Doctoral Thesis

Programa de Doctorado en Estudios de las Mujeres, Discursos y Prácticas de Género

Caste and Gender in the South Asian Diaspora: Case Studies of the Novels Written by Bharati Mukherjee, Diaspora Blog, and Diaspora Matrimonial Sites.

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To Hira Lal, Kalavati, and Anasuiya

Who dies...
-Nobody.
With every birth,
A human gives:
Half of the body,
Half of the mind,
Half of the soul,
Half of the memories.
A newborn
Carries the half
Till death.
And forwards
The half to new birth.
We never died
We will never die
We will move on
Keeping the half
Within us
With love
And pass.

Abstract

Caste discrimination is a social problem which is spread not only in India but beyond its borders. Caste oppression which goes unsaid, becomes a point of double marginalization of women either of higher or lower caste. The research thesis analyzes how the South Asian diaspora represents caste and gender. The thesis is accomplished through a close feminist reading (Lukic & Sánchez, 2011) of the literary texts, *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971), *Jasmine* (1989), and *Desirable Daughters* (2002) by Bharati Mukherjee, a matrimonial site Jeevansathi.com, and a blog article "Spearheading a survey of caste in South Asian diaspora" (2016), written by Dalit diaspora Valliammal Karunakaran et al.

Methodologically, the research constructs an interdisciplinary bridge between the literary and digital texts, explored with a close feminist reading. Concerning the research question, the thesis debates the concept of gender in contemporary feminist theory, which develops in matters relating to transnational geography and is shaped by different factors where caste is one of the crucial points. In this regard, the theoretical debate starts from postcolonial feminism, decolonial feminism, and Dalit (lower caste) feminism and will move toward Dalit diaspora feminism. This debate emphasizes that the fight for the Dalit diaspora women is multiple because they are not only "brown" women but rather carry their caste with their gender, race, and class. The conclusions of the thesis are as follows: first, the texts of Mukherjee written from the perspective of an upper-caste and upper-middle-class woman have used Dalits and Dalit diaspora only as a filler in the novels, and the concept of caste has been blurred with that of the class. Second, the matrimonial site, Jeevansathi.com, is designed according to upper-caste and upper-middle-class criteria, leaving the lower-caste women outside. Contrary to the first two cases, the blog article written by the Dalit diaspora shows that Dalit diaspora feminist discourse accepts caste as one of their identities. There is a proposal of collaboration and collectiveness to stand against the caste apartheid.

Keywords: South Asian diaspora, Gender, Caste, Representation, Dalit, Bharati Mukherjee, Matrimonial sites, Blog, Postcolonialism, Dalit diaspora feminism

Resumen

La discriminación por casta es un problema social que tiene lugar dentro y fuera de las fronteras indias. La opresión por casta supone una doble marginación de las mujeres, ya sean de casta superior o inferior. Esta tesis analiza cómo la diáspora del sur de Asia representa el género y la casta. Para ello se realiza una lectura feminista detallada (Lukic & Sánchez, 2011) de la representación de casta y género a través de textos literarios, de una web de búsqueda de pareja para matrimonios indios y de un artículo de blog.

A nivel metodológico, el trabajo construye un puente interdisciplinar entre textos literarios y digitales, explorados con un método de lectura detallada. En primer lugar, se estudian las novelas *The Tiger´s Daughter* (1971), *Jasmine* (1989) y *Desirable Daughters* (2002), escritas por Bharati Mukherjee. Seguidamente, se examina el sitio web de búsqueda de pareja para matrimonios indios Jeevansathi.com. Finalmente, se examina el artículo blog “Spearheading a survey of caste in South Asian diaspora” (2016) escrito por la diáspora Dalit Valliammal Karunakaran et al.

La tesis trabaja el concepto de género en la teoría feminista contemporánea desarrollado a través de la geografía transnacional y conformado por diferentes factores, donde la casta es uno de los puntos cruciales. En este sentido, el debate teórico parte del feminismo poscolonial, decolonial y Dalit y avanzará hacia el feminismo de la diáspora Dalit. Los resultados de esta tesis evidencian que los textos de Mukherjee están escritos desde la perspectiva de una mujer de casta superior y clase alta donde la diáspora Dalit se usa como relleno y, además, se confunden el concepto de casta con el de clase. En segundo lugar, se observa que el sitio web de búsqueda de pareja, creado desde un punto de vista patriarcal Brahmínico, usa la casta para crear “comunidades imaginarias” en las que margina doblemente a las mujeres de todas las castas. Finalmente, en el artículo de blog se muestra que el discurso feminista de la diáspora Dalit acepta la casta como parte de su identidad, lo que desafía la opresión relacionada con la casta. La lucha de estas mujeres, por tanto, se multiplica, ya que añade la casta al tradicional debate en torno a género, raza y clase.

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Introduction

1. Gender, caste, and research work

This thesis formally started taking shape in 2018 when I registered for a PhD program at the *Instituto de las Mujeres y Género.* But the elements and questions that animate it had been alive in my mind for a long time. The research questions raised herein are both a function of academic research and many herstories that are told through the thesis. One such story begins with the birth of a girl child whose father did not turn up to see her for almost a year. Her mother brought her home, where she grew up, becoming an elder sister to three siblings, two girls, and a boy, by the time she was six years old. The girl grew up witnessing several herstories unfold, especially of her mother attempting to raise three daughters and a gay son with an alcoholic husband. The four children grew up facing stiff challenges and discrimination at every step. They were humiliated at school for not being able to pay tuition fees, unprotected by any guardian. They were also sexually assaulted by some members of their own family. The pain and suffering of this age never ended; rather carried and lived in her inside as a trauma.

Against all odds, the girl got a chance to study in Khagaria, a small district in Bihar that currently ranks as India's second most illiterate state. Only a handful of economically and socially privileged kids from the district manage to get an English medium education, while the rest struggle with broken English and confidence. Burdened with the colonial language, some worked hard to clear the Central University Entrance Examination, which has a reserved admissions quota for castes legally designated as lower and OBCs (Other Backward Classes). The girl was one of the successful candidates. The central university offered her a space to understand the history of the colonial imposition of the English language and the dynamics of the demand for fluency in an unequal globalized market. Classrooms, canteens, and offices constantly reminded her of inferiority stemming from English language skills. Here the colonial language symbolized cultural capital and social and economic position in reference to geographic location, caste, class, and gender. Of course, the problem was not only about linguistic identity but also a matrix of identities: gender, caste, and region, among others, operating in various geographies and

temporalities. The identity matrix continually confronted discriminatory situations deeply rooted in a colonial, patriarchal, and Brahmanical hierarchical system[1].

While living in Europe, the girl was fetishized for her color; she did not seem to belong to any of the identities visible in India, especially those stemming from her caste and social roots. Would the Indian body, which was not able to shun its color and religion, be able to leave its caste behind? So, the question appeared: "Does caste travel with the gendered body?" Caste was invisibly visible at places where Indians met either in the streets of Granada or at international conferences. It was visible when some non-Indian companions discussed their vague ideas about caste. Invariably, they would carry narratives of dominant caste Indians in literary texts, digital platforms, or conferences. For such friends, caste was a visible social system. On one level, their idea was true, but the vantage point from where the research questions of the thesis emerged was an interrogating position for the unwritten, subtle operations of caste apartheid (more than a system).[2] For instance, in the streets of Granada, meeting an Indian couple in their fifties was exciting until they enquired about their companion's caste; Innocuously framed as a question about the surname, their query was aimed at gauging the caste to which the girl belonged and adjusted their attitudes based on the answer. The feeling of being "caught" was haunting, like scars of a naked body were exposed in front of them.

Caste is believed to be the defining feature of the Indian social formation, its single most potent symbol for both rural and urban social worlds. However, the relevance of caste outside India raises a significant question: how does it travel with the gendered body? How is it represented in the South Asian writings? Here, I want to mention why I chose to write about caste and gender and their representations in the South Asian diaspora writing. My research area and interest have always been the South Asian diaspora writings, especially literature written by the South Asian diaspora women. The question of un/belongingness from their perspectives as women has made me think about my own identity(ies) as I, myself, have crossed many borders with my

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[1] Brahmanical hierarchical system refers to the caste system constructed by brahmins (upper caste) which was strengthened by the texts and knowledges produced by brahmins. Through this hierarchical system, the suppression based on caste has been legitimized. The functionality of Brahmanical hierarchical system and caste system are talked in detail in chapter four.

[2] Brahmanical forces often choose the term "caste system," which helps neutralize and legitimize it. By calling it a "system," they claim there are aspects that are valuable and useful about it. Whereas caste apartheid is a more accurate description of the horrors of caste that break our minds and our hearts through punishing systemic exclusion and violence. (Soundararajan, 2022, p. 37)

intersecting identities. My M.Phil. research dissertation back in 2015 was titled *Negotiation of the border as a site of belonging and un-belongingness in the works of Gloria Anzaldúa and Taslima Nasreen*. This work opened up an understanding of the border, not as a physical line that divides two entities but as a "barbwire" where two sides meet to produce a new transformative space. Anzaldúa's definition of the "border," "borderline," and "borderlands" gave a new direction to the feminist discourse, especially diaspora feminist discourse, to re-construct their identities with "New Mestiza Consciousness" (Anzaldúa, 1987). In her work, mestiza does not connote only race but also language, culture, psychology, belonging, negotiation, and ambivalence.

Anzaldúa's notion of the border is an inclusive space. Taslima Nasreen, too, has discussed the existence of borders as in-between or a negotiating space from the viewpoint of a South Asian woman and a brown woman in a brown patriarchal Indian and Indian diaspora society. I pursued the same line of research in 2018, with my GEMMA master's thesis on *(Dis)location of homeland: In-betweenness in Taslima Nasreen's* French Lover *and Monica Ali's* Brick Lane. My research concentrated on unpacking the meaning of "homeland" from the perspective of the Third World and South Asian diasporic brown women. Using the framework of feminist, postcolonial, and transnational theory, the above-mentioned literary texts were studied alongside the theoretical concepts of the "Nueva Conciencia Mestiza" and "Coatlicue State" proposed in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), through the close reading. This approach defined by Jasmina Lukic and Adelina Sánchez (2011) helped in analytically study the lives of the protagonist of the novels together with the theories of Anzaldúa. The thesis work explored a debate based on Benedict Anderson's notion of "the nation" as an "imaginary community" (1983). The discussion ranges from the modern concept of "the nation" to the production of multiple "imagined homelands" at a transnational level based on the national theory. "Imagined homelands" in a transnational world are constructed, as shown in the study, on the different factors such basis of gender, color, class, religion and nationality. The thesis examined the "othered" position of the women within and in-between the "imagined homelands." Furthermore, the research investigated the mechanisms of survival adopted by transnational, South Asian, brown women within/in-between these imagined homelands. In particular, it approached their use of silence as their strategy to move from the position of the

"other" to the "conscious other." Finally, it explored an alternative idea of homeland proposed through the novels: "border(home)land" as opposed to "imagined homelands" (Gupta, 2018).

