

Negotiating between speech and silence as a form of agency: Understanding Dalit women's experiences of sexual violence in India

Abstract

This article explores the complexities of non-disclosure among female Dalit survivors of rape who negotiate between speech and silence as a means of exercising agency. It analyses the role of Brahmanical patriarchy, Dalit feminism and social constructionist theory to unpack the silence, shame, secrecy and cultural censorship surrounding sex and sexual violence both in India at large and for Dalit women in particular. The study comprised 28 qualitative interviews with Dalit women who had been raped by men; it employs Foucault's notion of resistance, regulation and subjectivity to explore when and to whom these participants chose to disclose their rape. It thus seeks to theorise these women's varied responses to their rape as acts of agency and resistance, demonstrating how silence can operate on multiple levels: individual, family and community. It draws on India's #LoSHA movement to demonstrate the dangers of universalising victim-survivors' experiences of sexual violence and to parse the complexities of speaking out or remaining silent and how these play out in individual and collective contexts. In focusing on Dalit women and situating their non-disclosure within an intersectional context, this work differentiates between the passivity of being silenced and the agency and resistance inherent in the decision to remain silent. Therefore, this paper makes a unique contribution to the literature on patriarchy, Dalit studies, feminism and social constructivism.

Introduction

Dalit women's experiences are unique with regard to the intersections between caste and gender in India and the principles on which Dalit feminism was founded. Crenshaw (1989) argues that all women can experience multiple, simultaneous oppressions that may not fall wholly under the category of either racism or sexism but are a combination of both. Dalit women in India often experience triple oppression – sexism, classism and casteism (Datta and Satija 2020) – that neither Dalit men nor Hindu women experience. This makes it vital to interpret and present Dalit women's experiences via their intersecting identities (Pan 2021).

Diwakar (2020) argues that violence against women in India is regulated according to their position in society, which means that the perception of Dalit women's bodies as 'untouchable' is often used to justify dismissing rape charges. Thus, the intersections between caste, class and gender make Dalit women in India more vulnerable to violence, sociocultural discrimination and subjugation and less likely to obtain justice.

Dalit feminists have fought to demonstrate that their experiences differ fundamentally from those of other Indian women by highlighting how this intersection shapes their particular experiences (Pan, 2021). Dalit feminists who draw on this position increase their risk of being subjected to violence (Sharma and Kumar, 2020). A study examining sexual violence against Dalit women in India conducted by Pandey and Mishra (2021) found that 83% of the 195 Dalit women who participated faced threats of sexual harassment or assault; 40.2% had experienced multiple instances of physical sexual assault, specifically groping or having their clothing torn; and 23.3% had been raped.

It is important to note that several universal elements may be discerned as common to the experiences of rape victim-survivors, not least the role that silence plays in the disclosure process. For instance, rape victim-survivors from all communities often choose not to disclose that they have been raped out of fear that they will meet with negative reactions from friends, family and society. It has thus been argued that such negative reactions may function as a disciplinary tool with which to silence rape victim-survivors (Ahrens, 2006). However, this argument is overly simplistic, failing to take into account the fact that silence may also serve as a form of agency, power and resistance. Dalit women's caste and gender means they must negotiate between speech and silence in the way they respond to treatment from their families, community and wider society and for this reason an intersectional approach is necessary to understand their unique experiences as a marginalised group. In some instances, Dalit women use silence as a form of resistance by not permitting society or the law to weigh in on their experience – that is, by choosing to whom and when to disclose their experience, they are engaging in an act of resistance. This aligns with Keating's (2013) contention that silence and force are often intertwined – for example, a 'silent refusal' can be interpreted as a form of resistance. This study adds to the expanding body of Dalit literature concerning patriarchy,

feminism, and social constructionism, by exploring the concepts of silence and resistance within the realm of Dalit women. While much research emphasizes the act of 'speaking out' as a means of empowerment, little research examines how marginalized women employ silence as a form of resistance and agency.

Brahmanical patriarchy and the #metoo movement in India

Although all women must confront patriarchy, patriarchy will not affect all women in the same way (Bhopal, 2018). Much work on women's issues in the Indian context has been undertaken through the lens of Brahmanical patriarchy. However, 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, 2020a).

The concept of Brahmanical patriarchy was coined by Chakravarti (1993). She argues that while patriarchy was viewed historically in India as a separate framework of exploitation, Brahmanical patriarchy is a set of rules, regulations and structures in which caste and gender are interlocked, each shaping the other (Chakravarti, 2018). Brahmanical patriarchy adopts an intersectional framework that makes it possible to examine Indian women's experiences in greater depth, as it positions caste at the centre of Indian women's issues (Senanayake and Trigunayat, 2020); previously, these experiences were universalised in the literature. Still (2014) asserts that Brahmanical patriarchy adheres to two key principles with respect to sexuality. The first is that men are perceived as superior to women and consequently have the right to sex irrespective of whether the woman is consenting. The second is that caste division originates with men: for example, if a child is born from a 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 the caste and gender hegemony that manages women's sexuality, which means that women are the gatekeepers of caste 'purity' (Still, 2014).

Brahmanical hegemony operates by means of various mechanisms, including the practice of endogamy, the subjugation of higher-caste women's sexuality, and restrictions on women's freedom of movement. Because the consequences of caste impurity are significantly more severe for upper-caste people than for Dalits, these practices are typically more restrictive for upper-caste women than for Dalit women; the former sustain and manage the caste's social structure (Chakravarti, 2018). However, Chakravarti argues that closer examination of Brahmanical patriarchy exposes a 'graded' inequality in gender-based violence as a means of maintaining the caste system. Given that caste and gender are the main determinants of India's social structure – which prioritises caste above all other considerations for an individual, followed by gender (Arya, 2020b) – the system is one wherein violence against Dalit women is justified by the perception that they are of lower worth than everyone else¹. Consequently, even if it appears that Brahmanical patriarchy is restrictive for women from upper castes, it also has serious repercussions for Dalit women.

While universal experiences may be discerned based on a broader understanding of sexual violence, some victim-survivors of sexual violence may delay disclosure or indeed may never disclose. However, analysis through an intersectional lens offers deeper insight into the barriers that may prevent different social groups from disclosing. For instance, Dalit women are less likely than non-Dalit women in India to disclose because of the ways in which their caste identity shapes how they are perceived within society. This means that Dalit women are less likely to be believed when they disclose that they are victims of sexual violence owing to the perceived association between lower-caste norms and so-called immoral behaviour (Sankaran, Sekerdej and Von Hecker, 2017). Non-Dalit women do not face this additional barrier of not being believed because of their lower-caste status. Therefore, intersectional explorations are necessary when examining sexual violence committed against Dalit minoritised women.

