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**DALIT WOMEN'S EXPLOITATION AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT
DEPICTED IN YASHICA DUTT'S MEMOIR *COMING OUT AS DALIT***

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Abstract:

The emotions, which rise to dominate others, are responsible to categorised human beings. There are few factors like class, race, colour, gender, religion, region etc., which play significant role to divide people and exploit the subordinates. Women, from theology to philosophy, considered as 'other'/inferior to men. Black and Dalit women are doubly marginalised and exploited due to their colour/caste and their gender. This research paper focuses upon the exploitation and sexual harassment of Dalit women portrayed in Yashica Dutt's memoir 'Coming Out as Dalit.' The Hindu reviewed this book as, 'A personal story becomes a powerful social commentary against everyday casteism that often goes unchallenged.' The book is having twelve chapters, but this paper especially focused upon eleven chapter- Dalit Women's Movements. Further, this work based on the discrimination of Dalit women and ignorance of mainstream feminists in India.

Keywords: *Dalit Women, Exploitation, Harassment, Gender, Feminism, etc.*

Coming Out as Dalit is a memoir written by Yashica Dutt, which explores the life of Dalits in India. The memoir is divided into twelve chapters and an epilogue at the end. It highlights the hardships faced by Dalits, such as the importance of education and the reservation policy that helped her grandparents enter civil services. Dutt also discusses her parents' marriage and her and her siblings' birth, emphasizing the exploitations they faced during their lifetime. The book also delves into the roots of the caste system in India, discussing various theories explaining the caste system. Sudden suicide of Rohith Vemula made her to realize that she was wrong to hide her caste from her childhood. She, then, came to know about Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and how he is special for every Dalit. She dedicated one entire chapter for Dr. Ambedkar and his Legacy where she briefly pointed out the struggle of Dr. Ambedkar to give equal rights to all Dalits. Dutt covers all aspects of Dalit people's lives, particularly the reality in which the Dalit community, where she grew up, often hides their caste, and appears as an Upper Caste person. Outlook India reviews the book, stating that it recounts the exhausting burden of living with the secret and the fear of being found out. Dutt also grapples with the guilt of denying her history and the struggles of her grandparents and other Dalit reformers fighting for equal rights. The memoir also touches on the sexual harassment of Dalit women and the struggles of her mother to hide her caste to follow the upper caste people. She discusses her expensive



education at Sophia school, her poor relations with her parents, her further education at St Joseph College, and her entry into journalism.

The present paper is based upon the chapter - eleven titled as, *Dalit Women's Movements*. In her own words, 'I am a Dalit and a woman, and therefore doubly disadvantaged so far as the casteist and patriarchal attitudes of Indian society continue to prevail' (Dutt, 142). Above statement connects with Gramsci's concept of subaltern. Subaltern means 'of inferior rank,' he used it to refer to those social groups who are the subject to the hegemony of ruling classes. As a feminist, Yashica Dutt highlights the subordinate position and sexual exploitation of Dalit women. Upper caste feminists have ignored the issues of Dalit women and how Dalit women have initiated their own feminist movement in India and US. Domestic violence against Dalits is not limited to rural areas, where women face immense physical and emotional brutality from their families. Dalit women, especially those from rural areas, are often at the bottom of caste, class, and gender hierarchies. Dalit women and men are often more vulnerable to violence from families and society due to their lower-class gender and lower caste. Upper caste men view women as sexual property, and access to Dalit man's land comes with access to his Dalit wife. Colour is associated with caste and purity, cleanliness, and impurity/pollution. Some scholars argue that Dalits and tribals are descended from darker indigenous Dravidians and upper castes from light skinned Aryans. Caste is associated with purity, cleanliness, and impurity/pollution. Some scholars argue that Dalits and tribals are descended from the darker indigenous Dravidians and the upper castes from the light skinned Aryans. Some scholars argue that upper caste = fair skin = touchable, lower caste = dark skin = untouchable.

As a woman and Dalit, she has to face double discrimination in her life. Upper-caste societies deliver abuse and caste violence against Dalit women, using public humiliation, mutilation, and brutal violence to keep their families and communities in check. After the rape, it is difficult for a Dalit woman to file a complaint against the abuser, and the upper-caste establishment punishes her family and the entire Dalit community by blocking their access to water, land, or neighbourhood shops.

The perception that Dalit women are 'sexually available' affects the judgment in court cases, with only one out of four accused sexual harassers and rapists being convicted in 2016. The idea that Dalit women are responsible for their rape due to being 'sexually available' is a damaging false idea that creates a damagingly false impression of them. This false idea is perpetuated by the public response to their assault, which often leads to the belief that Dalit women are less virtuous and deserving of sympathy or justice.

Then she listed out some of the rape cases of Dalit women due to their castes and how upper-caste people react to these cases. But they totally assembled when an upper-caste woman raped. She gave example of Nirbhaya case which was so famous because every Indian was agitated and participated in the movement. Everyone thought to be participated in the movement to express their patriotic duties. Where Jyoti Singh Pande was brutally gang-raped in Delhi in 2012 and later killed in Perumbavoor, Kerala. She became a symbol of protest against India's rape culture and violence against women. However, no one talked about or reacted to the murder of Jisha, a thirty-year-old Dalit woman who was horrifically raped and killed inside her single room shade in Perumbavoor, Kerala in April 2016.



The silence surrounding Jisha's murder is similar to another evil deeply ingrained in Indian society - that of the caste. In 2011, a National Family Health survey indicated that 11% of SC/ST women between the ages of 15 and 49 had experienced sexual violence compared to 7.6% of Non-SC/ST women. Upper caste people always refuse to accept Dalit women's sexual assault linked with her caste; even National data collection agencies do not seem to think caste is anything to do with rape of Dalit women.

Early feminism in India began to protest the systematic control and entitlement of men over men, i.e. patriarchy. Upper caste women seemed to focus on their own issues but never acknowledged Dalit women might have it even worse. A US-based Dalit law student and anti-caste activist, Rya Shankar, sent out a call asking students to send her names of Indian Professors who might have got away harassing them. After publication of the list, a statement criticizing it published in Kafila, the organization of Thirteen feminists, pointed out that the anonymous nature of the complaints because Shankar had hidden the identities of those students who informed her about their own harassments by the professors who belonged to the upper castes. Yashica Dutt's memoir, *The Danger of the Single Narrative*, discusses the experiences of Dalit women and the role of upper-caste feminists in addressing their issues. She highlights the challenges faced by Dalit women, such as Mathura's rape verdict in 1972 and Vishakha's creation of protection guidelines against workplace sexual harassment in 1997.

Dutt also highlights the importance of Dalit women's voices being heard, particularly through organizations like All India Dalit Women's Right Forum (AIDMAM) and the National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW). These organizations have found that Haryana has the highest number of gang rape cases on Dalit women, with 22 reported cases. They have also contributed to the Indian Women's Right movements since the 1970s, such as the Shahada movement protesting the exploitation of landless Bhillaborers.

To conclude, Yashica Dutt's memoir covers various aspects of the Dalit community, highlighting the struggles faced by Dalit women and the importance of acknowledging their caste identity. She acknowledges her own struggles and the challenges faced by Dalit women, highlighting the need for greater support and representation for these marginalized communities. Dutt criticizes upper-caste feminists for neglecting the issues of Dalit women and highlights the lack of visibility for Dalit women in the Dalit Panther Party. She also highlights the violence and abuse faced by Dalit women, including from their partners and family members.

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