Consulting the novels of Taslima Nasreen and Monica Ali, the focus in the thesis was on the theme of diasporic women such as their search for a home, their survival strategies. Hence the thesis worked on a feminist discourse where the debates on gender, their colonial background, Third World identity, culture, history, religion, and color come into play (Gupta, 2018). However, all these works, be it Taslima Nasreen's *French Lover* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* or any of the numerous fiction or non-fiction texts which I have worked on either in my master's thesis or in individual articles, were somehow limited in their narrations and interrogations of the caste-gender intersection. As far as my reading of these novels is concerned, and comparing a significant number of similar works, it can be inferred that authors have often tried to convince their readers that "caste does not cross the border with the gendered body" (Gupta, 2018). For instance, Taslima Nasreen discusses the gendered caste continuum in mainland India, where the lower caste protagonist's marriage proposal is rejected by her boyfriend. Nevertheless, caste is not further discussed in the novel when the protagonist crosses the border: as if her gendered caste body has left caste behind on Indian land. Hence, the concluding remarks of the thesis ended with another political question: Does the gendered body not carry caste beyond the South Asian borders? Or does the novel limit its focus to gender, leaving caste outside its diaspora narrative? If these novels focus on gender and other transnational issues, why do they leave caste outside their discussion?

Here, it is significant to discuss the use of gendered caste and caste-d gender as I will be using them further. Gendered caste refers to the marginality of gender on the basis of caste difference such as the different position between upper caste and lower caste women, between upper caste and lower caste men. They are women, however there can be difference in their position because of their caste. Caste-d gender refers to the situation when within the same caste there is a difference because of gender position. Such as a man and a woman have different social position within the same caste. In the case of Dalit women, there has been an intersection of gendered caste and caste-d gender, when compared to an upper caste male.

However, parallel to these fictional narratives, some other diaspora real-life stories, such as that of Permila Tirkey, force us to think about the intersection of gender and class with caste (Dalwai,

2016). Sameera Dalwai (2016) in one of her articles refers to Permila Tirkey, an Adivasi Dalit diaspora woman from rural Bihar, who described her belonging to a servant class and lower caste. Because of her caste and class, her society and family always treated her as an inherent domestic servant. The Chandhok family hired her to come with them to the UK to take care of their twins in 2018. During her five years of employment, her employers did not provide a suitable living space, even though they had assured her in the visa application that she would be given a separate room with a bathroom. She slept on the floor, where there was no privacy, or slept with the children to attend to them during the night. Tirkey never got a proper meal or bed because she ate only the leftovers and slept on a mattress without a bed.

Tirkey's case, as domestic labor in India structured by the caste apartheid, is a common one: first, it exemplifies the governance under the discourse of power, control, and dehumanization, and second, the devaluation of her work. The caste discourse prompts employers to expect servitude rather than service. She was not allowed to step out of the house alone, learn English further, was denied education, and was not allowed access to her salary, which was given to her family but irregularly. She had no access to go shopping for herself, was not allowed to practice her religion, and was not permitted to meet outsiders.

In the case of Permila Tirkey, an employer exercised his Brahminical patriarchal power over a Dalit woman. Brahminical patriarchy is not only a patriarchal system where gender difference is practiced but an intersection of gender with caste and class. Uma Chakravarti (1993) states that

The process of caste, class, and gender stratification, the three elements in the establishment of the social order in South Asia, are shaping the formation of Brahminical patriarchy. It has taken a considerable period of time to evolve into its complex structure. (1993, p. 580)

In the case of Tirkey, the suppression was based on such intersection which has placed her as Dalit woman at the bottom of the Brahmanical patriarchal system. The employer could treat her this way due to her inherent lower caste woman position. She was not appointed to the job because of her skill in caring for kids and the house but because of her lower caste and gender. They controlled her movements and used her for unreasonably heavy tasks, such as looking after the kids around the clock. Tirkey's situation was not only caused by caste or gender but by the intersection of many other aspects where caste and gender played a crucial role.

Tirkey's case and many other such cases happening worldwide call for a revision of postcolonial diasporic texts and invite us to question the representation of Dalit diaspora women in the South Asian diaspora writings. Coming back to the novels *French Lover* (2002) and *Brick Lane* (2003) again, it can be pointed out that the authors have portrayed the narrators/protagonists of the novels from a particular section of the South Asian diaspora community, with their own stories of oppression based on caste, class, and gender, which should be revised, raising the same questions mentioned above. Hence, interrogations developing from my earlier work have directed me toward the question of the representation of caste and gender in the South Asian diaspora. The notion of representation is essential here because representation and self-representation decide the position of Dalit diaspora women in the eyes of the First World, their South Asian diaspora community, and the South Asian Dalit community. For me, the purpose of this Ph.D. writing is meant as an act of diving into the domain of one's unfulfilled desire for knowledge and bringing uninterrogated zones into focus. Thus, this research aims to bring forward issues of philosophical and political concern that degrade the human personality and dehumanize a particular section of the South Asian diaspora.

Initially, I wanted to engage with literary texts for this research as that was my area of interest and previous research works. It was observed that several scholars had followed Homi K Bhabha's "third space" theory which is a radical theory representing the masses of South Asian diaspora (1990; 1994). Further, the South Asian diaspora women writers have centered their discussion on the debate between Third World feminism and White feminism apart from the diaspora themes. Some well-known theorists of reference in diaspora women's writings are Gayatri Spivak (1988), Chandra Mohanty (1984), Lata Mani (1990), and Avtar Brah (1996), to name a few. However, Dalit diaspora or Dalit diaspora women remain unexplored by postcolonial writers in their writings. In terms of representation, as Thenmozhi Soundararajan states that most South Asian diaspora writing has been "trapped" in a colonial cosmopolitan diaspora theme, resulting in the homogenization of the South Asian diaspora as a "brown" community (2022). It has masked the tensions and hierarchies within individual national, cultural, caste, gender, and linguistic identities.

In this regard, I second the thought of Anne McClintock, who argues, "postcolonial writers seem to be trapped within the same colonial tragedy that they criticized earlier: within the binary

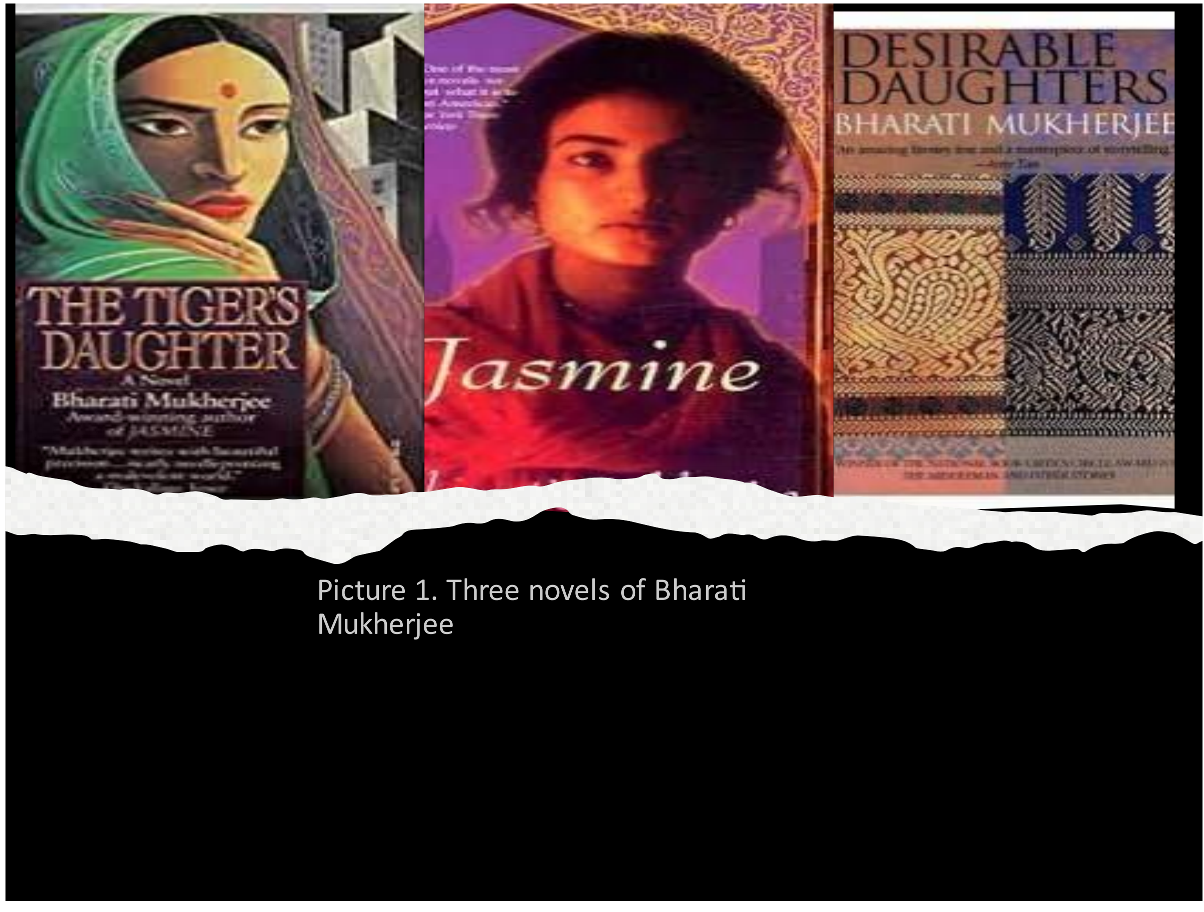
division of the West/the rest, the First World/Third World" (McClintock, 1994, p. 11). However, from the point of Dalit women, they have divided their brown community based on caste and gender and re-created a similar hierarchy. That is why there is a need to explore beyond the literary texts and enter other texts such as matrimonial websites, newspaper articles, diaspora Instagram, Twitter hashtags, and blogs handled and written by South Asian diaspora with the question of the representation of caste and gender. All these texts have variously attempted to answer the above-mentioned question, "Does caste travel with the gendered body?" Intriguingly, the difference in the presentation of gender, class, race, religion, and region shifts according to the writers and their social backgrounds.

For instance, women diaspora writers have juxtaposed feminist concerns with diasporic elements. Matrimonial and business-oriented websites, started by upper-class, dominant caste, male South Asian diaspora, maintained the "purity" of their culture by arranging marriages within the same community. Blog writings by the South Asian diaspora are also used to connect with India and its community—different kinds of blog writings attempt to address various topics. Interestingly, with the internet boom, blogs that nowadays are easily accessed have visitors from all sections of the South Asian diasporas. Besides, there are blogs handled by lower caste communities that talk about gender and caste from their perspective. A strong presence on platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram cannot be avoided when it comes to the digital presence of South Asian diaspora or Dalit diaspora and their connectivity with the mainland. Thus, many diaspora stories are available worldwide and linked to different backgrounds, sections, and ideologies. The factors such as the writers of the text, their diasporic movement, their ideologies, and their social and economic identities shape these diasporic narratives.

After wide-ranging reading and research, I chose to focus on three case studies in this thesis. The selection of the texts is based on the representation and self-representation of the gendered caste and caste-d gender "other" by the South Asian (Dalit) diaspora in their texts. Three novels, *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971), *Jasmine* (1989), and *Desirable Daughters* (2002), written by Bharati Mukherjee, are chosen for the first case study. The second case study is a matrimonial site called *Jeevansathi.com*, one of the most visited among South Asians and the South Asian diaspora. The third case study is a blog titled "Spearheading a survey of caste in South Asian diasporas"

(2016), written by Valliammal Karunakaran, Asmita Pankaj, Thenmozhi Soundararajan, and Prathap Balakrishnan.