In India, the #MeToo movement appeared to offer an intersectional space for Queer women and girls of lower castes to exercise power by coming forward and exposing their perpetrators anonymously. The digital

¹ We acknowledge the problematic use of hierarchical terms such as 'upper' or 'lower' in reference to a caste-stratified society. It is not something we endorse or support (see Arya, 2020b).

platforms on which they enacted this exposure were thought to provide a space for validation and support after these women had been silenced and/or had remained silent for such a long time (Alaggia and Wang, 2020). For instance, a young Queer Dalit feminist named Raya Sarkar went public on Facebook by providing a list of sexual harassers in academia (LoSHA) in 2018. Sarkar asked others to add to the list, and the final version featured the names of 70 prominent academics (Santos Bruss, 2020). The list was met with strong resistance from both men and women, including from leading feminist groups such as the Kafila team, which comprises prominent feminists such as Kavita Krishnan, Pratiksha Baxi, Nivedita Menon and other scholars, activists, writers and journalists. They argued that the list should be removed in view of the lack of judicial due process afforded to the alleged perpetrators; they suggested alternative approaches instead, such as institutional reporting (Menon, 2017). This criticism indicates that the #MeToo movement is not necessarily a silence breaker; rather, with regard to marginalised groups, such as Dalit women in India or Black women in the United States, it can actually compound their silence. Therefore, we should exercise caution about universalising the experiences of sexual violence and concluding that the #MeToo movement is a silence breaker that invariably yields positive outcomes. Moreover, it simplifies the notion of resistance to the form of speaking out when it comes to sexual violence. For marginalised women, resistance and silence may also take different forms. Dalit women may, for instance, use silence to obtain freedom from additional stigmatisation or to obtain ‘justice’ in other ways.

Methodology and data analysis

The present study adopted a multifaceted theoretical framework that incorporates intersectionality, feminist theory and social constructionism. The research design was inspired by postcolonial feminist critique, with a focus on researcher positionality and power as well as on the ethical considerations of researching the sensitive subject of sexual violence. To fully appreciate the multiple factors that influence Dalit women’s lives, the research is female-centred and incorporates an intersectional lens (Crenshaw, 1989) to consider caste, class and gender identities.

The study aimed to examine the lived experiences of female Dalit rape victim-survivors to understand the targeting of sexual violence against Dalit women and the impunity of its perpetrators. It achieves this by examining the language that the Dalit women participants used in describing their rape, trauma and resilience. The participants were recruited using snowball sampling, a purposive sampling strategy, to recruit Dalit female survivors of sexual violence (Parker, Scott and Geddes, 2019). The participants were recruited from three different organizations, that were not-for-profit and relied on donations and government funding to support women and children living in the local informal settlements, which many of the locals referred to as 'jhuggis' (*aka* mud housing settlements).

The research employed critical discourse analysis (CDA) to critically examine the qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted with 28 female Dalit rape victim-survivors residing in East Delhi, India. The objective of CDA is to highlight how language can contribute to the oppression of marginalised people while simultaneously encouraging agency and social emancipation (Kalra and Joshi, 2020; Loutfi, 2019).

Twenty-six of the participants had been raped as many as 10–20 years ago; one had been raped six years ago; and one had been raped three years ago (from the date of interview). All rapes had been perpetrated by men; nine of the women had been raped by relatives (uncles/cousins), two by unknown assailants, four by their employers/landlords, seven by local villagers, four by intimate partners, one by a student teacher and one by classmates in a gang rape. Two of the 28 participants had been gang-raped. Twenty-six were raped in rural areas. Dalit women face a high risk of sexual violence in a rural setting – the majority of the Dalit women who live rurally are landless labourers or scavengers (Kumar, 2021), and rape is a common political weapon used to settle caste disputes in these parts of the country (Diwakar, 2020).

Drawing from social constructionist epistemology, semi-structured interviews were produced to gather multiple narrative accounts from Dalit women to examine their experiences and how they were shaped by sexual violence discourses and/or by the threat of sexual violence and/or by sexual violence itself in India. Semi-structured interviews can facilitate additional inquiry in sensitive research (Das, Bhattacharayy and Pervin, 2020) by making space for participant subjectivity. For instance, an inquiry into how and why some

rape victims disclose their rape and why some do not is necessary to understand how rape victim-survivors' experiences have been shaped by their environment.

In this research, the language the participants used to share their narratives was analysed to yield further insight into these women's social worlds. When and how a woman chooses to disclose her rape – whether voluntarily or involuntarily – may have greater societal implications by creating space for societal interpretation, stigmatising reactions and victim-blaming (Iles et al., 2018). For instance, depending on a given society's cultural and social expectations, rape disclosure may result in the victim being shamed (Bhuptani et al., 2018). This study used semi-structured interviews to examine how the participants spoke about their personal experiences and how they made sense of those experiences within the social world.

The recorded transcripts were coded using NVivo. The codes included 'disclosing rape', 'marriage after rape', 'izzat' (honour), 'naming their rape', 'victim' and 'justice'. These recurring themes were then critically analysed, split into subthemes and linked to sexual violence. Coding key events and the women's interpretation of them allowed for close examination of how the women themselves had further constructed their identities following their rape. Reflexivity is important when researching sensitive topics and working with vulnerable groups (Hesse-Biber, 2012). When selecting a topic that draws on a person's pain, trauma, and suffering, researchers must be mindful of the burden placed on the participant. (Page, 2017). Consequently, this study operates under the premise of a 'non-hierarchical' model built on cooperation, concern and connection between the participants and researcher (Proctor, 2015).

Power is another key consideration in the research process (Bhopal, 2009). Feminist research operates under the principle of the researcher's responsibility to counter power imbalances (Harding, 2020), as they have the power to manage the research process (Bhopal and Danaher, 2013). This is particularly salient when conducting research among marginalised groups, such as Dalit women. The first step is to refrain from rationalising the research aims as an 'opportunity' for the researcher and by avoiding positioning the research as a means of speaking for the subjects. When Western transnational researchers state that they are providing an opportunity for the marginalised and 'giving' them a voice, they are engaging in a highly

problematic imperialist exercise that privileges them and ignores their individual and structural benefits (Falcon, 2016). This is also the case for mainstream Indian feminism, which has not been consistent in its commitments to forging gender justice spaces for the most marginalised (Arya, 2020b). Consequently, this research adopts the position that ‘voice’ is constructed through interaction (Harris, 2016) and, therefore, the knowledge produced from that interaction is understood *to be co-produced* between the researcher and the participants. As a feminist transnational researcher, author one had to take her position into consideration during the fieldwork data collection and ‘tread carefully’ to ensure that the interviews did not seem interrogatory or insensitive. This may also have produced a limitation to the study by adding to the silences that occurred during data production. Another potential limitation is the tight focus of the research. While not every issue can be addressed simultaneously, the choice of one analytical perspective ‘easily obscures other perspectives and insights’ (Nording 2021: 107). In particular, the research could have explored the experiences of Dalit women from more diverse class backgrounds: the inclusion of upper- and middle-class Dalit women might have provided further insights into the intersections between Dalit women’s various identities. However, the research did pass through a variety of gatekeepers, and the participants were recruited through multiple NGOs rather than 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, are more challenging to access (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). Thus, incorporating participants from different organisations made space for multiple points of view. Furthermore, a local interpreter who was known to many of the participants was recruited, and this relationship acted as a support system (Kalra and Bhugra 2013). The use of an interpreter may have affected the overall knowledge being produced, as some data may have been ‘lost in translation’. The presence of the interpreter and the act of translation also informed the knowledge production (Mandal 2018). It must therefore be emphasised that this study does not claim to be exhaustive, authoritative or final.

