do something, they had no choice. They will not do this kind of investigation for all cases.

Interviewer: Why not?

Chandhni: Because the public is not knowing of all these cases and they will not pressure them.

Interviewer: So why did that case get public attention?

Chandhni: Pause. I don't know. Somehow the media was able to come to know and then everyone began getting angry.

Interviewer: Do you think the media picks some cases more than other cases?

Chandhni: Pause. I don't know. Pause. I don't know

Shanta: Ma'am, I am thinking the media shows the cases that people will get angry with and watch their news more. So that is why Nirbhaya case was picked because everyone started to watch all the media channels and then more and more they were getting angry.

Interviewer: So then tell me how do they decide what case will make people angry and get attention?

Shanta: Nirbhaya was going to be a doctor, maybe I think that is why?

Chandhni: Also I think. Pause. Because in the city more of these university type students were involved they were getting upset because they also like to go outside and do things.

Interviewer: ok so if it was a Dalit girl do you think it would have received the same attention?

Chandhni: Pause. I don't think so, she will not get the support. How will the media come to find out? Those types of people are not living here in our areas so they don't know what is happening over here. They only know what happens in their areas.

Shanta: But ma'am some Dalit cases are also coming in media. Pause. But they are not like Nirbhaya.

Interviewer: Chandhni, what do you mean by those types are living here?

Chandhni: Ma'am, the journalists do not visit our areas. They don't come here, they stay in there rich areas, so how can they come to know what happens here with the poor people.

Interviewer: That is true. If I am understanding are you saying they relate more to Nirbhaya, than they do the Dalit women who have been abused?

Chandhni: Yes ma'am, that is what I am saying. Also that the poor people are not so educated so they are not thinking we are going to buy their newspapers or watch on the television.

Interviewer: If all women, including Dalit had more support like Nirbhaya then there would be better investigation by police?

Chandhni: Yes. If all the people know that they can get in trouble for their bad behavior then they will definitely not do bad things. That includes these kinds of men that abuse the women and if it is the police. They are the same in that thinking, they will do all bad things unless they will get into trouble.

Interviewer: okay that's interesting. But what about just not doing bad things? You think people just don't do bad things because they might get in trouble?

Chandhni: Yes if I know that I will not get in trouble for taking something say like an orange from the cart then I will most likely take it. But if I am scared I will get into trouble from police or god then I will not do such bad things.

Interviewer: Pause. I know you had mentioned you were Christian?

Chandhni: Yes ma'am I am Christian.

Interviewer: Have you always been or have you converted or your family converted?

Chandhni: I have converted with my husband, quite a few years back.

Interviewer: Do you mind if I ask why you converted?

Chandhni: Pause. My husband wanted to convert, so I did also.

Interviewer: Did he give a reason as to why he wanted to convert?

Chandhni: Pause. Looking away. He had met these people who were talking of Christianity in our area and they said they will help because he was injured then and could not work. Then slowly slowly he started hanging around with them and he thought it was better for us to convert.

Interviewer: Did it have anything to do with caste and being Dalit?

Chandhni: Yes my husband was saying that he is tired of being put down and not treated the same as the other people. We are all people and we are all the same.

Interviewer: What do you think about that? Do you think you are treated differently?

Chandhni: At first I just thought he is angry and just talking so much, but then I also went with him a few times to the office, and they treat us so nicely. In the office everyone is having the same feeling and no one is abusing or looking differently at anyone we are all the same.

Interviewer: That must make you feel good?

Chandhni: yes of course.

Interviewer: Can you explain to me what the difference would be for a Dalit woman such as you and say a Brahman woman? Meaning how you are treated differently?

Chandhni: Pause. I don't know I can't explain. They are rich and we are so poor, they are living in these large house and we are in their homes cleaning up after them and they call us names, yell, I have been spit on and even hit by these rich people.

Interviewer: I'm sorry to hear that, they do this because you are Dalit?

Chandhni: Yes and because they are rich they can get away with it. No one will say anything to them.

Interviewer: So since converting has anything changed?

Chandhni: Pause. I don't know. Pause. I have to think.

Interviewer: Take your time.

Chandhni: Actually you know in that sense nothing has changed. I mean to say that these things are still occurring but I know in my inside that I am not lower than anybody, so that is making me feel good.