In this division, the term (self)representation plays a crucial role in delineating who is writing the text and for whom and how it is written and hence follows a detailed theorization. The research work uses the terms representation and self-representation with an intention to clear how non-Dalit diaspora writers represent the Dalit diaspora in their texts especially in the first two case studies. Then, how Dalit diasporas self-represent themselves in the third case study. [3] We will discuss about representation and self-representation in the theoretical framework of the thesis which covers from postcolonialism and decoloniality to Dalit diaspora feminism.



Picture 1. Three novels of Bharati Mukherjee

[3] When I have to consider both the terms representation and self-representation together, I will use (self)representation.

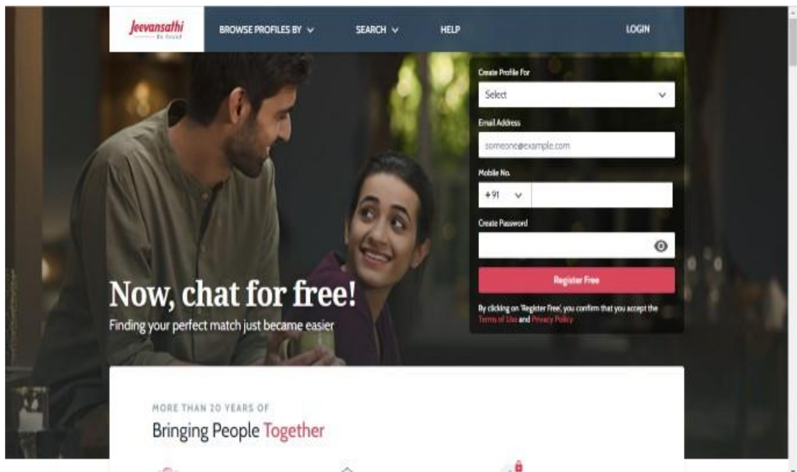
The novels, *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971), *Jasmine* (1989), and *Desirable Daughters* (2002), written by Bharati Mukherjee, follow similar diaspora themes discussed in Taslima Nasreen's *French Lover* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*. Despite this, several reasons make her novels fit better as a case study for this research work.

Picture 2. Bharati Mukherjee in American flag printed saree

Picture 3. Bharati Mukherjee celebrating Durga Puja

First, Mukherjee is one of the pioneer diaspora women writers who are read worldwide. She was born in West Bengal in 1940 before the independence and partition of what we call India today. She worked in the department of English at the University of California, Berkeley, USA. In her works, she has explored the diasporic characteristics from the perspective of women who play different challenging roles in the patriarchal South Asian diaspora communities, for instance, a woman married outside the country, religion, culture, and caste; a widow; a wife who kills her husband; a divorced single mother. Her diasporic themes have evolved from her first novel, published in the 1970s, to the latest one, published in the 2010s, breaking many male-oriented traditional diaspora trends. She has evolved as a diaspora writer from being an "expatriate" to an

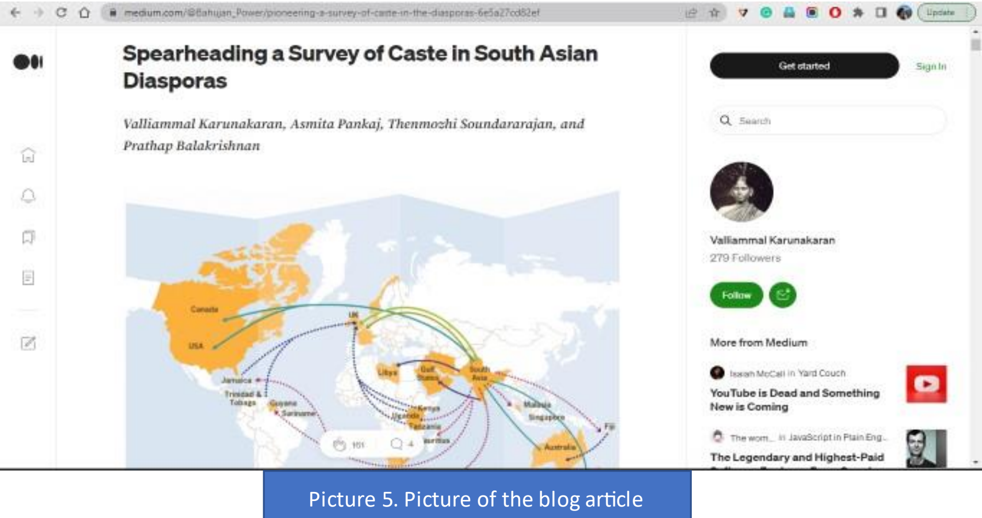
"immigrant," from a "hyphenated" to a "genetic," from being confused about her in-betweenness to accepting her new avatar of being an "American." Second, as the above pictures symbolize, Mukherjee lived in her homeland for years before migrating for studies at a foreign university and has lived many years in her host land, the United States of America. Thus, her works speak not only about the South Asian diaspora woman's presence in the host land, but she has instead managed to produce a fine balance in her writings between her homeland and her host land. Third, she has shown the cultural interaction between a diaspora (from the Third World) and a native and, simultaneously, has portrayed the conflicts among Indian diasporas. The latter part allows an understanding of gender disputes, class conflict, and caste issues among the South Asian diasporas in the host land. The second and third points are crucial for this research work, as they present the interactions of South Asians among themselves and their treatment of gender and caste in their worlds. The novels of Mukherjee thus provide a fertile ground for productive engagement with the representation of caste and gender dynamics among the South Asian diaspora, which is the focus of this research (Gupta, 2023).



Picture 4. Home page of *Jeevansathi.com*

The second case study is a matrimonial site called *Jeevansathi.com*, a profile-oriented digital business venture. It is easy to access and make a profile, as the above picture shows: one can

register and chat for free. Visitors can provide information for creating their profile and describe their specific customized desires for their bride or groom. The reason for choosing Jeevansathi.com is that it is a well-known matrimonial site among Indians and Indian diasporas. This site is comparatively more accessible than other matrimonial sites when discussing the South Asian diaspora. The selection of this matrimonial site is, first, based on its popularity and second, caste question which on Jeevansathi.com as matrimonial site uses in its tag line. Jeevansathi.com boomed in the neoliberal market opening during the 1990s and did business worth millions. This matrimonial site connects Indians living in India and Indian diaspora through marriage agreements. However, at the same time, it is political because it defines marriage, diaspora, gender, body shape, color, and caste according to the dominant South Asian upper-caste diaspora perspectives and tropes. Indeed, it goes beyond the nation where it originated to negotiate between tradition and the modern, national, and transnational. At the same time, it perpetuates the similar ideology attached to the “imagined community” and “nation” (Anderson, 1983) constructed on the basis of caste, class, and gender in arranging marriages. Besides, the picture above portrays two happily engaged faces that carry the baggage of values and conditions, such as their body (how they look), the profession they seek, the family behind them, the class, and the caste markers. Hence, it gives a scope to delineate the functionality of caste in marriage and the role of marriage in strengthening caste among Indians globally. Thus, its study cannot be avoided when it comes to the representation of gender and caste among the South Asian diaspora.



Picture 5. Picture of the blog article

The third case study is a blog article titled "Spearheading a survey of caste in South Asian diasporas" (2016), written by Valliammal Karunakaran, Asmita Pankaj, Thenmozhi Soundararajan, and Prathap Balakrishnan. The writers of this blog article are South Asian Dalit diaspora social activists, scholars, and writers working, in general, against the violence toward Dalit diaspora by the caste-privileged diaspora community. The blog article, a compilation of experiences shared by caste-oppressed diasporas, was written as the conclusion of a survey conducted as "caste in the diaspora survey 2016." The "Dalit American Foundation headed the survey in collaboration with the Ambedkar International Mission, the Ambedkar Association of North America, and the Dalit American Women's Association" (2016). These are the organizations working in the USA to protect the rights of South Asians who come from a lower caste.

This survey was conducted after repeatedly hearing different versions of caste issues where on the one hand, the South Asian Dalit diaspora shared their discrimination at their workplaces, dominant caste households, and the South Asian cultural places. On the other hand, the dominant caste argued that there could not be caste discrimination beyond the Indian land because there was no caste. In 2016, many organizations working against caste, gender, and religious discrimination came together to organize a survey where the South Asian diasporas from all

castes could participate and share their experience about caste (Karunakaran et al., 2016). Participants in the survey came from different work fields and different genders. The Dalit diaspora's short narratives shared their trauma, pain, suffering, and wounds as their experiences while living among the South Asian diaspora in different places such as offices, colleges, universities, or social gatherings. Hence, this blog becomes a platform to understand the self-representation of the Dalit diaspora. The blog article is linked to other reading sets about caste among the South Asian diaspora. Together with other articles, Instagram hashtags, and YouTube channels, they have created a space of cyber-activism where the (self)representation of caste-oppressed South Asian diaspora is crucial. Although the number of followers is low, the article raises the political question of the presence of caste-d gender or gendered caste among the South Asian diaspora.

The reason for considering the blog article as one of the case studies is personal and political. As a blogger, I blog poems and stories from a feminist perspective and follow other bloggers as well. Academic interest in diaspora studies from the Third World perspective made me follow bloggers writing about gender and caste issues. Blogs written by Valliammal Karunkaran, Thenmozhi, and Suraj Yengde became enriching knowledge to question the representation of caste and gender in the South Asian diaspora. In this way, this research writing has also become an attempt where personal interest and political questions meet academic writing.

Toward the end, a comparative close reading of the three case studies will be done considering the difference in the writers, the writing style, the perspective from where the text is written, and for whom the text is written. Comparative reading will focus on the changing perspective on caste and gender from the first case study to the third one.

The principal research question in this thesis can be summarized as follows:

1. *How are gender and caste represented by the South Asian diaspora, taking the case studies of the texts of Bharati Mukherjee, Jeevansathi.com matrimonial site, and a blog*?

Some other questions, which will follow, are:

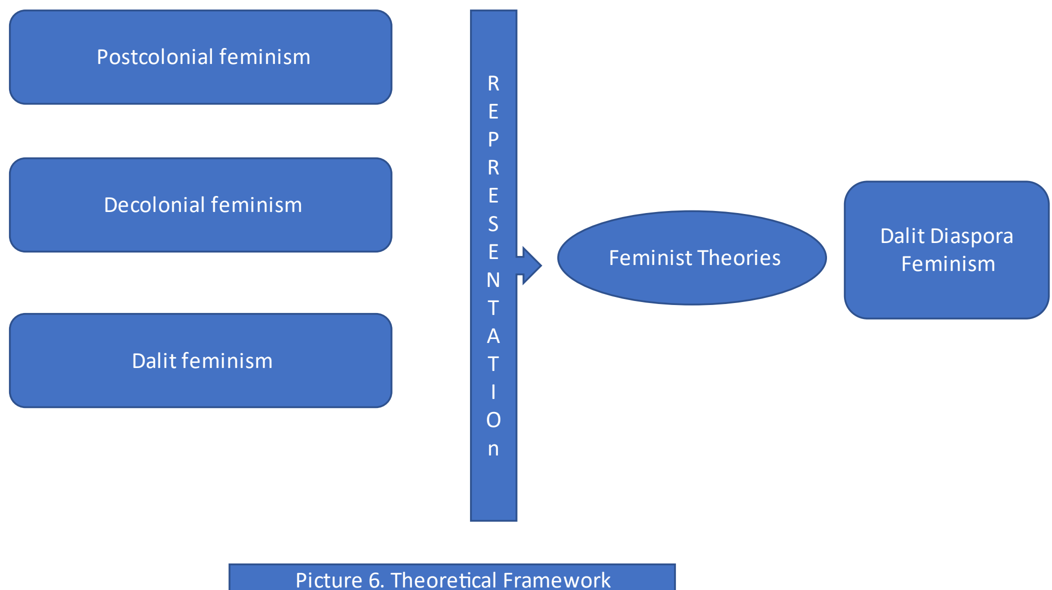
a) Considering gender and caste as essential terms, the research will be revising the definition of feminism from the perspective of the Third World South Asian Dalit diaspora

women and question: *should caste be an essential factor in defining feminism in the case of the South Asian diaspora caste-d women?*

b) How can the term (self)representation be re-defined in this thesis considering the factors of caste and gender among the South Asian diaspora through the given case studies?