In light of the sensitive nature of the study, the transcripts were analysed inductively, with the data informing the development of theory. In line with this approach and our overarching research philosophy,

reflexive thematic analysis was used to generate themes from the interview data. The central contribution of reflexive thematic analysis is the recognition that the ‘truth’ does not exist ‘out there’ or buried within the data; rather, data analysis is an active, interpretive process, where the researcher plays a key role in the knowledge production (Braun and Clarke 2019). Themes are thus conceptualised as ‘patterns of *shared meaning* underpinned or united by a core concept’ (Braun and Clarke 2019: 593). In what follows, we analyse the words and phrases the participants used to construct their experiences of rape and how they made sense of those experiences. We then explore how they experienced being silenced in the contexts of their families, communities and the state before moving on to discuss how, for some participants, silence could also operate as a form of resistance.

Results and Discussion

Why many female Dalit victim-survivors fail to report sexual violence

As discussed above, 26 of the 28 participants had been raped 10-20 years ago. Thus, at the time of the interviews, the majority of the participants were reflecting on incidents that had taken place one to two decades ago. The LoSHA movement highlighted the ways in which women, particularly female Dalit students, were continuously being failed by their universities (Santos Bruss, 2019) and why the majority of them failed to make formal disclosures. Moreover, the historical pattern of impunity for those who committed sexual violence against Dalit women (Kumar, 2021) might explain why the women employed terms such as ‘forgetting’ as a way to highlight the futility of disclosing what had happened to them. It seems that the women used ‘forgetting’ in the sense that they had opted to try to move on from the incident rather than dwell on or speak about it.

While none of the women who participated in this study answered this question directly about why they had failed to disclose their rapes previously, some explained their action in the following terms:

Azura: There’s no need to talk about bad things that happened. It was long time ago; it’s better for me to forget.

Lakshmi: No one will talk about this. No one. What good will it do to talk about these types of problems? It isn't in any woman's interest to discuss such matters.

Kajal: I've forgotten about it long ago, and I feel embarrassed about talking about it. What's the point of these discussions? No one wants to listen to such things, and I also don't want to talk about this with people.

Azura and Kajal emphasised the length of time that had elapsed since their rape: 'it was a long time ago', 'I've forgotten about it long ago'. It is not uncommon for rape victims to wish to forget what happened to them and/or believe that too much time has elapsed for them to be able to speak out about it (Siuta et al., 2023). In addition, given these women's intersectional identities, they believed that the length of time since their rape, coupled with their historical experiences of injustice, meant that their disclosure would achieve nothing, and they would not be believed. This was also evident from the 72 anonymous disclosures of the LoSHA (Chakraborty, 2019), which suggests that the time taken to disclose plays a vital role in one's right to and ability to speak.

This is particularly salient for marginalised women, such as Dalits, because they have historically been deprived of a voice (Bahadur 2020). They are often met with disbelief by the authorities, their family members and society in general (Gupta 2015); consequently, they face a lack of support and justice. The LoSHA campaign viewed sexual abuse through the lens of Dalitness and highlighted how Dalit women's experiences have been erased (Sarkar, 2022).

What is interesting about LoSHA is it can also be seen as a form of whistleblowing (Santos Bruss, 2019). Santos Bruss (2019) compares Sarkar's exposure of the #LoSHA list to the public and Foucault's concept of parrhesiatic 'speaking truth to power'. Here, we may observe that the participants resist the need to speak out about the 'truth' of their experiences but are, in fact, speaking truth through that very resistance. They are evidently implying that there is no point in talking about their experiences because this would be

pointless; they are highlighting the impunity of sexual violence and clearly indicating that ‘No one wants to listen to such things’, meaning that no one would hear what they were saying.

Sen (2017) argues that speaking out is always challenging, particularly for victim-survivors of sexual violence: they need not only to choose their words carefully but also to be able to hold fast to those words when speaking under pressure. Silence is a common coping mechanism: by avoiding any disclosure or discussion of their rape, victims/survivors believe that they can move forward and avoid thinking about it (Kaszovitz, 2021). All three of the women quoted above negotiated the shame of sexual violence and resistance to speaking about it, demonstrating a discursive association between sexual embodiment and shame that has produced a culture of silence in India. For Dalit women, this culture of silence is also in accordance with the politics of difference: they experience double the oppression and, consequently, double the violence due to the intersections between caste and gender (Rani and Hassan, 2020). Dalit women are reluctant to disclose sexual violence that has been committed by non-Dalit men because, historically, sexual violence has been used against Dalit men or women who break the social norms ‘in their place’ (Shrivastava and Tanchangya, 2015). Moreover, because of the historical impunity for committing sexual violence against Dalit women, such acts have become normalised and consequently sustain the culture of silence (Kumar, 2021).

Further, the violence that Dalit women experience at the hands of Dalit men within their own communities adds to the shame and stigma attached to these women’s bodies, which further pushes them into silence (Rani and UI Hassan, 2020); Dalit men also face oppression and similar taboos surrounding ‘untouchability’ (Kumar, 2021).² However, Dalit men also follow the patriarchal norms that exist within their own

² A practice whereby groups belonging to the lowest caste category, currently referred to as Scheduled Castes, Dalits, who were once referred to as ‘untouchables’, were considered polluted and forced to live on the fringes of society, forbidden from making eye contact and/or ‘touching’ the upper casted populations. This was based on the notion that purity and pollution were attached to the body, which is sacred to Hinduism and integral to the practice of Brahmanism (Vaid, 2014). Muthukkaruppan (2017) argues that the untouchable category was constructed, and continues to be upheld, because Brahminism cannot survive *without* the practice of untouchability.

communities, resulting in Dalit women also being oppressed in these communities (Arya, 2020b). Lakshmi highlighted that rapes are not disclosed because the subject is taboo: ‘no one will talk of this. No one.’ Kajal mentioned a personal feeling of embarrassment, demonstrating that sexual violence is positioned as shameful and talking about it is prohibited. Bhattacharyya (2018) argues that the shame attached to sexual violence is rooted in the normalisation of the patriarchal ideology, which is embedded within society, making it difficult to disclose. This is compounded for the Dalit women, as they face double the patriarchy – Dalit and Brahmanical – and must navigate multiple expectations of their behaviour (Chakravarti, 2012).

Azura, Lakshmi and Kajal also expressed the idea that there would be no benefit in speaking about having been raped: ‘what good would it do?’, ‘there’s no need to talk of bad things’, ‘what’s the point?’ Their scornful tone was echoed by other participants, and indeed was indicative of how many of the Dalit women who took part in the study felt about disclosing rape. Scorn is, arguably, a coping strategy that is produced by the community norms, beliefs and institutional practices (Holland and Cortina, 2017), but it could also represent a history of being silenced when other reporting mechanisms have failed to offer validation or support (Siuta et al. 2023). However, being silenced does not always equate to being deprived of one’s right to expression by those who are empowered to speak (Thiesmeyer 2003). Rather, there is an underlying contempt for the interviewer’s question, that suggests that those with power and privilege tend to perceive silence as deprivation rather than agency. This recalls Stephens’ (1994) argument that the only one ‘speaking out’ is the interviewer. Silence, therefore, is also a tool that makes space for marginalised people to resist. By failing to disclose, victim-survivors can shed the stigmatised identity attached to their body.

Being silenced by their family/community

Many of the interviewees revealed that their family and/or community³ had used shame as a disciplinary tool to silence their voices regarding their experiences of sexual violence:

³ The women often conflated their family and their community when describing their experiences, possibly because Indian society is collective in nature, and the community is seen as an extension of the family

Chandhni: People had come over to see how I was doing, but I wouldn't 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 had happened either.