Interviewer: Is it often that you are hit or yelled at abused for being Dalit?

Chandhni: I have not been hit in a long time, that was when we were in the village. It is not as bad here because it is hard for these rich people to get people like us to clean up after them. I will just leave if someone misbehaves and we all do that. And because they are unable to take care of themselves, they need us so it is not so bad. But I hear them when they have their friends over or if they are talking with other rich people about us. This one older couple were so upset with their son who wanted to marry a girl of a lower caste. They were saying all these things, right in front of me.

Interviewer: How did that make you feel?

Chandhni: I was getting so angry, they were saying such horrible things. I was thinking I am the one who runs your entire house and I make your tea and food and you have the guts to say these things. But I stayed quiet, I know they were upset and normally they were not like that.

Interviewer: Why did you stay quiet?

Chandhni: I don't know. I was scared and did not know what to say.

Interviewer: It can be scary confronting people, especially if you feel threatened by them. Do you still work for them?

Chandhni: No ma'am, I stopped working. My husband did not want me to work anymore because the hours were very late.

Interviewer: okay. I'm going to ask you some more personal questions now. Is that okay?

Chandhni: Okay. I'm feeling scared. I hope I don't say the wrong thing?

Interviewer: Nothing you say will be wrong. I want to hear about what you think and feel. There is no wrong answer in your opinion. Okay?

Chandhni: Yes ma'am. No one will come to know of my interview with you?

Interviewer: Definitely no one will know that I have interviewed you today. I promise you that your name and everything, even your village and where you live will be listed differently. Okay?

Chandhni: Yes ma'am. I don't know why I am feeling so scared.

Interviewer: You don't have to be scared. But if you are uncomfortable. We don't have to do this interview? I won't be upset, I completely understand. Even if I was in your place I would be scared and not sure. Pause. Do you want to do this interview? Please be honest and don't feel bad if you don't want to.

Chandhni: Yes ma'am. I can do this interview. Just I want to be sure that no one will know. I don't like to sign documents and such

Interviewer: Yes I understand and your information is safe, that is why I had you sign the document. Do you want me to go over it with you again?

Chandhni: No ma'am I am understanding. I just wanted to be sure. Pause. Yes ma'am. Okay I can start the interview.

Interviewer: So maybe I can ask you easier questions first then?

Chandhni: yes ma'am

Interviewer: How old were you when the abuse happened?

Chandhni: Ma'am I was 16 years old

Interviewer: You were a young girl then

Chandhni: Yes ma'am

Interviewer: it didn't happen here in Delhi?

Chandhni: No ma'am, it was in my goan (village) [village name removed]

Interviewer: okay. Did you know of your attackers?

Chandhni: Ma'am it was some of the Naxalite boys who had done this.

Interviewer: Who are these Naxalites?

Chandhni: It is a group who the police and the government are afraid of. The police won't investigate them because even some police are members of the naxalite. They have overtaken our village for a long time now.

Interviewer: Is it like a gang?

Chandhni: It is not like a gang it is like a group, they have lots of power in all of India. They can be in different areas, and they do different things. Like how do you say? Pause. They work also in government and also they can be poor. They are like everyone, but no one knows who they are.

Interviewer: The police are part of this group also?

Chandhni: Yes ma'am and even the government. They all work together.

Interviewer: Is it ok if I ask what had happened to you? What did they do?

Chandhni: Silence. I don't know

Shanta: Ma'am Chandhni was taken right in front of me at that time. Five boys kidnapped her and took her into the farm house. After abusing her for four or five days then they sent her back home.

Interviewer: I'm sorry this must be very difficult for you to talk about.

Chandhni: Silence

Shanta: Yes ma'am. After she had come home, her parents actually did not let her leave the house. Even I have now only met Chandhni after many years, after her marriage. Nobody saw her again because her parents were scared for her.

Interviewer: I can understand why you are so scared. But this is a safe place for you talk, if you want to. It is only me and Shanta here to talk with you.

Chandhni: Silence

Interviewer: So, this group called the Naxalite? I have not heard of them before? They are a group in your village, are they still there?

Shanta: Ma'am they are everywhere not just in village. But in our village it is small and they have taken over that area. They started recruiting the poor people and pay them to do bad things. The very poor people who have no food or nothing they will do because they need food. Even so many of my own friends, all went over to them.