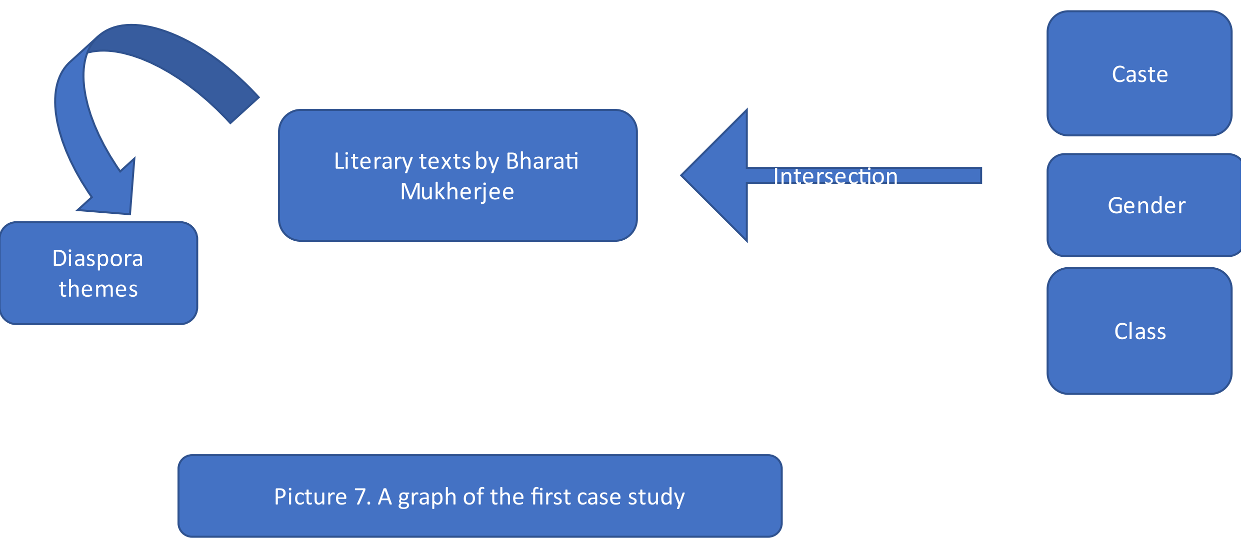
In its use of literary texts, a matrimonial site, and a blog article, this research work combines literature, and social media, the humanities and the social sciences and thus acts like a hybrid production of different disciplinary traditions and a bridge between literary texts and social media. This work will intend to show the shift from Bharati Mukherjee's literary texts to social media, such as matrimonial sites and blogs. What links all the texts are the questions of representation, caste, and gender.

Consequently, the thesis addresses current debates in four areas. Feminist theory advances work from the perspectives of a South Asian Dalit diaspora woman who carries a transnational identity. This identity has kept shifting geographically between the Third World and the First World, between colonizer and colonized, and between brown men and white men. It has countered white women, broken the homogenized "brownness" of the South Asian diaspora community, and carried caste with it. Thus, the first debate is on the concept of gender in contemporary feminist theory, which develops steadily interestingly in matters concerning transnational geography and is shaped by different factors where caste will be one of the crucial points. This thesis, hence, places its debates on the question of the representation of caste and gender. As shown in the picture below, the debate will start from postcolonial feminism, decolonial feminism, and Dalit feminism and will move towards Dalit diaspora feminism from a transnational perspective. In this discussion, the term Third World women, subaltern, animalization, heterogenization, intersection, gender, caste, representation, and "Coatlicue State" are debated. All these terms, taken from these schools of feminism, will help shape the notion of (self) representation, which will aim towards understanding the strategies of Dalit diaspora feminism.



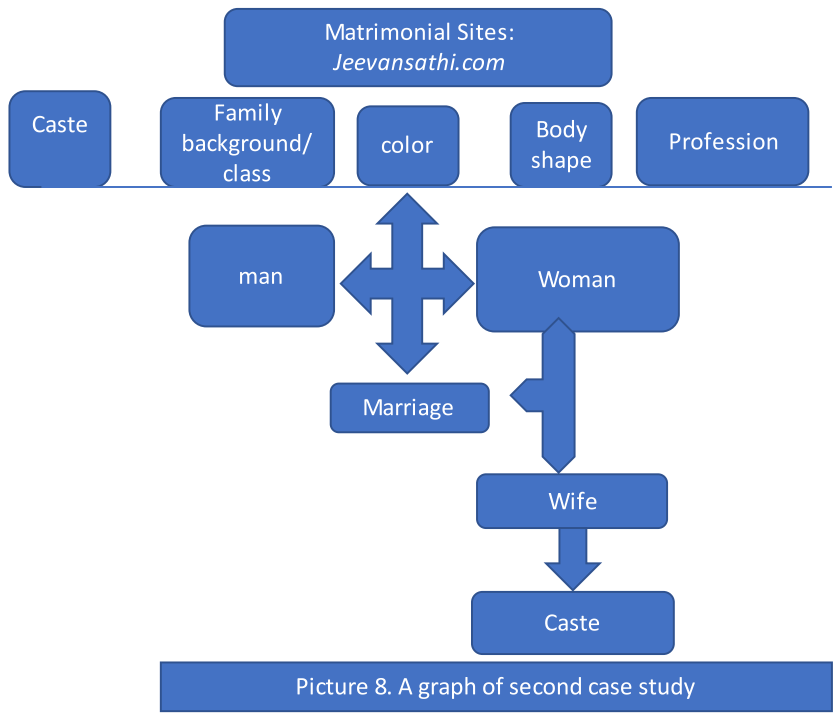
Picture 6. Theoretical Framework

Second, as shown in the picture 7 below, this thesis debates the literary texts of Bharati Mukherjee concerning the complexity of the identities of diaspora women based on gendered caste and caste-d gender in a transnational space. It will open the debates on the question of representation which will attempt to discuss the socioeconomic position, such as caste, gender, and class, of the writer and the protagonists. From there, one can question how the caste-d and gendered "other" is represented in Mukherjee's writings, as she carries a contradictory position of being an upper middle-class woman from a dominant caste.



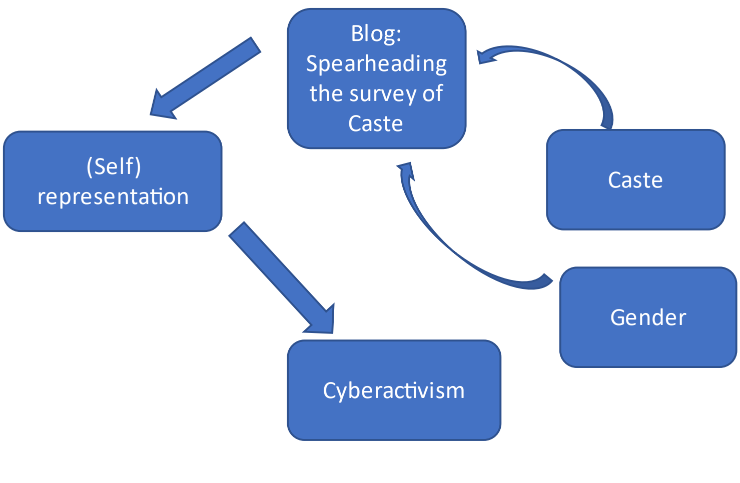
Picture 7. A graph of the first case study

Third, as shown in the picture 8, the different aspects of matrimonial sites will be debated, that are shaping the idea of a marriageable man and woman, delineating them under gender and caste. This part will discuss the function of caste and gender in marriage and how a matrimonial site, despite representing a modern Indian culture, continues to suppress women of all castes. On the one hand, it sidelines the lower caste women from the category of desired women for marriage by linking their "lower" caste to their character. On the other hand, it arrests the upper caste women in the vicious cycle of re/producing caste.



Picture 8. A graph of second case study

The fourth debate is on another social media, i.e., a blog, especially about (self) representation. The blog will be read through the lens of caste and gender using the theory of Dalit diaspora feminism. The focus will also be on how Dalit activists and feminists collectively use cyberspace to create space for activism against Brahminical patriarchy.



Picture 9. A graph of third case study

As discussed above in picture six, the theoretical framework of this research covers a combination of postcolonialism and decoloniality with a feminist discourse that comes from these schools of theory and Dalit feminism. The intention of choosing postcolonialism, decoloniality, and Dalit feminism is to focus on three critical terms: (self)representation, caste, and gender within a transitional space among the South Asian diaspora. All these terms have significantly re-defined feminist discourse where diaspora, caste, and gender are important factors and can lead to Dalit diaspora feminism. In detail, the theoretical framework is divided into levels. On the first level, the term representation has been widely discussed in postcolonialism from the perspective of the South Asian diaspora and diaspora feminists. In this work, the notion of representation is shaped by postcolonial theorists such as Homi K Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, ranging from "hybridity," a "third space" between colonizers and colonized, and subaltern women in a heterogenous imperialist Brahmanical patriarchal society. However, most postcolonial theorists have been criticized for their cosmopolitan, dominant caste, upper-class points of view. For instance, postcolonialism has defined gender, which has limitedly discussed caste-d gender or gendered caste. Alternatively, if it is done, then only from the perspective of dominant caste women such as "Brahmin women."

Hence, in the second stage, to start the debate on caste-d gender or gendered caste, I will use decoloniality, especially the discussion of the "animalization" of women's bodies and how "intersection" can be an important theory in understanding marginalization, which is multiple in the case of Dalit diaspora women (2007). Indeed, María Lugones does not talk about the caste apartheid but opens a discussion about the "animalization" of women's bodies, which has been similar in the case of Dalit women. Lugones also talks about the "intersection," which is taken from the concept given by Kimberley Crenshaw (1991) and can be applied to go beyond the "brownness" of the South Asian diaspora community.

Susan Stanford Friedman's new geography of identity is employed to detail further the "multiple" or "contradictory subject positions" concerning "situation," "relativity," and "location" (1998). Friedman's "new geography of identity" helps find the multiplicity and complexity of gender with other factors, especially caste, in this research work. Further, recognizing caste as not just a retrograde past but an oppressive past reproduced as forms of inequality in modern society requires that we intersect caste with other factors such as gender, class, nationality, region, and religion.

In what follows, within decolonial feminism, Anzaldúa's theories on the "Coatlicue State" and "Nueva Mestiza Conciencia" are used to decipher the psychology and the internal conflict of caste-d gender or gendered caste. Dalit diaspora has focused on multigenerational trauma, pain, suffering, and wounds as their narratives representing themselves and become their mentor who teaches them to stand up for themselves. The theories of "Coatlicue state" and "Nueva Conciencia Mestiza" explore the internal conflicts of the Dalit diaspora, bringing us closer to their narrative and self-representation.