Chandhni: [Pause.] I don't think people actually want to know what has happened. They just come to look at you; in their minds, 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 their support for the case to go to the media, and that's if the family gets to know about the abuse in the first place. Most women won't even tell anyone, and if they do tell someone, everyone will tell them to keep quiet.

Sneh: Yes, she [my mother] wouldn't understand all this. I wouldn't have told her or anyone else in my family. My family is very – how do you say it – formal. They wouldn't like to hear about such things. They'd think it would be bad for the family and that it won't be good.

Shahei: No, she [my mother] never would talk about it. She just kept 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 described the various ways in which their experiences of rape had been silenced. Foucault (1979) argues that silence does not occur through mass censorship – rather, it starts with the establishment of what type of talk is appropriate within both the family and the community. Similarly, each of the above quotations draws attention to the ways in which silence operates not only at the individual level but also at the social level. For example, the institution of the family is the primary agent of socialisation and plays an integral part in children's perceptions, expectations and understanding when faced with adversity. It is well-documented that rape victims do not disclose because they fear that they

(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 wider family in order to avoid shame and stigma. Thus, the family and community sometimes constituted a single unit, but not always.

will be disbelieved and/or wish to avoid stigma (Ullman et al., 2020); shame is often an affective element of stigmatisation following abuse (Kennedy and Prock 2018).

Geetha (2017) argues that in the context of sexual violence, even when the perpetrators are known, they are seldom shamed. Instead, Dalit women who disclose or expose a non-Dalit male perpetrator are frequently the ones shamed for casting doubt on a man's moral character (Singh, 2023), even more so when he is a non-Dalit male. This claim was also made by those who criticised LoSHA; accordingly, many dubbed the more senior feminists who spoke out against the movement 'Savarna' (dominant-caste) feminists (Chakraborty, 2019), suggesting that criticism of LoSHA serves the interests of the upper caste, who wield societal power. These *Savarna* feminists who criticized LoSHA were also effectively shaming the victims.

India is a collectivist society (Menon and Allen 2018), and the stigma of a rape extends to the victim's family. Since a family's social status shapes an individual's attitudes, values and beliefs (Little et al., 2016), a family's response to rape can influence how a rape victim-survivor constructs and articulates their experience. This creates added pressure to remain silent in order to preserve the family honour. Shahei, Jeeya and Sneh were never explicitly instructed not to disclose their rape; their silence was seemingly a normalised practice that emerged from their family contexts. Sneh felt that her mother 'wouldn't understand all this'. Shahei's mother's thoughts materialised through an inter-corporeal experience (Katila and Raudaskoski 2020): maintaining her daughter's physical needs produced a shared experience and understanding between them. Jeeya expressed the view that a woman would not be supported if she chose to disclose a rape.

Chandhni, Jeeya and Sneh also drew on discourses of honour and shame that prevented the disclosure of sexual violence. In Goffman's (1963) terms, this was an anticipatory stigma: the women chose not to disclose their rape because they believed that, were they to do so, they would be stigmatised as irresponsible or dishonourable. None of the participants quoted above stated explicitly that she had been silenced. However, Shahei's recollection of her mother's behaviour indicates a broader pattern of implicit silencing by the family/community. Similarly, Jeeya's response suggests that the fear of being silenced by their

family and community keeps women silent. Sneh feared that disclosure would elicit negative reactions from her friends and family; consequently, she did not disclose her rape. In the context of Goffman's (1963) distinction between discredited and discreditable individuals, Shahei, Jeeya and Sneh's explanations can be better understood through an intersectional lens: as Dalit women, they already live with a stigmatised identity that distinguishes them as *discredited* people within the wider Indian society; disclosing a rape would make this even more complex and add to their discredited identity. Therefore, they find different ways to manage their *discreditable* status by attempting to conceal their trauma and avoid stigma.

Chandhni's interview was especially interesting for a variety of reasons. She had migrated from a small rural village in the Eastern part of India to Delhi, after her rape with her husband. Chandhni's community was aware of her rape because her case had been reported to the police – she had been kidnapped and gang-raped by a group known as the Naxalites, a rebel communist movement that was founded on Maoist principles and seeks universal social justice (Suykens 2015).⁴ In Chandhni's case, her neighbours and extended family members initially responded by avoiding her; *vice versa*, if Chandhni did not talk about it, then it had not really happened. Chandhni explained that society did not want to know when a woman had been raped. This is reminiscent of a 'belief in a just world' (BJW) (Lerner, 1980): when an individual's social perceptions and expectations are influenced by BJW, this can lead to victim-blaming and/or the justification of an offence that has occurred (Russel and Hand 2017). In this sense, BJW can be understood as another power mechanism that tells women to keep silent about the sexual abuse they have suffered. Chandhni suggested as much when she stated that society was not 'ready' to hear about her experience of rape, meaning that her community was unable to acknowledge and/or did not know how to react to the repeated rape of a 16-year-old by multiple men from their village. It is not uncommon for people to feel unable to acknowledge the trauma experienced by a loved one and, in such cases, people may use coping

⁴ Chandhni and a few of the other interviewees explained that certain sub-Naxalite criminal organisations are armed, use violence, exploit people, and are linked to various state authorities.

strategies such as avoidance (Bhuptani et al., 2018) because they feel powerless and do not know how to help (Ringer 2018). This was apparent in Chandhni's case:

Chandhni: [The Naxalites] are a group that the police and the government fear. The police won't investigate them because some police officers are even members of the Naxalites. They took over our village a long time ago.

Chandhni's contextualisation of her experience may explain why her community failed to acknowledge her rape: the men who raped her belonged to a powerful group that was connected to the police. Furthermore, there would be no recourse to assistance from the police because they were involved with this gang.

As a result, Chandhni's rape experience was managed by shifting the discursive spaces and social identities of caste, class and gender. It became what Mookherjee (2015) would call a 'public secret', whereby a community engages in an active 'not knowing' as a strategy for avoiding action. Chandhni's community was aware that she had been raped but did not allow itself to articulate this. Similarly, Sahay (2010) observes that family members often choose to remain 'ignorant' of the sexual abuse alleged by their female relatives because they are not in a position to take action against the perpetrators. By ignoring the allegations and/or stating that they disbelieve them, the victim's relatives seek to manage both the family's and the victim-survivor's experience of abuse.

Another pertinent point is that according to Chandhni, her community's primary concern was for her physical body – she was 'alive', and that was 'good enough'. Similarly, Shahei's mother, who tended to her daughter's physical wellbeing as if she had a physical ailment, refused to acknowledge that she had been a victim of rape. Chandhni's and Shahei's experiences indicate an attempt to disconnect the body from the soul. Chandhni stated clearly that the 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 any signs of the rape. Because rape is not always visually evident on the body in the same way as other types of violence, Chandhni's physical presence – the evidence that she was alive – was enough to keep her public secret. Yet, one's body

represents one's experiences and relationships with others, and other people's responses to one's rape influence one's sense of self – the body and the soul cannot be divided (Lennon, 2019).

Conversely, Chandhni's case can be understood as a process whereby the experience of rape transcended the individual in order to reach the community, and the community attempts to work through the trauma collectively by being a silent presence. The community wished to show their support for Chandhni, but they could only do so silently because of their own discredited experiences and fear of possible retaliation. Through their silence and their gaze, Chandhni became aware of their support. 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 the public space. However, a silent presence can also operate as a mechanism for expressing collective emotional support when neither words nor actions are available. Such a silent presence may empower the victims to make their own decisions about the best action to take.