Interviewer: So Chandhni was taken in front of you?

Shanta: Yes ma'am, we were walking. And these boys came on motorcycles and started saying things to Chandhni. Telling her to come with them and we just ignored and kept walking. They kept driving besides us and then I ran, I thought she had run too. But then they had taken her on the bikes through the bushes.

Interviewer: That must have been hard to watch? What did you do?

Shanta: I ran home and told my father what happened and he went and got my uncle. Then everyone went down to where we were. There is a crossing point of the train but when everyone got there she was gone.

Interviewer: Were the police called in your case?

Chandhni: Yes. Silence

Shanta: Um. Yes they were called but they did not do anything. The family made a complaint to the police. But the police are also scared, so when they went to go look for her they only looked in our area and did not go to where the Naxalite's live.

Interviewer: Then what happened?

Chandhni: After four days they dropped me in the village.

Shanta: My uncle started creating big commotion in the village and the people started to get really upset, so that is how they decided to let her go. Some other girls have gone before and we have never seen them again. She was very lucky she had made it back. People were getting so scared and none of us girls were allowed to go outside. Everyone thought if this happening right here in the day then we are not safe here anymore.

Interviewer: What do they do to the women?

Chandhni: Silence

Chandhni: Ma'am they abuse them very badly and make them do bad things for them and also everything for them. They become like servants to all the Naxalite's. Some girls nobody even knows what happens to them because they are never seen again.

Interviewer: Okay. That is a lot of information to take in. I'm not even sure what to ask. I'm still trying to understand this.

Shanta: Ma'am they are a big group involved in the government also, nobody says anything or does anything to them because everyone is scared of who they know.

Interviewer: okay. I will have to maybe do some research on them to understand this group. For now maybe we should take a tea break?

Chandhni: Yes ma'am

Shanta: Yes ma'am

Thoughts on why to take a break: A break was needed as Chandhni was very uncomfortable talking about the group as she was hesitant and silent, and her body language became more rigid. And it was very clear she did not want to talk about what happened to her. I thought it would be appropriate to take a break and when we returned I could talk about what happened after the abuse. I was unsure of the Naxalite group. I wanted to recollect my thoughts and think about how I wanted to conduct the interview.

Interviewer: I want to ask you about, what happened after the abuse, and you were back at home? What was the reaction of your family, friends, and community?

Chandhni: It was not good. My parents kept me inside and did not let me go out anymore and they would not let anyone come and see me. Even I did not want to see anyone. After some time I went to stay with my relatives in another village.

Interviewer: How did you feel about that?

Chandhni: I was happy to go, because I could not have a life in village anymore. Everyone was seeing me as though I was some different kind of being. If I stayed no one would look at me the same anymore.

Interviewer: Why is that? Meaning how would they look at you?

Chandhni: I don't know. I would always be the girl who was kidnapped by the Naxalites. People started questioning how I was let go and why I was let go. Because a few other girls never returned, so people began to question. Then others would just keep saying poor girl what is going to happen with her life now. You know our villages are so small, so you cannot even hide and people will never forget anything. So once a mark has been made on your reputation your life is not the same.

Interviewer: That must have been hard not having the support of your community?

Chandhni: They themselves were also scared of them. They would never say to me, everyone just ignored me and did not talk to me even if they did see me. But they would all stare and I could see in their faces. Most people even stopped coming to our house and even visiting our family. I can see they have the sympathy, but no one was brave enough to stand for us and our family.

Interviewer: Did the police ever find who did this? Or anyone find out who it was that did this?

Chandhni: That does not matter, because even that group is not so big. But people are scared to say anything so it is avoided. The police are part of them, so they did not investigate the case.

Shanta: Ma'am we know of the boys who did this. One of the boys was our classmate.

Interviewer: Even knowing exactly who it was, nothing can be done?

Shanta: No ma'am because they are protected by the Naxalites. The Naxalites are also in the police, they are having connections with the local government. So even a good police officer will not say anything because he himself does not know who is a Naxalite and who isn't one in his own academy.

Chandhni: The police wont dare investigate because they will be investigating themselves. They are all involved in this together.

Interviewer: Okay. That's really interesting. Pause. I don't want to sound ignorant. But I am trying to understand then is there no regulation? Is the government or a high power of government aware of this group?