2. Structure of the thesis

The first chapter is a literature review that starts with a brief discussion on transnationalism, postcolonialism, and globalization, and then leads to the diaspora, its history, development, political and social situation, and economic participation in the world. The chapter will also focus on the historical and academic presence of the diaspora and their further strengthening globally with the rise of the internet. The chapter narrows down to the South Asian diaspora,

their development in different parts of the world, and their economic, social, cultural, and political involvement in the homeland and host land. The chapter points out the differences among the South Asian diaspora based on the time of migration ("old diaspora" and "new diaspora") and the formation of the different levels of heterogeneity among diaspora communities based on color, religion, gender, language, and nationality. It explains how gender and caste have been dealt with in the South Asian diaspora writing. Further, it discusses about the South Asian diaspora literary writing by women and briefly deals with the matrimonial sites and the blogs used in the research. A review of the case studies will conclude the chapter to help understand the themes discussed and how caste can become an important aspect of analyzing the case studies.

The second chapter deals with the methodological strategies applied while selecting the texts by Mukherjee, the matrimonial website, and the blog as case studies. In this regard, the chapter explores the methodological problems and political benefits of interdisciplinarity through two critical approaches: those by Gabriele Griffin (2011) and Gayatri Spivak (2003). Then the chapter discusses the term representation from the text *Who sings the nation-state: Language, politics, belonging* (2007) together with the concept of "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983) in order to delineate the representation of the gendered caste and caste-d gender others in South Asian diaspora community. Finally, it will discuss the methods and methodological strategies used in case studies to conduct the research. In all the case studies, "feminist close reading" has been used as a significant method which is worked together with other methods and methodologies (Lukic & Sanchez, 2011). The first case study will be investigated through a close reading built on postcolonial and Dalit diaspora feminist strategies. In the second case study, digital ethnography and auto ethnography have been used together with postcolonial and Dalit diaspora feminist close reading. In the third case study, the question of self-representation is defined taking the example of Dalit diaspora woman from Dalit diaspora feminist close reading. Then using blog as a space of activism.

The third chapter corresponds to the building of the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework will delineate the question of representation starting from the postcolonialism and decoloniality to Dalit diaspora feminism. First, I will concentrate on the ideas proposed by Homi K Bhabha about the South Asian diaspora writing, which presents the complex relationship

between colonizers and colonized. He delineates the resistance and representation as an ambivalent presence– a "hybrid" and "third space." However, the chapter questions "hybridity" defined by a colonial elite, dominant caste, and cosmopolitan male migrant where the groups at the margin, such as women and caste others, have little space. Hence, the question of representation is revised through the theory of postcolonial feminist writer Gayatri Spivak's "Can the subaltern speak?" where she emphasizes the heterogeneity of the Indian population. We see how she has pointed out the suppressed position of Third World women in her land and outside as colonized racialized Brahminical patriarchal victims.

Further, the chapter questions the position of Dalit diaspora women within postcolonialism. As postcolonial scholars have enabled people worldwide, especially in the USA, to understand the violence of the Orientalist and white imperial gaze. However, they do not locate the colonial dynamic as existing within or having been built upon the original dominator-culture context of caste.

In order to enter into the discussion of caste, the chapter first includes a discussion between postcolonialism and decoloniality, where it revises the well-known texts "Coloniality of gender" (2007) by María Lugones and "Can the subaltern speak?" (1988) by Gayatri Spivak to delineate the representation of the Third World women and women of color. The section discusses the crucial theoretical points such as the "animalization" of (women of color and Third World Dalit women) and the understanding of Dalit women's position through "heterogeneity" and "intersectionality" within a hierarchical structure of caste-d gender and gendered caste. I do not deny that postcolonialism, which Dalit feminists have criticized, has given the base to build Dalit diaspora feminism, such as countering White hierarchy, patriarchy, and European feminism and understanding the ambivalent identities when colonized meets the colonizer. However, postcolonialism has not touched the vital aspect of caste, the main reason for Dalit women's marginalization in the homeland and host land. Thus, I discuss how decolonial feminism, more than postcolonial feminism, can contribute to shaping and understanding Dalit diaspora feminism. In this regard, feminist decolonial approaches, such as Maria Lugones's delineation of the "animalization" of women of color's bodies and "intersectionality," are used to emphasize Dalit diaspora women's subjectivity. Besides, I use Anzaldúa's theoretical contribution, "Coatlicue state," to provide a base for understanding the internal conflict of the South Asian

Dalit diaspora women and their process of becoming "conscious others" (Gupta, 2018; Gupta, 2022) and achieving a "Nueva Conciencia Metiza." That is how the chapter maps the theoretical framework from postcolonial feminism, decolonial feminism, and Dalit feminism to Dalit diaspora feminism.

The fourth chapter gives an overall view of caste and gender and how gender intersects with caste resulting in the double marginalization of Dalit women. The chapter investigates the different phases in which caste intersects gender in the suppression of women, starting from marriage, widowhood, and motherhood. The chapter also emphasizes the consequences of not following the caste system such as marrying outside the caste. It also focuses on caste, which "does not exist outside Indian land," plays a critical role in the marginalization of caste-d and gendered other outside the Indian land. The chapter will give a detailed reading of the hierarchical system of caste.

The fifth chapter carries out a close reading of Bharati Mukherjee's novels *The Tiger's daughter* (1971), *Jasmine* (1989), and *Desirable Daughters* (2002) (Lukic & Sánchez, 2011). The close reading of the texts presents transnational spaces, projecting multiple geographies from Calcutta to America where the writer has portrayed her female protagonists with multiple identities based on caste, class, race, and nationality. The chapter analyzes the characters' socio-economic positions and questions: How are they multiply marginalized in transnational spaces based on gender, class, and caste? How are the lower caste women and lower-class women represented in Mukherjee's writings? Methodologically the chapter will read the "silences," "gaps," "noises," and "obstacles" from a Dalit diaspora feminist perspective which introduces us to the historical and cultural marginalization of women based on their caste (Khair, 2011). Theoretically, the chapter will employ Susan Friedman's "new geography of identity," Gayatri Spivak's debate of "subalternity," Tabish Khair's distinction between the "Babu" and "Coolie," and Uma Chakravarti's discussion of caste parallel to gender and class.

The sixth chapter is a shift from the literary texts of Mukherjee to digital texts such as matrimonial sites. The chapter first introduces the traditional matrimonial arrangement and then talks about the boom of matrimonial sites market. This case study is based on *Jeevansathi.com*, from where the data for the study has been collected. For the study, 25 male and 25 female diaspora profiles are taken where the information on caste and gender is collected.

Methodologically, this chapter is based on digital ethnography. In addition, the case study involves decisions taken by the researcher in creating the profiles and narrates those experiences through an digital autoethnographic approach. The observation of the data collected takes the research in three steps. First, analysis of gender-specific roles and the politics of the body, such as body type and color on a matrimonial site. Second, the role of caste in the matrimonial site. Last, it discusses the intersection of gender and caste and the representation of Dalit diaspora women on a matrimonial site.

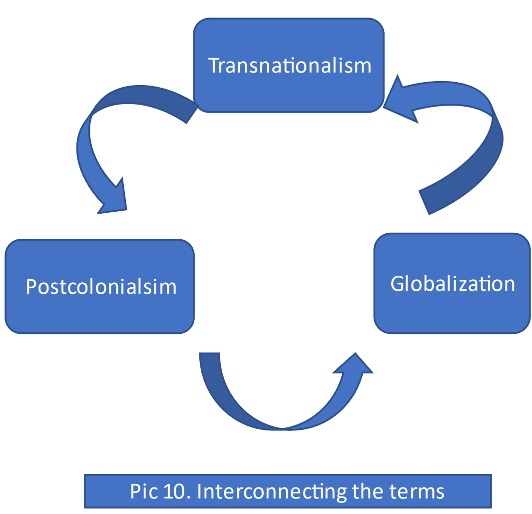
Contrary to the above two case studies, the seventh chapter questions the South Asian diaspora narrative concerning the position of marginalized sections of the South Asian diaspora. This chapter is based on the case study of a blog, "Spearheading a survey of caste in South Asian diaspora," by Valliammal Karunakaran et al. (2016). Since the blog is a collection of narratives about caste and gender-based discrimination, the testimonies provided demonstrate the intent of self-representation against a casteist (his)story. The chapter briefly introduces blogs as an alternative genre, their advantages in including as a case, and their methodological issues in this research. It revises the notion of self-representation–an impossibility and, at the same time, an urge–considering the real incidence of death of a 13-year-old Dalit diaspora girl in 1999 in the USA. Then it discusses the terminologies used in the Dalit diaspora's narratives, such as "trauma," "hiding," "separation from self," "dominant caste ignorance," and "double marginalization" as their self-representation. Then finally, the chapter sees how these narratives are collectively used for collaboration, confrontation, and cyber activism.

Finally, the thesis conclusions will have a brief close comparative reading of the three case studies to provide provisional answers to the research questions. Then it talks about the different lines of research that can be pursued and the limitations of the present thesis. I also present a section of appendix where the photos of Dalit diaspora feminists are given so that one can visualize the image of women who are in the fight against Brahmanical patriarchy. Then I present bibliographical references which includes the author's first name as a feminist strategy to vindicate the female production of knowledge.

Chapter 1. Transnationalism and (digital) diaspora towards the question of caste: Literature review

> *Yet in leaving home, I did not lose touch with my origins because lo mexicano is in my system. I am a turtle, and wherever I go, I carry home on my back*. (Gloria Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 47)

1.1. Transnationalism, postcolonialism, and globalization: Contemporary genealogy



Pic 10. Interconnecting the terms

Transnationalism is a term that has challenged the notion of the nation-state by entering discussions that are beyond national borders: trans-national. Since the 1990s, many scholars have developed and debated the term from interdisciplinary perspectives. Oliver Müller and Cornelius Torp state that transnationalism developed because of "two different but related pulses: postcolonialism and globalization" (2009, p. 610). These scholars have interconnected the terms postcolonialism, globalization, and transnationalism as these notions have changed the perceptive of the world at large. First, postcolonialism, theoretically developed by ex-colonized international academics, has visualized the colonized subject within the global picture, shifting the focus from the West to the East. Müller and Torp state that "the postcolonial perspective exposed the deeply embedded Eurocentrism of prevailing historical narratives. It turned

historians' attention to colonial discourse with its binary oppositions and concepts of the other" (2009, p. 610). This way, postcolonialism has forsaken long-standing colonial ideas based on the binary division of the West/rest and has brought the "other" and many more "in-between" identities into the framework (Müller & Torp, 2009, p. 610).

Second, globalization also confronts the concept of the nation-state and advances the ostensibly limitless field of global flows. "It has led to the abandonment of the idea of writing history from a national perspective and attempting to deconstruct national perspectives of history thoroughly" (Müller & Torp, 2009, p. 610). Exceedingly, when there is a mass migration worldwide, migrants carry different local narratives that counter the one national perspective. We can also see this in Arjun Appadurai's examples through his different scapes in the construction of new groups globally (1996).

However, postcolonialism sees the term globalization from the point of colonization and capitalism. Globalization is not a new phenomenon or a post-nation or postcolonial phenomenon, but it is based on the ideologies of colonization (Spivak, 1988). Sandra Ponzanesi links colonization and globalization by saying that, theoretically, colonization has been revised and continues to travel even in post-colonization in what we call globalization, calling it "neo-colonization." According to her, understanding colonization helps figure out the current restructuring of capitalism as a worldwide force that has resulted in multinational corporations. Globalization, a result of capitalism, has shifted labor forces, mainly from Third World to First World countries. (Ponzanesi, 2020).