Disclosing rape and codes of silence

Of the 28 interviewees, 10 had disclosed their rapes to their mothers. Little research has been conducted on the disclosure of sexual abuse in India; the research that has been undertaken is largely in the context of the overall paucity of investigation into this topic in both Indian and transnational contexts (Malloy, Sutherland and Cauffman, 2021). This study's findings show that the participants' first point of disclosure was often their mother, which suggests that universal points of disclosure may be identified for across national/cultural contexts for young girls who have experienced sexual violence. However, the responses to disclosure vary, according to the country/culture and also specific individual/family/community circumstances and this reaffirms the importance of adopting an intersectional lens. Because of the taboo of discussions surrounding sex and sexuality (Singh, Sharma and Mishra, 2020) in India alongside the shame and stigma attached to Dalit women's bodies, their experiences of sexual violence are distinct (Chereches, 2023), and this is part of why the mothers of the participants did not receive the information well and

silenced their daughters. After the women disclosed their rapes, it was never spoken of again and remained a secret between themselves and their mothers:

Jeeya: My mother did not even tell my father of this. ... My mother thought it was better if we did not say anything. ... At first she did not believe me herself, and then I think she was in shock. We never talked about it afterwards, but she always kept me away from him.

Meenakshi: 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.

Jeeya explained that she had told her mother that her uncle had raped her. Her mother responded by not telling Jeeya's father and by performing the emotional and physical labour of keeping the secret: she restricted the perpetrator's access to Jeeya to keep her physically safe. However, Jeeya did not discuss the experience of the rape itself with her mother. Of the 10 women who confided in their mothers, four were told by their mothers not to tell their fathers; the other six were told not to tell anyone at all. This aligns with Sahay's (2010) finding that mothers in India tell their children not to disclose sexual violence to their fathers for fear of their response and to maintain family honour and dignity. Similarly, X (peer review, 2019) found that South Asian mothers encouraged their daughters to remain silent to protect the reputations of both mother and daughter. This could also be connected to the shame attached to rape. It may be difficult for women in Indian communities to disclose rape to their fathers because women's bodies symbolise male and familial honour (Tejero-Navarro, 2019). In keeping her daughter's rape secret, a wife may be performing emotional labour on her husband's behalf, protecting him from shame and dishonour in addition to managing her daughter's experience. These narratives operate as a mechanism of Dalit patriarchy: Dalit women assume the burden of protecting Dalit men's reputations by privileging male experience and power (Garrity-Bond, 2018). The criticism of LoSHA has similarly served to protect men and reinforce the existing power structures.

These narratives operate as mechanisms of Dalit patriarchy and Brahmanical patriarchy. Pan (2022) raises the questions of whether Dalit patriarchy functions inside the dominant Brahmanical patriarchy and whether it is either a reflection of it or a response to it. For example, on the one hand, Dalit mothers take on the burden to protect the reputation of Dalit men by privileging male experience and power (Garrity-Bond, 2018); although in the cases of both Jeeya and Meenakshi the perpetrators were Dalit men. It is here we can raise the argument that Dalit men replicate the same methods of dominance over Dalit women that non-Dalit men employ (Pan, 2022). Sharma (2022) refers to this as “twin patriarchy” Dalit women face: domestic violence and public violence.

Meenakshi’s story provides insights from a mother’s perspective: her husband had sexually abused their daughter, and Meenakshi used silence as a survival mechanism that allowed her to forget and be happy. Remembering would bring sorrow, whereas silence could provide protection and escape from the traumatic memory (Jean-Charles, 2014). Although silence and forgetting are not the same, they are nonetheless connected: trauma victims often use both as coping mechanisms and/or healing processes (Khan, 2015). Forgetting helps the individual to construct a new identity, allowing them to move on by leaving the pain and trauma behind and focusing on new and other relationships with family, friends and romantic partners (Hirst and Yamashiro, 2017). This may explain why Meenakshi spoke not about her daughter’s past but about who she herself was at the time of the interview. They had both left their trauma in the past; that traumatic experience did not define Meenakshi’s daughter.

In a world shaped by patriarchal, caste and heterosexual institutions, familial (especially maternal) power can produce change and regulate how women construct themselves and their options for resistance (Ussher et al., 2017). This may explain why Jeeya’s mother and Meenakshi both felt that they needed to manage their daughters’ physical and emotional well-being. Meenakshi had no familial support – she had been ostracised by both her natal family and her husband’s family after leaving her husband following his rape of her daughter. This may be why she was drawn to silence: her own experience of speaking out had resulted in ostracism. Meenakshi drew on the materialities of her own life and that of her daughter to construct

explanations that emphasised the imposition of constraints on speaking about sexual violence. This highlights the difficult position in which mothers find themselves. Given the society in which they live, they have limited resources and options to support themselves and must therefore rely on experience to protect their daughters while simultaneously managing their own well-being. However, the consequence of avoiding the subject is that it prevents the victim-survivor from speaking and potentially healing. Bahadur (2020) argues that for marginalised women, such as those from the Dalit community, speech is important as a means of making space to heal their historic suffering. In remaining silent, they perpetuate patriarchal and caste norms and further exclude rape victims, leaving rape victim-survivors powerless and burdened with secrecy.

It was apparent from the interviews that participants had negotiated their rape (non-)disclosures through what can only be referred to as a cultural code of silence. Rape victims in India are prevented from speaking out about sexual violence by social and cultural norms (Jeremiah, Quinn and Alexis, 2017). The extracts below illustrate the participants' negotiations between the disclosure of rape and the community's potential 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.

Anju: 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 the police on my husband for this – what will I tell them?

The notion of silence emerged as central, and complex, in all the interviews. While it might initially appear as though the participants were simply too uncomfortable or scared to speak, their experiences highlight the association between rape and the 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' – for fear that it would 'look bad' for a Dalit woman to disclose rape. Their subjectivity was shaped by a

societal ‘normalising gaze’ (Foucault, 1979) centred on a casteism that had become internalised. For Dalit rape victim-survivors, this caste-gaze is a mode of power that imposes self-regulation, and its effects are crucial to their subjectivity: they become self-diagnosing, self-scrutinising and self-analysing individuals (Hancock, 2018). The women in this study could not speak of their rapes because of their concern about what people ‘will say’. The above extracts constitute value statements representing the society in which they lived, which values men’s rights – ‘how can I call the police on my husband?’ – more highly than women’s rights to live safely and without violence. The criticism of LoSHA has similarly served to protect men and reinforce the existing power structures.

For marginalised women, disclosure of sexual violence is more complicated, which is why intersectionality is a necessary approach to analysing and understanding their experiences. In India, Dalit women are less likely to be believed than women from other castes and may even be criminalised for reporting sexual violence: there have been cases of Dalit women who reported sexual violence to police and were then physically, sexually and verbally abused as punishment (Abhirr, 2022). Moreover, given that rape within marriage is regarded as a ‘private matter’, it is largely unacknowledged within the larger community (Edmunds and Gupta, 2016). This may be attributed to the fact that marital rape is legal in India and most sexual violence cases in the country occur within marriage or intimate partner relationships (Bhattacharyya, 2015). The women’s stories in this study reflect their embodied experiences, and both their linguistic choices and their silence were shaped by patriarchal discourse, fear and how society would perceive them. This reveals both how the community gaze is constituted and how it regulates women’s bodies and voices.