Chandhni: They are all together, they work as one. One will pay another and then the other group and so on. They let them get away with things because the government officers are also doing some business with them.

Interviewer: Okay. How do you want to see justice for yourself then?

Chandhni: Ma'am I don't know, there is no justice. This is just how it is. I have moved on from that and I'm married so that in itself is also a blessing.

Interviewer: Why is being married a blessing?

Chandhni: Because I am lucky that someone married me. I'm lucky that my husband is so good and has accepted me after that has happened.

Interviewer: Did you think you would not get married because of the rape?

Chandhni: yes ma'am, my parents were also worried because no one wants to marry someone when such things happen and also because people were afraid of me.

Interviewer: Afraid of you?

Chandhni: Yes ma'am because they are scared of the Naxalites, no one even would talk to me or even my family to this day. People have just stayed away.

Interviewer: Your husband was not scared?

Chandhni: He is from another village, that is further away. So no one knew over there what exactly happened to me. But I told him after some time.

Interviewer: You had told him then?

Chandhni: Yes ma'am, I had told him after some time. He really cares for me so much and he knew I was in so much pain.

Interviewer: Was it an arranged marriage?

Chandhni: No ma'am it was a love marriage.

Interviewer: Do you think he accepted it more because it was a love marriage?

Chandhni: Yes ma'am, he cares for me very much.

Interviewer: But had it been arranged?

Chandhni: Then no, but then I don't think I would even tell because people don't want to have a girl who has been used.

Interviewer: okay. Let me go back to something that keeps being said about justice. I often hear people say that is just how it is, but is it something you've accepted? Is there no one or nowhere to go to achieve justice?

Chandhni: What is the point? Of course you can go, they will spend so much time doing the cases and you have to have the money also. The Naxalites have the money and the power, so I would not stand a chance. There is no point in wasting all that time and agony over something that will amount to nothing. My family will be put through so much, even until today they hound my family at home. Taunting them and threatening them. How many years later it has been and my mother and father have to live with that abuse?

Interviewer: Even now?

Chandhni: Yes ma'am. It is best to just leave it and that is it.

Interviewer: okay

Chandhni: They are very powerful group. You don't want to get into a tangle with them, it is just best to keep your head down and stay away.

Interviewer: Okay…When did you get married then?

Chandhni: I was married a couple of years later. My Aunt had arranged the marriage with a boy in the neighboring village of hers.

Interviewer: Sorry your Aunt arranged the marriage? Or was it a love marriage?

Chandhni: We had love marriage, but my aunt had arranged everything for the wedding. We don't come to tell people that it was love marriage. It is better when it is said it is arranged.

Me: Why is that?

Chandhni: I don't know. The people don't like when the girls have boyfriends and such things, so you just tell everyone it is arranged. Even if everyone knows it's not you just have to say.

Interviewer: That's interesting. People knew it was a love marriage, but you had to say it was arranged.

Shanta: Ma'am you know it looks better for the girl otherwise people will think that she is going out with the boys and misbehaving. And with Chandhni it was more important for the family to protect her reputation.

Interviewer: What do you mean by protect her reputation?

Shanta: She already was abused and by the Naxalites and then when she came home, the people were already questioning what had happened. So, with her marriage if people were to find out it was a love marriage, then they will be thinking bad thoughts about her.

Interviewer: How do you both feel about that? Having to protect your reputation?

Chandhni: I don't know. Pause. Reputation is important for the family, so it does not matter what I think. I know I have not done anything wrong. So it is ok, my family has been through so much because of me that it is important to things for them. That is how families work.

Shanta: Ma'am you are not only protecting your reputation but also of your families. It does not look nice if the people are saying things about you because that will reflect on the family.

Interviewer: Okay. That is interesting. Does your husband's family know of the rape?

Chandhni: Yes, ma'am his family know what has happened.

Interviewer: How did they react?

Chandhni: My husband was very upset and sad by this but he still accepts me.

Interviewer: When did you tell him? Before or after you were married?

Chandhni: I did not tell until after, but he knew something happened to me. He used to always ask why my parents left me here with relatives. I would always just ignore his questions and then told him some bad things happened and that is why I had to leave.

Interviewer: Why did you wait until after marriage to tell him?

Chandhni: I don't know, I was scared and not sure what he would think of me. But after some time, I came to know that he does care for me so much.