Additionally, Spivak writes that the "contemporary international division of labor is a displacement of the divided field of nineteenth-century imperialism" (Spivak, 1988, p. 84). Here, Spivak indicates the paradigmatic shift from colonization to capitalism. She argues that in globalization the "First World becomes an investing capital whereas the Third World provides the field for investment, ill-protected and shifting labor force" (ibid). Besides, she adds that "in the interest of industrial capital, transportation, law, and standardized education systems are developed. Local industries and production systems are destroyed" (ibid).

Further, capitalism, an essential factor of globalization, has filtered the Third World population according to the service they can provide based on their education, class, gender, etc. Thus,

transnational movements of various groups from different regions during different phases of globalization, either colonization or capitalism, have created various diaspora communities, which we will see further down. Globalization, transnationalism, and postcolonialism are interlinked terms that have much to offer in a study of diaspora, specifically South Asian diaspora that traveled from the Third World to the First World.

Regarding transnationalism, Huib Ernste et al. states that Randolph Bourne coined the term transnationalism in 1916 to describe a situation in which immigrants preserve ties to their native countries on a cultural level. Bourne questioned the "melting pot" theory of America, which theorized that immigrants must thoroughly mix themselves into their host country (Ernste, Van Houtum, & Zoomers, 2009). Thus, in contrast to the "melting pot" theory, transnationalism encourages the continuation of various ties for immigrants to maintain contact with their society of origin. Linda Basch et al. state that embedded identities are related to two or more nation-states by developing numerous economic, social, organizational, religious, and political linkages (Basch et al., 2020, p. 4). This way, migrants act in multiple locations, carrying multiple identities and cultures, constructing a new 'in-between' space geographically and culturally. In this regard, Homi K Bhabha, a South Asian diaspora, has explored the concepts of "hybridity" and "third space," which have gone beyond the national boundaries and blurred the concept of the home, culture, border, colonizers, colonized, and identity (Bhabha, 1990; Bhabha, 1994). A few years earlier, Gloria Anzaldúa, a Chicana writer, has also shaped the idea of transnationalism with her proposed definition of "border," "borderline," and "borderlands" (1987). She talks about Mexican people becoming transnational not through the movement of Mexicans to other countries but because of the movement of the USA-Mexico border towards South in 1847.[4] She clarifies that the people residing in the "borderland" are not readily accepted. Nevertheless, the "borderlands" is a space of resistance, new thinking, hybrid thinking, and "Nueva Conciencia Mestiza" (1987).

Further, in the academic field, transnationalism is a broader term covering trans-national activities. Some recent scholars have worked profoundly on the term transnationalism. Susan Friedman writes that transnationalism reflects a shift from nation-based paradigms to

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[4] Anzaldúa refers to the invasion of Mexican land by the US army in 1847 and occupation of the Mexican land such Texas, New Mexico, California; Northern Central, and Eastern Mexico; Mexico City.

"transnational models emphasizing the global space of ongoing travel and transcontinental connection" (2006, p. 906). In their article, Sonia Fernandez and Adelina Sánchez, claim that transnationalism offers a way of thinking beyond national boundaries, not a mono-perspective from one linguistic, social or cultural viewpoints, but conceptualization that is bi- or multi-perspective. They say that "transnationality allows a simultaneous multiplicity of exchanges and adaptations. It works on several levels since it contemplates the national together with what happens within the constraints of national borders and outside these" (2018, p. 4). Fernandez and Sánchez have pointed out that transnationality carries the nation within and at the same time it goes beyond the nation. I second this thought because transnationalism covers many concepts which are linked to the nation and at the same time they go beyond the border.

One such concept which has recently attracted huge academic discussion is the diaspora. The term diaspora and transnationalism have been prominently used in describing cross-border movements. Thomas Faist using the concept of "imagined community" of Anderson states that the term diaspora has often been used "to denote religious or national groups living outside an (imagined) homeland" (Thomas Faist, 2010, p. 9). At the same time, transnationalism refers "to migrants' durable ties across countries with their communities, through transnational active networks, groups and organizations" socially, culturally, economically, and politically (Faist, 2010, p. 9). In addition, Ato Quayson and Girish Daswani write that diaspora and transnationalism, when combined, offer a comprehensive explanation of all the manifestations and ramifications that result from "the massive flows of people, ideas, technologies, images, and financial networks that have helped to create the world we live in today" (Quayson & Daswani, 2013, p. 2). Arjun Appadurai, with "technoscape, financescape, ideoscape, imagespace, and mediascape," has established the transitional theories to understand how different communities are built at transnational levels and are connected among themselves beyond the national border (1996).

Many transnational thinkers have affirmed that although borders have been crossed, the modern system of the nation has not been debilitated (Tölölyan, 1991, p. 1). In this regard Benedict Anderson's notion of "the nation as an imagined community" has been a significant concept to understand how the idea of nation travels in a transnational phase. Nation, as Benedict Anderson rightly says, is an "imagined community." For him, it is commonly noted that the nation and

state are influenced, underpinned, and even founded by the ideas rooted in the Enlightenment and liberalism of West, which is called "modernity." He attributes the rise of nationalism to the historical condition of the late eighteenth century, arguing the development of certain cultural artefacts such as print technology and colonialism (1983, p. 49). Hence nationalism and nation-ness spread among the people who were present within the national boundaries as well in their colonies. Consequently, the colonial countries were flooded with the "modern" European ideas of nationalism, based as they are, on boundaries and the "imagined communities" within them. Anderson also exerts that that "in the case of colonized people, who have every reason to feel hatred for their imperialist rulers, it is astonishing how insignificant the element of hatred is" (Anderson, 1983, p. 141). He further says that the "motherland" or "home" (the colonial motherland) becomes a domain of "dis/interested love and solidarity" which demands loyalty, patriotic inclination, they root themselves in love often profoundly self-sacrificing love (Anderson, 1983, p. 144).[5]

According to Appadurai such national feeling can be carried out even faster in the era of "electronic media," creating different nation-like communities based on various factors such as religion, culture, and political ideologies (1996). According to Katherine Verdery, if the nation is an "imagined community," then the term nationalism derived from the nation is "the political utilization of the symbol nation through discourse and political activity, as well as the sentiment that draws people into responding to this symbol's use" (Verdery, 1996, p. 227).

The sentimental emotions linked to a sense of nationalism have been a significant point in transnational studies and postcolonial studies. For instance, in one of my pervious works, I argued the construction of an "imagined homeland"[6] based on the modern concept of the nation-state (Anderson, 1983). The idea of a nation– an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983) and its nationalism have created many "imagined homelands" based on religion, gender, region, class, and many more (Gupta, 2019). Here, I would mention Susan Strehle's (1998) discussion of home and homeland from a transnational feminist perspective. She suggests that home and homeland are based on "imperialist philosophies of nation construct" (p. 3). Home and homeland

[5] This discussion is a part of a published paper:
Gupta, S. (2019). Negotiation of Un/Belongingness between the "(Imagined) Homelands" from a Transnational, South Asian, Brown Woman's Perspective: A Case Study of Taslima Nasreen's French Lover. *Indialogs*, *6*, 97-113.
[6] The term "imagined homeland" is based on the theory of "imagined communities" and is borrowed from the discussion of (imagined)homeland by Thomas Faist (2010).

define “settling down,” “stability,” separation from the outer world, and are a patriarchal space (ibid). Strehle’ definition of home and homeland brings us closer to the concept of the nation especially from the perspective of women. Home/land based on the idea of nation emerge in the valorization of accomplished “housewifery,” which involves managing resources not your own (ibid). However, the idea of nation has not vanished even in transnational phase. As many scholars have already discussed about it. On the one hand, going transnational has broken the border of nation and state and then on the other, it has borrowed ideas of the nation to the transnational, especially among the diasporas. With this idea, the chapter will further discuss the diaspora in general and then delineate the South Asian diaspora and their writing.

1.2. Diaspora

Initially, the term diaspora was used for the dispersed Jewish, Greek, and Armenian population. Then, later, the notion of diaspora shared a larger semantic domain, including “immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest worker, exile community, overseas community, and ethnic community” (Tölölyan, 1991, pp. 4-5). According to Steven Vertovec, diaspora refers to any population deemed deterritorialized or transnational, i.e., “originated in a different country than the one in which it now resides and whose social, economic, and political networks transcend the boundaries of nation-states” (1997, p. 277). Further, Sandra Ponzanesi writes that diasporas are becoming a significant part of the transnational and globalized economy, creating global cities and cosmopolitan and deterritorialized social identities (Ponzanesi, 2020, p. 978). Hence, the diaspora grows a relationship between their homeland and host land by functioning on both sides. In this sense, Homi K Bhabha defines the term diaspora culturally, accounting for “multiple subject positions” (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 269-72).

Also, diasporas have been appreciated for producing a counter-narrative of a nation, breaking the borders, and producing a “hybrid space” and a “third space” where multiple positions could emerge (Bhabha, 1990; Bhabha, 1994). As Ponzanesi states, the diaspora is a post-national phenomenon (whereas the transnational movement always existed) that has problematized and challenged the question of nation and the identity built based on the nation (Ponzanesi, 2020, p. 978). From the perspective of the production of counterculture, especially from a Third World

postcolonial reading, it is vital to think about what Bhabha states about a diasporic situation. He says:

> [R]esistance is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention, nor is it the simple negation or the exclusion of the "content" of another culture, as difference once perceived. It is the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate the signs of cultural difference. (Bhabha, 1994, p. 110)

Diaspora's new "hybrid" identities challenge both the homeland and the host land. Diaspora's in-between identities have become a new genre of writing which is transnational, global, and postcolonial. As far as the themes of diaspora writing are concerned, many diaspora writers have focused on the shifting relationship between homeland and host land; their utopian idealization of the homeland; the nostalgia about the homeland and its culture; or the internal conflicts of rootlessness and in-betweenness. Adaptation and acceptance of in-betweenness are also some themes which can be seen in diaspora writings.

Ato Quayson and Girish Daswani (2013) have also argued, on the contrary, that diaspora is not only breaking the concept of the nation-state, but it is further creating the romantic notion of the nation among itself. Many diaspora writers have shown that idealizing home as an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983) is an ultimate salience within diasporic consciousness (Appadurai, 1996; Brah, 1996; Clifford, 1997; Tölölyan, 2000). Further, diaspora which is known for creating a "home away from home" (Clifford, 1994, p. 308) has idealized "imaginary homelands" (Anderson 1983) based on race, color, religion, region, gender (Gupta, 2019), and caste, as we will see in this research work.

1.3. Academic presence of diaspora

Several academics contend that diasporas have existed ever since the beginning of human history. There have always been mass movements: traders, workers, nomads, travelers, and explorers who settled in various parts of the globe. Nonetheless, in terms of specific organizations, publications, and academic research, diaspora studies can only find their origin in

the middle of the 20th century. Quayson and Daswani have discussed that historian George Shepperson first presented a rationale for considering all Afro-Americans outside Africa as part of diaspora in 1965 (2013, p. 7). Later, the term diaspora assisted in broadening and enhancing the influence of the three traditional diasporas–Jewish, Greek, and Armenian (Clifford, 1994). Then, since the 1990s, the notion of diaspora has been used to talk about many groups which have moved transnationally. There is a movement from all parts of the world towards the First World, creating various diaspora communities. They all have continued transnational relations based on the pre- and post-digital boom (Quayson & Daswani, 2013, p. 7).