Individual and collective silence

There is a difference between being *silent* and being *silenced*, although both can signify either a loss of power or a shared understanding that no speech is required (Fivush, 2010). This section examines the notion of ‘being silent’, whereby culturally dominant narratives support a shared understanding that certain subjects may remain unspoken. In this way, silence may serve as a mechanism of power while speech conveys a loss thereof (Wagner, 2012). Some feminist research has equated silence with powerlessness, but

adopting an intersectional lens to examine victim-survivors of sexual violence in marginalised groups reveals *instances* in which silence may be a tool for resistance and healing (Corcoran, 2018). Shahei shared a story that illustrated how silence may operate in this way for Dalit women:

Shahei: There is one man who was always misbehaving, and one by one the women would quit, and when we said something to his wife, she would make us come back. She would say that it was our job, or that she would 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 on our block decided we will not work in their house. The wife was begging us to send someone, and she even said she would be sure to be home. She must have phoned me 100 times. But we all ignored her, we didn't answer her phone calls, and she would yell outside for us to come up if she saw us on 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 did not go into detail about the nature of that behaviour. Research suggests that the language used to describe sexual assault that is available to Dalit women is inadequate (peer review 2023) and that shame is attached to discussion of anything of a sexual nature. Reference to sexual harassment in this manner suggests that men's sexual harassment of women has been normalised and can be explained away as an almost childlike behaviour. However, it has also been normalised by the pervasive dominant narratives and stereotypes of Dalit women's and girls' bodies as hypersexual and accessible to men – including Dalit men and, particularly, upper-caste men (Paik, 2014).

Shahei's words also demonstrate that collective silence can operate as a form of resistance and a measure of safety and alternative justice. According to her account, collective silence is an embodied action – it is highly performative. The Dalit women collectively devised a strategy to resist sexual abuse and use silence

as a tool, indicating that silence can sometimes be more powerful than speech. The above extract also highlights how Brahmanical patriarchy shapes Dalit women's experiences (Bhopal, 2018). When Shahei and the other women spoke to the abuser's wife about her husband's behaviour, 'she would make us come back' and 'she would say that it was our job'. Thus, the female employer would draw on her caste-based power to make these women return to work. This illustrates the graded inequality of gender-based violence as a mechanism that sustains caste hierarchy (Rege, 2013). The intermingling of caste, class and gender produces differences in privilege: an upper-caste woman can ask a Dalit woman to remain in a sexually exploitative situation precisely because that woman is Dalit and is dependent on the upper-caste woman for financial security. This produces differences in subjugation for Dalit women based on the institution of Brahmanical patriarchy. This in turn suggests that silence is complex for Dalit women; it is not merely passive or a form of oppression but can also serve as an act of resistance.

The complexity of Shahei's story reveals the microphysics of power (Foucault, 1979). While the power imbalance between upper-caste and lower-caste women is evident, 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, because upper-caste individuals rely on 'impure' Dalits to do the jobs that they would not or could not perform for themselves (Sharma, 2017). This accounts for the wife's 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 reject the upper-caste woman's requests, she silenced the woman by ignoring her and denying her service without having to articulate the word 'no'. This may be interpreted as a mechanism for reclaiming power and illustrates the notion that 'power is everywhere' (Foucault, 1979).

Conclusion

This article has developed a deeper understanding of Dalit women's current experiences of sexual violence in India. Many of the participants described multiple ways in which their attempts to articulate their

experiences had been silenced by family members speaking on their behalf, urging them to be quiet and/or ignoring them. Moreover, state agents – namely, the police – were complicit in silencing Dalit women’s experiences by means of various mechanisms, such as not believing them and/or reshaping their accounts with alternative narratives that misrepresented the women as vengeful because of their intersecting identities of caste, class and gender; this discredited them as legitimate victims and misrepresented their rape as not real. The women's experiences played out in a very specific context of the Dalit and Brahmanical patriarchy, that served to differentiate them further from other sexual violence victim-survivors.

However, many of the participants used silence as a form of agency and resistance against sexual violence. Despite the challenges that the Dalit participants faced in their everyday lives, they also highlighted the various ways in which they practised and negotiated agency. Dalit women are not the silent, submissive females that others may perceive them 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, their families or the upper caste. Rather, they are creative and can negotiate a space for themselves and a future for their children by establishing boundaries and transforming the Dalit identity.

While India’s LoSHA campaign claimed to reflect the shared experiences of sexual violence victim-survivors across India, it did not speak to Dalit women; their experiences had been challenged. Employing an intersectional lens thus laid bare the *specific* experiences of Dalit women, whose needs are different and require different support strategies (Boyd and McEwan, 2022). For instance, Dalit women experience patriarchy *differently*; in India, the caste system is regarded as the most important form of social hierarchy, followed by gender (Arya, 2020b). Therefore, violence against a Dalit woman is considered justifiable because she is regarded as less valuable than everyone else on multiple fronts (e.g., caste and gender). This article also identified the various ways in which Dalit women’s experiences and accounts were often silenced by the women themselves, their families, their communities and the state. Many of the study participants did not disclose or wish to discuss their experiences because too much time had lapsed, and

others wished to forget about their experience. Their silence was a coping mechanism that helped them to ‘move forward’ with their lives.

Many of the participants also drew on discourses of honour and shame that are used to stigmatise victim-survivors into silence. For Dalit women, notions of shame are more complex than they are for non-Dalit women: they must also navigate their intersecting caste identity, which further silences them. Dalit women’s lives are shaped by both the Brahmanical and the Dalit patriarchal institutions and, consequently, the mothers of the women who were raped were also complicit in silencing these victim-survivors’ voices. This meant that female Dalit rape victim-survivors had to negotiate disclosure through a cultural code of silence. Victim-survivors are often prevented from speaking out by cultural expectations, norms and social hierarchies that cohere around elements such as caste, class and gender.

However, there is a clear distinction between being silent and being silenced. Although being silent is often misunderstood as evidence of powerlessness, it may also serve as a mechanism by which one can reclaim power and agency and as a form of resistance to subjugation. For the marginalised, voice may not always be a viable or available mechanism of power; silence can be.

References

Author (removed for peer review)

Abhrr, V. (2022). *The Case of Low Conviction in Crimes Against Dalits and Adivasis*. Oxfam: India

Ahrens, C. (2006). Being Silenced: The Impact of Negative Social Reactions on the Disclosure of Rape. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, vol. 38(4), pp 263-274.

Alaggia, R., Wang, S. (2020). “I never told anyone until the #metoo movement”: What can we learn from sexual abuse and sexual assault disclosures made through social media? *Child Abuse & Neglect*, vol. 103.

Arya, S. (2020a). Theorising Gender in South Asia: Dalit Feminist Perspective. *CASTE: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion*, vol. 1(2), pp 5-19.