Interviewer: I'm glad you were able to find someone so caring of you.

Chandhni: Yes ma'am. He is very good, and his family is very good to me. My mother in law is a very nice woman.

Interviewer: That's really nice to hear, it makes me happy that you have been able to move on and live a happy life.

Chandhni: Yes ma'am, thank you

Interviewer: Have you ever gone back to your village?

Chandhni: No ma'am. I cannot go back there.

Interviewer: Do you not see your parents then?

Chandhni: My parents sometimes come here. Not often but they have come to see me and when we go to my husband's village they will come and see me there.

Interviewer: Why did you decide to move to Delhi?

Chandhni: Ma'am my husband wanted to move here for job.

Interviewer: And are you happy with the move?

Chandhni: Yes ma'am very much so. Even I get to see Shanta, as she and my uncle and aunt also moved from the village. It is nice to have some of my family close with me, because we have no family here otherwise.

Interviewer: Shanta why did you family move over here?

Shanta: For my studies and my father wanted to move because our village is not safe. My father did not want my brother to end up with the Naxalites or anything to happen with me and my sister so we moved here six years ago.

Interviewer: okay. So in your opinion, what can society do to make women feel safe and be safe?

Chandhni: The need to end fear is important, but this can only be done if the police have the guts to stand up and do their job and not fear the higher up elites in society. Even the police need to change the way they judge women and then they will be more willing to help. They need to start treating these women as actually victims and not like the accused.

Interviewer: Who are these higher up elites in society?

Chandhni: These Naxalite are supported by the rich and powerful. They are using the poor people. They poor people don't have food so they are already in fear of them. They also recruit the poor boys to do work for them, to do the bad things for them. These boys will do anything because they get food, money and support. Then these boys start acting on like they are something else after having some money. The local government support, these Naxalites. They do this because they get them to do their bad work for them and then put fear in the community. The rich people use the poor people to do the bad work for them by paying them food, clothing and shelter.

Interviewer: And these poor boys/men are then abusing their new found power and taking it out on women?

Chandhni: Not just women, on everyone. They act like animals. Whatever they want they take, they don't have any fear. Even those rich men who support them and the police are also scared of them. They have given these poor people too much power and now they have no control over them.

Interviewer: That is interesting. When you say that these poor people have been given too much power. What do you mean by that?

Chandhni: I don't know how to explain to you. But these people are uneducated and they come from nothing and then they are showered with all these things, so they start doing terrible things to people. After some time, they begin to start thinking they can be the boss and because they have already done such terrible things nothing stops them. They are not like humans and they have no fear of god or anyone. They would abuse their own mothers. That is how terrible these people become.

Interviewer: Is this only because of the Naxalites? Meaning did they create this and does it only happen in your village?

Shanta: No ma'am. These types of groups are everywhere. There are some good Naxalites also, but these in our area are abusing everyone.

Chandhni: Let me say like this, when the people have nothing, not even food to eat and then you give them some food they will do anything you ask because they are hungry. People who are poor are always hungry and then they act very badly if they have no food.

Interviewer: Do these men only abuse other poor people? Or have rich women also been abducted by them as well?

Shanta: I only know of the poor girls that are from where we live. We know two girls who never came back and we don't know what has happened to them.

Interviewer: What do you think Chandhni?

Chandhni: I think they just go after people who they can scare and it is more poor people who are scared. Because if it was a rich persons daughter then they could also lose the support and the money from the rich people.

Interviewer: When you say poor do you mean Dalits? Or generally in poor and does not matter of caste?

Chandhni: The people are poor because they are the Dalits. If you are poor then you are just like Dalit.

Interviewer: Yes I understand. But are some people on the caste system are higher or lower than others. I am wondering if there is a difference?

Chandhni: In my opinion there is not much, if you are this poor then it does not matter.

Interviewer: Do you have any idea what could have happened to the other girls that have never returned?

Chandhni: Silent

Shanta: Nobody knows ma'am. They might still be on the grounds, or they get passed around from one to another and could end up in some other village or even state altogether. Unless they have been able to get away.

Interviewer: Why do you think they let you leave Chandhni?

Chandhni: Silent. I don't know.

Shanta: Ma'am, Chandhni's father and our relatives created a big scene and we kept going the police. Uncle was ready to kill himself at the station until they did something. He said he will kill himself inside the station unless they did something. My uncle also was a very hard worker and he worked for wealthy family for many years, so they have talked to the police and also the Naxalites and somehow they decided to let her go.