Since the 1990s, journals, handbooks, edited books, and articles have set milestones in diaspora studies. For instance, *The Black Atlantic* (1993) by Paul Gilroy, *Diasporas* (1994) and *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997) by James Clifford talked about different models of diaspora hybridity(ies). William Safran's *Diaspora in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return* (1991) set out highly productive typologies of diasporas. Caren Kaplan's *Questions of travel: Postmodern discourses of displacement* (1996) has touched on different types of displacement. Avtar Brah explores the meaning of "home" for the South Asian diaspora and the intersections of their identities, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and ethnicity among South Asian diasporic communities (1996). Some other important works which came out later are Robin Cohen's *Global Diasporas* (2008), Vijay Mishra's "The diasporic imaginary: Theorizing the Indian diaspora," (2008), Stephane Dufoix's *Diasporas* (2008), and Ato Quayson and Girish Daswani's *A Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism* (2013). All these books and articles have given a broad and comparative definition of the diaspora, which is significantly used worldwide in diaspora studies.

1.4. Historical presence of diaspora

Quayson and Daswani explain that the term diaspora originated in Alexandria, where most people spoke Hebrew, and was first used in order to refer to the Jews population in the third century BCE. The Jews of Hellenistic Alexandria, the largest Jewish population living outside Jerusalem, were a part of the Greek and Jewish cultural nexus. In response to this converging situation, Hellenized Jews created a Greek neologism to convey a Biblical fact for which no

Greek equivalent existed. The term diaspora was derived from the verb *διασπείρω* (from *δια*, 'through' and *σπείρω*, 'to sow'), that "signified 'disperse' or 'scatter.' The term was first used to symbolize God's curse and the threat of dispersal of the Jews if they disobeyed the holy commandments" (Quayson & Daswani, 2013, pp. 6).

After that, there has been a long history of dispersal from the early modern period, which goes beyond the example of the Jewish people. Quayson and Daswani (2013) affirm that the two primary stages of the European imperial and colonial expansion resulted in diverse diaspora communities worldwide. The first one emerged during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when the Spanish and Portuguese monarchs set in motion the first expansion of modernity (1492-1650) in Latin America. The second one was from the middle of the seventeenth century and onwards (1650-1945), called the second phase of modernity, which witnessed an expansion of colonial powers such as France, England, the Netherlands, and Germany. On both occasions, as these two scholars point out, there was an expansion of the imaginative borders of colonial powers (ibid).

Decolonial scholars such as Walter Mignolo (2002) and Ramon Grosfoguel (2007) have argued that during colonization, there was a massive movement of slaves from colonial lands to Latin America to meet the economic need of the colonizers. Vijay Mishra (2008) affirms that there was a massive migration from the Asian and African continents during the second phase of modernity. The mass movements during these two phases explain the horrific situation of migrants. As Quayson and Daswani mention:

> [W]hether with the direct establishment of administrative and bureaucratic arrangements in the conversion of what were initially trade outposts (as in much of Africa, India, and Southeast Asia) or in the context of settler colonies (as in Australia, Canada, Latin America, and, arguably, Ireland), or the case of post-plantation economies (as in Sri Lanka, Jamaica, and Malaysia), colonial governmentality invariably involved the creation of conditions for the dispersal of populations, some of which came to coalesce into diasporas. (2013, p. 6)

Later, the movement continued, especially during "the postwar period, when Europe encouraged labor migration from its former colonies to its countries" (Quayson & Daswani, 2013, p. 12).

Then, with the global market boom, popularly called "globalization," there was the need for trained and educated human resources, mainly from the last decades of the twentieth century. Hence, people have migrated from the Third to the First World for a better work environment and high salaries. Specifically focusing on the South Asian diaspora, the forced migration of enslaved people during colonization and the high-level population flow in an internet era has undoubtedly produced multifarious diasporic movements. The diversity in the South Asian diaspora is based on many factors, such as region, culture, generation, gender, class, education, and caste. This heterogeneous population does not comfortably set itself within the framework of hybridity, nor does it always connect with the cosmopolitan expatriate identity. They carry many other factors that intersect with their diasporic identity, creating their subjectivity "locational" and "multiple" (Friedman, 1998; Muller et al., 2009; Brah, 1996; Mohanty, 1995; Mani,1990; Kaplan, 1996).

1.5. Digitalization of diaspora

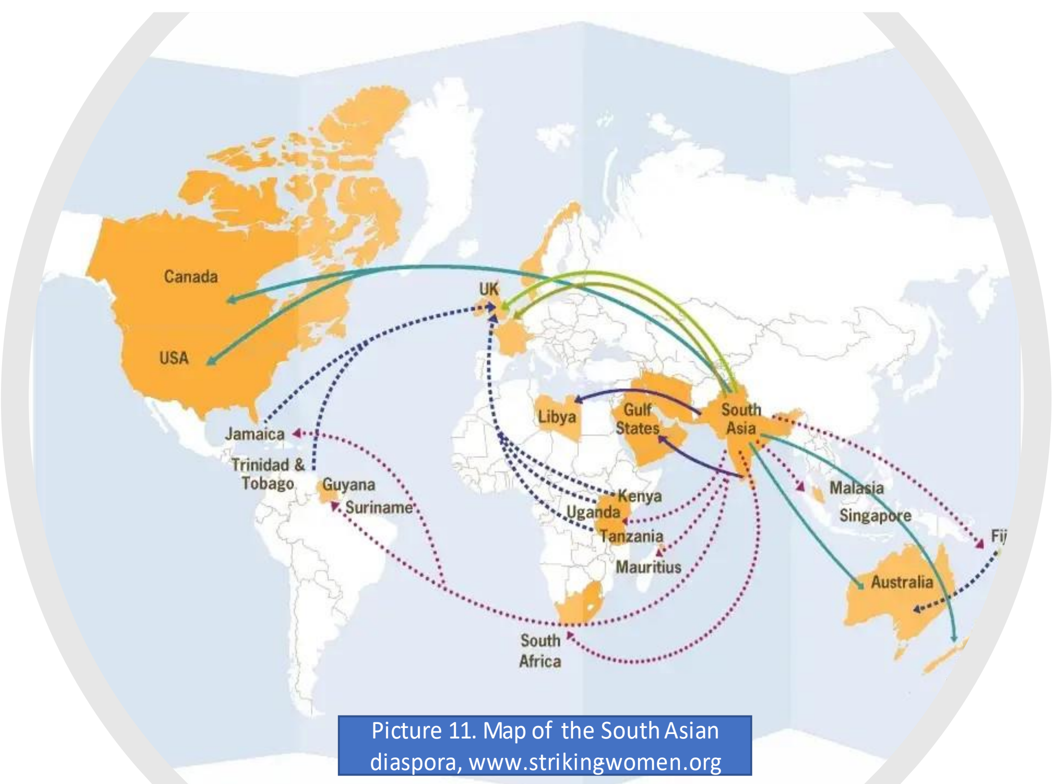
The new era of globalization has added a new term to diaspora, that is, digital and new media technologies in the global world that lead to the construction of new "digital diaspora" communities (Ponzanesi, 2020). Arjun Appadurai commented that electronic media, a game-changer, has altered the definition of (traditional) media. Electronic media has reformed the imagined selves and imagined worlds.[7] It has changed the perspective towards borders and identities related to geographical boundaries (Appadurai, 1996, pp. 7-8). Ponzanesi has argued that the internet has changed the ways of engagement with space and time, as it has shrunk the physical space and reduced the time gap by blurring the borders (Ponzanesi, 2020, p. 982). Radhika Gajjala has exerted that the internet has challenged the binary division of the world and gives the scope to think beyond binaries (Gajjala, 2013, p. 2). Indeed, they all have indicated the ways to re-think the transnational world from electronic media, digital platforms, and internet connectivity.

[7] Appadurai, here, compares the imagined self and imagined world with communities formed with print capitalism as discussed by Benedict Anderson in 1983.

Radhika Gajjala and many other scholars from diaspora and media studies, such as Sandra Ponzanesi, Jennifer Brinkerhoff, M S Laguerre, A. Everett, S ding, or M Georgiou, have brought the two well-known terms “diaspora” and “digital” together. They have referred to this union as “digital diasporas” to explain diaspora in a globalized and digitalized world (Gajjala, 2019; Ponzanessi, 2019; Brinkerhoff, 2009; Laguerre, 2010; Everett, 2009; Ding, 2007; Georgiou 2013). Ponzanesi explains that the virtual platform offered by the internet gives diaspora hope to be connected to their land, people, and community to strengthen their ethnic ties, to carry political, social, economic, and cultural agendas (Ponzanesi, 2019, pp. 978- 980).

At the same time, the South Asian writers have commented on the exploitation of marginalized groups of diasporas through the internet. Pramod Kumar Nayar, for instance, talks about the use of the internet in targeting employees and workers based on their racial identities (Nayar, 2010, p. 160). Thenmozhi Soundararajan writes about the discrimination against Dalit employees working in multinational companies where the internet is used to filter employees and is used as a medium to target them (2022). Ponzanesi explains the “neocolonial patterns” during the digital times: “digital communications are structured online by exploiting free digital labor and instrumentalizing social network profiles for commercial purposes. The repurposes of the internet for capitalistic gains lead to digital neocolonialism” (Ponzanesi, 2020, p. 981). Further, she talks about digital securitization, another method of controlling the “others” who are assumed to be a threat to Western and North American democracy (Ponzanesi, 2020).

1.6. The South Asian Diaspora



Picture 11. Map of the South Asian diaspora, www.strikingwomen.org

The South Asian diasporas cannot be defined as a homogenized group, as we have talked about before. As shown in picture 11, they have traveled to different parts of the world and shared various experiences of traveling from their homeland to the host land. They have migrated at different times, sometimes willingly and other times not so. Also, these communities carried their cultural identities with them, such as their religion, language, class, gender, educational qualification, and caste, creating different grades of the South Asian diasporas accordingly. Rajesh Rai and Peter Reeves write about the South Asian diaspora and that there has been a long history of migration starting from "the nineteenth-century traders, imperial auxiliaries, 'free' migrants, and long-term migrant professionals" who cannot be compared together as they carry

different identities, different social and economic backgrounds (Rai & Reeves, 2008, p. 2). Thus, the narratives of South Asian diasporas capture the vivid experiences "born out of slavery, indenture, or convict labor, which is different from those of diasporas who have traveled recently as IT professionals, scientists, and doctors" (ibid). Many scholars have used the term "old diaspora" and "new diaspora" to categorize the South Asian diaspora according to the time in which they moved (Mishra, 2008; Rai & Reeves, 2008). This typology also helps us understand the division based on colonization and "globalization." It can also be understood as a division based on pre-digital and post-digital worlds, referring to the "print capitalism" (Anderson, 1983) and "electronic mediation" (Appadurai, 1996). Rai and Reeves explain that "the old diaspora is born out of the age of colonial capital, whereas the new diaspora is formed by people who connect themselves with the ongoing new age of globalization" (2008, p. 3). Further, Vijay Mishra delineates that the "old diaspora" has suffered horrible, dehumanized, and fatal journeys while migrating as slaves or indentured labors to different parts of the world as colonial subjects (2008).