- Arya, S. (2020b). Dalit or Brahmanical Patriarchy? Rethinking Indian Feminism. *CASTE: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion* , vol. 1(1), pp 217-228.
- Bahadur, A. (2020). Speaking is Healing: Dalit Women Gain a Voice through a Charismatic Healing Movement in Nepal. *CASTE: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion*, vol. 1(2), pp 73-90.
- Bhattacharyya, R. (2015). Understanding the spatialities of sexual assault against Indian women in India. *Gender, Place and Culture*, vol. 22(9), pp 1340-1356.
- Bhattacharyya, R. (2018). #Metoo Movement: An Awareness Campaign. *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change. Special Edition* , vol. 3(4).
- Bhopal, K (2009). Identity, Empathy and 'otherness': Asian women, education and dowries in the UK. *Race Ethnicity and Education. Special Issue: Black feminisms and postcolonial paradigms: researching educational inequalities*, pp 27-39, vol. 12.
- Bhopal, K. (2018). *Gender, 'Race' and Patriarchy. A study of South Asian Women*. Milton Park: Routledge.
- Bhopal, K., Danaher, P. (2013). *Identity and Pedagogy in Higher Education. International Comparisons*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Bhuptani, P., Kaufman, J., Messman-Moore, T., Gratz, K., DiLillo, D. (2018). Rape Disclosure and Depression Among Community Women: The Mediating Roles of Shame and Experiential Avoidance. . *Violence Against Women*, vol. 25(10), pp 1226-1242.
- Boyd, A., McEwan, B. (2022). Viral paradox: The intersection of “me too” and #MeToo. *New Media and Society*.
- Chakraborty, A. (2019). Politics of #LoSha: Using Naming and Shaming as a Feminist Tool on Facebook. In D. Ging, E. Siaper, *Gender Hate Online* (p. Chapter 10). Ireland India Institute.

Chakravarti, U. (1993). Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State. *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 28(14), pp 579-585.

Chakravarti, U. (2012). Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State. *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 28(14), pp 579–585.

Chakravarti, U. (2018). The Axis of Gender. Stratification in India. In U. Chakravarti, *G.C. lens*. New Delhi:Sage.

Chereches, B. (2023). Unveiling the Oppressed Body: Female Dalit Body Politics in India through Baburao Bagul and Yashica Dutt. *Humanities*, vol. 12(4).

Corcoran, P. (2018). Silence. In P. Corcoran, V. Spencer, *Disclosures*. London: Routledge.

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 1241-1299.

Das, T., Bhattacharayy, R., Pervin, A. (2020). In-depth semi-structured interviewing: Reserching domestic violence as a public health issue in Bangladesh. *SAGE Research Methods Cases Medicine and Health*.

Datta, A., Satija, S. (2020). Women, development, caste, and violence in rural Bihar, India. *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, vol. 26(2), pp 223-244.

Diwakar, J. (2020). Sex as a Weapon to Settle Scores against Dalits: A Quotidian Phenomenon. *CASTE: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion*, vol. 1(2), pp 121-134.

Edmunds, E., Gupta, A. (2016). Headline violence and silenced pleasure: contested framings of consensual sex, power and rape in Delhi, India 2011-2014. *Reproductive Health Matters*, vol. 24(47), pp 126-140.

- Ellard-Gray, A., Jeffrey, N., Choubak, M., Crann, S. (2015). Finding the Hidden Participant: Solutions for Recruiting Hidden, Hard-to-Reach, and Vulnerable Populations. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, vol. 14(5).
- Falcon, S. (2016). Transnational feminism as a paradigm for decolonizing the practice of research: Identifying feminist principles and methodology criteria for US-based scholars. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 37(1), 174-194.
- Fivush, R. (2010). Speaking silence: The social construction of silence in autobiographical and cultural narratives. *Memory*, vol. 18(2), pp 88-98.
- Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison: Translated from French by Alan Sheridan*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Garrity-Bond, C. (2018). “Ecofeminist Epistemology in Vandana Shiva’s The Feminine Principle of Prakriti and Ivone Gebara’s Trinitarian Cosmology.” . *Feminist Theology*, vol. 26(2), pp 185-194.
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. New York: Penguin.
- Gupta, C. (2015). Embodying Resistance: Representing Dalits in Colonial India. *Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 38(1), pp 100-118.
- Hancock, B. (2018). Michel Foucault and the Problematics of Power: Theorizing DTCA and Medicalized Subjectivity. *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, vol. 43(4), pp 439-468.
- Harding, N. (2020). Co-constructing feminist research: Ensuring meaningful participation while researching the experiences of criminalised women. . *Methodological Innovations* , vol. 13(2).
- Harris, K. (2016). Reflexive voicing: a communicative approach to intersectional writing. *Qualitative Research* , vol. 16(1), pp 111-127.

- Hesse-Biber, N. (2012). Feminist Research Exploring, Interrogating, and Transforming the Interconnections of Epistemology, Methodology, and Method. In N. S. Hesse-Biber, *Hand Book of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*. Boston: Sage.
- Hirst, W., Yamashiro, J. (2017). Social aspects of forgetting. In C. Meade, C. Harris. P., Van Bergen, *Collaborative remembering: Theories, research, and applications* (pp 76-99). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Holland, K., Cortina, L. (2017). “It Happens to Girls All the Time”: Examining Sexual Assault Survivors’ Reasons for Not Using Campus Supports. *American Journal of Psychology*. *American Journal of Psychology*, vol. 59, pp 50-64.
- Iles, I., Waks, L., Seate, A., Irions, A. (2018). The Unintended Consequences of Rape Disclosure: The Effects of Disclosure Content, Listener Gender, and Year in College on Listener’s Reactions. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 36(7-8), pp 4022-4048.
- Jean-Charles, R. (2014). Toward a Victim-Survivor Narrative: Rape and Form in Yvonne Vera's *Under the Tongue* and Calixthe Beyala's *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*. *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 45(1), pp 39-62.
- Jeremiah, R., Quinn, C., Alexis, J. (2017). Exposing the culture of silence: Inhibiting factors in the prevention, treatment, and mitigation of sexual abuse in the Eastern Caribbean. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, vol. 66, pp 53-63.
- Kalra, G., Bhugra, D. (2013). Sexual violence against women: Understanding cross-cultural intersections. *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 55(3), 244–249.
- Kaszovitz, S. (2021). Reasons Why Victims Wait To Disclose That They Were Sexually Assaulted. *Jackson Health System*.

- Katila, J., Raudaskoski, S. (2020). Interaction Analysis as an Embodied and Interactive Process: Multimodal, Co-operative, and Intercorporeal Ways of Seeing Video Data as Complementary Professional Visions. *Human Studies*, vol. 43, pp 445-470.
- Keating, C. (2013). *Resistant Silences*. In M.S., R.A.C, *Silence, Feminism, Power*. London: Palgrave.
- Kennedy, A., Prock, K. (2018). “I Still Feel Like I Am Not Normal”: A Review of the Role of Stigma and Stigmatization Among Female Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse, Sexual Assault, and Intimate Partner Violence. *Trauma, Violence and Abuse*, vol. 19(5), pp 512-527.
- Khan, S. (2015). The Silence and Forgetting that wrote Noor. *Journal of Narrative Politics* , vol. 1(2), pp 121-132.
- Kumar, A. (2021). Sexual Violence against Dalit women: An analytical study of Intersectionality of Gender, Caste and class in India. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 22(10), pp 123-134.
- Lennon, K. (2019). *Feminist Perspectives on the Body* . available at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminist-body/>: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, .
- Lerner, M. (1980). The Belief in a Just World. In M. Lerner, *The Belief in a Just World. Perspectives in Social Psychology*. Boston, MA: Springer.
- Little, W., McGivern, R., Keirns, N., Strayer, E., Griffiths, H., Cody-Rydzewski, S., Vyain, S. (2016). *Introduction to Sociology*. Open BCCAMPUS.
- Malloy, L., Brubacher, S., Lamb, M. (2013). “Because she’s one who listens”: Children discuss disclosure recipients in forensic interviews. *Child Maltreatment*, vol. 18, 245–251.
- Mandal, P. (2018). Translation in Qualitative Studies: Evaluation Criteria and Equivalence. *The Qualitative Report*, vol. 23(1), pp 2529-2537.