Interviewer: Chandhni, I know this must be very difficult. You are very brave for having to gone through so much in your life.

Chandhni: Thank you ma'am, I have tried to not think of what happened and my husband always says to me that I have been given a new life and I should focus on that.

Interviewer: Must be hard, have you ever talked about what actually happened when they had taken you over those days?

Chandhni: Silent

Interviewer: It's okay. You don't have to tell me what has happened. I just want to know if you have ever told anyone of the details.

Chandhni: Silent.

Shanta: Ma'am, she has not told to anyone. Sometimes maybe a little bit we used to hear but that was from other people talking.

Interviewer: Okay. So, the people in the village were talking about what happened? But no one actually was told?

Chandhni: Deep breath. Ma'am I don't think it is good to talk of those details, it is hard for me to talk about them. My husband also does not know of all the details and he says it is better to forget them.

Interviewer: Have you ever wanted to talk about what had happened?

Chandhni: No, I don't want to talk about what happened. It was a very bad time and I have forgotten some things and something I will never forget but I want to be strong.

Interviewer: And you think talking about them will make you feel weak?

Chandhni: Nodding.

Interviewer: Why do you think women don't talk about their abuse, not just you but in general?

Chandhni: Pause. I think maybe they are embarrassed and when they think about it or talk about it then they can remember those feelings again, so much so even on their arms, legs and back they can feel it. They can remember someone's breath or the way someone can touch their back. It can make your body and hands tingle. If a woman is abused she will not want to remember those feelings.

Interviewer: Is that how you feel?

Chandhni: Silent

Interviewer: Pause. How do you think women can make themselves feel strong and be able to move on?

Chandhni: The woman needs to be strong in her mind, she has to give that to herself and block out everything else.

Interviewer: What if she is not strong in the mind? How can she become strong?

Chandhni: I don't know. It is very hard, she has to just make it up in her mind that it has happened and be thankful she is alive, so it was not in gods will for her to die.

Interviewer: It sounds like you are saying that she needs to make herself strong. Is there anything anyone or the community can do to help? I mean can anything be done to be more supportive of people who have been abused?

Chandhni: Stop staring and judging these girls, they have been through a lot. They just stare and stare at the girl, maybe they also don't know what to say, but to stare and whisper when she walks. Even they don't like to talk of such things. Its better you ask me what is my favorite film, or what I would like to eat. But they should not stare and whisper behind her back.

Interviewer: Were people staring at you?

Chandhni: Silent

Interviewer: I'm sorry. Pause. You make a very good point. People should not stare and judge someone who has been through abuse.

Chandhni: I was feeling very bad for so long, I would think what has happened to me? Nobody would talk to me, just staring. Then I would get angry and say what are you staring at? I'm not a ghost.

Interviewer: What helped you get over that? And to ignore everything?

Chandhni: My parent sent me to live with my aunt. Over there no one actually knew what happened. People thought that I did something or something had happened but they did not what happened. So they did not treat so differently.

Interviewer: So you think your parents sending you away was a good idea then?

Chandhni: yes ma'am. I would not been able to live otherwise. I would have gone crazy.

Interviewer: how do you feel now after talking with me?

Chandhni: First, I was so scared and nervous about what you are going to ask me but this was not bad. I really enjoyed talking with you and you made me feel very happy. Thank you ma'am.

Interviewer: Good I'm glad. I am always nervous too. It is hard asking questions also because even I am unsure if I should ask a question or not. But I am very happy that you felt comfortable.

Chandhni: Smiling. It was nice talking with you and I'm happy that I did.

Shanta: Thank-you ma'am, you are nice to talk with because you are not forceful with your questioning and we can see the care in your eyes. And we care for you also so that makes it easier.

Interviewer: Yes you make a very good point there, I definitely do care for all of you and that is the most important part. I know you have to leave now, so I think I will end it here. You are a very strong young woman Chandhni and I am so happy I got the chance to meet with you. I have learned a lot from what you have said and appreciate you taking the time out to meet with me. And Miss Shanta, thank you for supporting both me and Chandhni, you have been a great help.

Shanta: Thank-you ma'am.

Chandhni: Thank-you ma'am