- Menon, S., Allen, N. (2018). The Formal Systems Response to Violence Against Women in India: A Cultural Lens. *American Journal of Psychology*, vol. 62(1-2), pp 51-61.
- Mookherjee, N. (2015). "Bringing Out the Snake": Khota (scorn) and the Public Secrecy of Sexual Violence. In N. Mookherjee, *The Spectral Wound. Sexual violence, public memories, and the Bangladesh War of 1971*. USA: Duke University Press.
- Muthukkaruppan, P. (2017). Critique of Caste Violence: Explorations in Theory. *Social Scientist*, vol. 45(1-2), pp 49-71.
- Nording, V. (2021). The Critical Methodologies Collective, (Ed.). (2021). *The Politics and Ethics of Representation in Qualitative Research: Addressing Moments of Discomfort* (1st ed.) London: Routledge.
- Page, T. (2017). Vulnerable writing as a feminist methodological practice. In Y. Gunaratnam, C. Hamilton, Brah, A. *Feminist Review* (pp.13-29). London: Palgrave.
- Paik, S. (2014). Building Bridges: Articulating Dalit and African American Women's Solidarity. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, vol. 42(3/4), pp 74-96.
- Pan, A. (2021). Representating a Dalit Woman. In A. Pan, *Mapping Dalit Feminism. Towards an intersectional standpoint* pp. 109). London: Sage.
- Pan, A. (2022). After Violence: Dalit Women's Narratives and the Possibilities of Possibilities of . *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 24(6).
- Pandey, A., Mishra, V. (2021). Dalit Women's narratives on sexual violence: Reflections on Indian Society and State. *Social Change*, vol. 51(3), pp 311-326.
- Parker, C., Scott, S., Geddes, A. (2019). SAGE Research Methods . *Snowball Sampling*.

- Proctor, A. (2015). Methodological and ethical issues in feminist research with abused women: Reflections on participants' vulnerability and empowerment. *Women's Studies International Forum* , vol. 48, pp 124-134.
- Rani, A., Hassan, F. (2020). Suffering in Silence: Stories of Indian Women with Chronic Mental Illness and Sexual Coercion. *Indian Journal of Psychology*, vol. 42(2), pp 168-174.
- Rege, S. (2013). *Writing caste/ writing gender: narrating dalit women's testimonios*. New Delhi: Zubaan.
- Ringer, J. (2018). *How to support a loved one who has survived a traumatic event*. Retrieved from Loma Linda University Health.
- Russel, K., Hand, C. (2017). Rape myth acceptance, victim blame attribution and Just World Beliefs: A rapid evidence assessment. *Aggression and Violent Behavior* , vol. 37, pp 153-160.
- Sahay, S. (2010). Compelled Subjugation and Forced Silence: Sexually Abused Girls and their Family Members: A Case Study of Western Madhya Pradesh (India). *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, vol. 15(4), pp 343-364.
- Sankaran, S., Sekerdej, M., Von Hecker, U. (2017). The Role of Indian Caste Identity and Caste Inconsistent Norms on Status Representation. *Frontiers Psychology*, vol. 8.
- Santos Bruss, M. (2019). Naming and shaming or 'speaking truth to power'? On the ambivalences of the Indian 'list of sexual harassers in academia' (LoSHA) . *Ephemera theory and politics in organization*, vol. 19(4), pp 721-743.
- Santos Bruss, S. (2020). Queering Feminist Solidarities. #Metoo, LoSHA and the Digital Dalit. *Open Gender Journal*.
- Sarkar, D. (2022). Toward a Feminism Without Scaffoldings: Mapping a Research Project, a Narrative from the Field, and a Dr om the Field, and a Draft Bill . *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 23(2), pp 103-118.

Sen, R. (2017). Sexual Harassment and the Limits of Speech. *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 52(50), pp 7-8.

Senanayake, H., Trigunayat, S. (2020). Brahmanical Patriarchy and Voices from Below: Ambedkar's Characterization of Women's Emancipation. *De Gruyter, Open Access Open Political Science*, vol. 3, pp 175-182.

Shalhoub-Kevorkian, N. (2016). Towards a Cultural definition of rape. In P. Ikkaracan, *Deconstructing sexuality in the Middle East*. London: Routledge.

Sharma, B., Kumar, A. (2020). Learning from 'the Outsider Within': The Sociological Significance of Dalit Women's Life Narratives. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 21(6), pp 22-34.

Shrivastava, J., Tanchangya, R. (2015). Dalit women's quest for justice: Cases from India and Bangladesh. *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, vol. 21(2), pp 180-191.

Singh, N., Sharma, P., Mishra, N. (2020). Female Sexual Dysfunction: Indian Perspective and Role of Indian Gynecologists. *Indian Journal of Community Medicine*, vol. 45(3), pp 333-337.

Siuta, R., Martin, R., Dray, K., Cindy Liu, S., Bergman, M. (2023). Who posted #MeToo, why, and what happened: A mixed methods examination. *Frontiers in Public Health*, vol. 11.

Sonawat, R. (2001). Understanding families in India: A reflection of societal changes. *SciElo Analytics*, vol. 17 (2), pp 177-186.

Stephens, J. (1994). Feminist fictions: a critique of the category 'non-western woman' in . In R. Guha, *Subaltern studies VI: writings on South* (pp. 92-125). Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Still, C. (2014). *Dalit Women: Honour and Patriarchy in South India*. Delhi: Social Science Press.

- Suykens, B. (2015). Comparing Rebel Rule Through Revolution and Naturalization: Ideologies of Governance in Naxalite and Naga India . In A. Arjona, N. Kasfir, Z. Mampilly, *Rebel Governance in Civil War* (pp. Chapter 7, pp 138-157). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tejero-Navarro, A. (2019). Sacks of Mutilated Breasts: Violence and Body Politics in South Asian Partition Literature . *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 20(3), pp 44-50.
- Thiesmeyer, L. (2003). *Discourses and Silencing, Representation and the language of displacement*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing.
- Ullman, S., O'Callaghan, E., Shepp, V., Harris, C. (2020). Reasons for and Experiences of Sexual Assault Nondisclosure in a Diverse Community Sample. *Journal of Family Violence*, vol. 35, pp 839-851.
- Ussher, J., Perz, J., Metusela, C., Hawkey, A., Morrow, M., Narchal, R., Estoesta, J. (2017). Negotiating Discourses of Shame, Secrecy, and Silence: Migrant and Refugee Women's Experiences of Sexual Embodiment. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, vol. 46, pp 1901-1921.
- Vaid, D. (2014). Vaid, D. (2014). Caste in Contemporary India: Flexibility and Persistence. *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 40, pp 391-410.
- Wagner, R. (2012). Silence as Resistance before the Subject, or Could the Subaltern Remain Silent. *Theory, Culture and Society*, pp 1-26.