Currently, according to the "UN report on international migrant stock at mid-year 2020," 44 million South Asians are living as a diaspora in different parts of the world. Of these, 18 million are Indians, 7.4 million are from Bangladesh, and 6.32 million are from Pakistan (UN report on international migrant stock at mid-year 2020, 2020). There has been phenomenal growth in South Asian diaspora due to the continuous movement of professionals and laborers from the 1950s onward.

The social, economic, and political expansion of the South Asian diaspora has also been accompanied by an academic boom which has explored the experiences of the South Asian diaspora. Most of the scholarly research on the South Asian diaspora has taken an interdisciplinary approach to address the questions related to the history of their movement, their cultural identity, and ambivalence (Rai & Reeves, 2008). Besides, the South Asian diaspora is known for the social, religious, and cultural practices they carry with them. The Bollywood boom, for instance, is one example that has introduced the South Asian diaspora worldwide (Desai & Neutill, 2013; Iyer, 2016). Besides, the South Asian culture in the form of food and fashion has been widely accepted (Rai & Reeves, 2008).

1.7. The South Asian diaspora writing

Regarding the South Asian diaspora literary activities, Sam Naidu states that the hub of South Asian writings is found to be the United States of America (USA), the UK, and Canada (Naidu, 2008, p. 367). There has been a force of the South Asian diaspora writing, which can be divided again based on the "old diaspora" and the "new diaspora" writings. Vijay Mishra states that one might differentiate the literary texts into two "interlinked but historically separated diasporas" (Mishra 1996, pp. 421-22). V S Naipaul is one of the "old diaspora" writers, whereas Salman Rushdie and Jhumpa Lahiri can be called "new diaspora" writers. These diaspora writers are writing from different locations such as Trinidad, New York, and Boston carrying different experiences of migration and producing a variety of the South Asian diaspora narratives. For instance, the writings of Naipaul express the trauma of his indentured ancestors, as is the case with *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961). Rushdie writes about the nostalgia and in-between identities of the South Asian diaspora through his book *Imaginary Homeland* (1991). Jhumpa Lahiri has juxtaposed the diaspora themes of alienation, nostalgia, and in-betweenness with diaspora women's issues in her novel *The Namesake* (2003).

"New diaspora" writers such Rushdie, Hanif Kureshi, Meera Syal, Bharati Mukherjee, and Chitra Banerjee have been widely read. Most "new diaspora" writers are inspired by Bhabha's theories arising from the "in-betweenness," "interstitial," or "third space," which are present in their personal lives and demonstrated in their writing (Bhabha, 1990; Bhabha, 1994). Hence, as Suman Rani points out, diasporic literature mainly deals with "alienation, displacement, existential rootlessness, nostalgia, the quest for identity, amalgamation, or the disintegration of cultures. Indeed, these aspects vary concerning the generations living in Europe or the USA" (Rani, 2018, p. 253).

However, most of the critics from postcolonial and Dalit studies have considered the "new diaspora" writers as a privileged section of the diaspora, writing in English from metropolitan locations in the West. They have produced literature confined to the cosmopolitan elite South Asian diaspora. Tabish Khair has used the terminology "Babu" to describe most of the South Asian diaspora writers who symbolize "middle or upper-middle-class, mostly urban (cosmopolitan), Brahamanized and "westernized," and fluent in English" (Khair, 2001, p. 9).

1.8. The South Asian diaspora women's writings and their themes

From the perspective of South Asian diaspora women, most of the earlier diaspora writings were authored by male writers, to name a few, V.S. Naipaul, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Sheth, and Salman Rushdie. Only in the last few decades, the South Asian women's diaspora experiences have become intense and visible. Some of them, such as Monica Ali, Jhumpa Lahiri, Anita Desai and Kiran Desai, are nominated or awarded literary awards such as Pulitzer, Booker, and Orange Prizes (Naidu, 2008). Also, the South Asian diaspora women's writings are included in the university curriculum globally. The South Asian diaspora women writers have used different genres such as novels, short stories, autobiographies, and memoirs to convey their migrant experiences. Their writings show similarities in their themes, however, present different styles because of their social, cultural, geographical, and linguistic differences. These women writers come from a new generation of the diaspora, referred to as "new diaspora," who are well-settled and educated in the United States of America or European countries and some of them are married in these countries. Nowadays, one cannot ignore the contribution made by the South Asian diaspora women in the South Asian diaspora literature. Anita Desai' *Bye Bye Blackbird* (1971) and Kamal Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man* (1972) talk about the sense of displacement among the South Asian diasporas. Bharati Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter* (1975) details the experience of in-betweenness among South Asian diaspora women and Chitra Bannerjee's *Mistress of Spices* (1997) projects the fear of being mixed with the people of host land. There are other South Asian diaspora women's writing such *Anita and Me* (1996) by Meera Syal and *The Namesake* (2003) by Jhumpa Lahiri (2003) which have presented the conflicts between the old and new South Asian diaspora generations. Meena Alexander's *Manhattan Music* and Sunetra Gupta's *A Sin of Color* (1998) present the identity crisis and in-betweenness of the South Asian diaspora.

Most of the South Asian women's writings are based on two themes which go parallel. First, the gender inequality that writers show through their protagonists in their homeland and host land. The writers have intersected the gender issues with the problem arising in the host land, such as racism, class conflict, and colonial difference. Second, they have portrayed the question of be/longingness through their protagonists which have discussed earlier in the section "The South

Asian diaspora writing." They have merged gender, class, race, and colonial conflict with the diasporic themes. Thus, the South Asian women writers' books amalgamate their homeland and host land experiences from a Third World brown woman's perspective.

Interestingly, the South Asian diaspora women writers have produced a debate on women's character through self-representation where they show a sharp and persuasive criticism of being doubly marginalized. In this regard, Sam Naidu (2008) writes that the South Asian diaspora women's literature undoubtedly celebrates the accomplishments of the South Asian women writers who, within their cultural contexts, work to subvert and combat patriarchal oppression by explicitly articulating their female subjectivities. Thus, women portrayed in the South Asian diaspora women's writing are revolutionary characters who challenge the male-oriented diaspora writing.

As we have seen briefly that the South Asian diaspora women writers have explored many themes within the diaspora literature such as nostalgia, identity crisis, displacement, un/belonginess, and also some of them celebrated the in-betweenness, their multi-identities, their experience of adaptation. With their diasporic themes, South Asian diaspora women writers, to name a few, Bharati Mukherjee (1989), Taslima Nasreen (2002), Monica Ali (2003), and Jhumpa Lahiri (2003), are concerned about the representations of transformative processes about gendered subjectivities. So, in this section, I will talk about spaces like kitchen and bedrooms as a space for transformation, women's bonding, and in-betweenness with respect to homeland and host land from the South Asian diaspora women's perspective which I found interesting apart from the above themes.

With respect to the transformation in the female subjects, the South Asian diaspora women writers divide their plot in two parts. Generally, the first part of their novels shows that women are controlled, violated, and marginalized in their homeland and host land. For instance, Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) portrays women in domestic and public spheres; the protagonist or other female characters are abused, made silent and are sexually exploited within marriage. Many other novels have shown narratives of forced marriages, violence on women's bodies, and treating the female bodies as merely functional entities. At the same time, the novels, in their second half, offer a transformation among their female characters where female protagonists show strength, wisdom, capacity for suffering, and talent to evolve. Miki Flockemann, one of the

South African feminist diasporas, writes that literary writing about self-representation and transformation offers a “utopian glimpse of an alternative world” (1998, p. 12). The projection of such an alternative world can be seen in the South Asian diapora women’s writing. Interestingly, some of the writers have used spaces such as kitchen and bedroom as a space of self-representation and transformation of their female subjects.

1.8.1. Spaces: Kitchen and bedroom

The South Asian women writers have provided a closer view of an alternative world–their own spaces– which were not explored before, such as a kitchen. A kitchen, which is a space for cooking, is referred to as a women’s space. As cooking has always been connected to the women’s role at home and hence a space dedicated for this activity also belongs to women. However, the question such as ‘what is cooked?’ and ‘how should be cooked?’ are always dictated by the male family members. Spaces like kitchen are mostly unexplored by the South Asian male writers because male writers do not access the kitchen. On the contrary, this space is emphasized by writers such as Jhumpa Lahiri in *The Namesake* (2003), where women are talking about their daily diapora lives and struggle, and at the same time, they are cooking Bengali meals and frying *samosas.* Kitchen becomes a space of connection and sharing among women and a space where they create their homeland through their food. Monica Ali has also portrayed the kitchen as a space where one can notice the transformation in the protagonist (2003). Kitchen, in the beginning, Ali has shown as a space where protagonist’s husband’s favorite meals are cooked. Later, the protagonist chooses kitchen as a space to plan and implement her fight against the patriarchal setup of her home, where “she chops fiery red chillies and places them in her husband’s sandwich” (2003, p. 63). Chitra Banerjee’s *The Mistress of Spices* (1997) also shows the magical power which the protagonist has with the spices. She often goes to the kitchen to prepare remedies for the needy ones. These glimpses of the kitchen in the novels show that these writers have projected the kitchen as a space of communication and connection among women. It is a space of rebellion and a space of creation.

Similarly, some diaspora women writers describe the sexual desires of the protagonists outside of their unsuccessful marriages. One can see the examples of Taslima Nasreen’s *French Lover*

*(*2002) and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003), and Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* (2002). Some of them describe these sexual practices happening in their bedrooms which they shared with their husbands. This perspective shows transformed women who are not submitting themselves to the men who are unable to give them the sexual pleasure. The writers have chosen the bedroom as a space of transformation and challenge the prescribed dedicated and loyal wife's role. Hence, these diaspora women's writings introduce us to the new world, such as the kitchen and bedroom, to which we would have no accessibility otherwise.

1.8.2. Women's bonding

Women's bonding is another significant point that can be seen in the South Asian women's writing. They have shown women's bonding as a template for survival and the medium for transformation. For instance, in *Desirable Daughters*, Bharati Mukherjee talks about the Tree Bride, the ancestral woman of her family, as her energy, who has served throughout her life (Mukherjee, 2002). Monica Ali, too through the central character, has shown love and affection towards the mother and sister of the protagonist, who used to give the protagonist strength to question her subverted position (2003). Taslima Nasreen, in *French Lover* (2002), shows a profound connection between the protagonist and her mother. The protagonist keeps visiting her mother in her memories to talk with her and understand her mother's position at her father's home. This way, she understands her own suppressed self because of being a woman. These writers explore that visiting the women in their memories gives them strength to escape the patriarchal society in which women like their mothers, sisters, and grandmothers have lived. These women provide protagonists the power to fight and not repeat the story that other women have gone through. In my GEMMA master' work (2018), I discussed that Monica Ali and Taslima Nasreen have projected a plot where the mothers of the protagonists are cheated by their fathers, which has become the reason for being neglected, rejected, suppressed and finally, death. The protagonists of their novels keep revisiting those incidences where their mothers are suffering, and hence, they choose not to submit themselves to unsatisfied marriages.

1.8.3. In-betweenness

As we discussed before, South Asian diaspora women writers have portrayed the internal conflict of the female subject and their struggle between homeland/host land. One can refer to Bharati Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971) and Bharti Kirchner's *Shiva Dancing* (1999), where the writers have portrayed their struggle of be/longing. Roger Bromley writes about such conflict:

> [N]arratives are mostly produced by women and shaped by what might be called bi-culturalism in the sense that they are of two worlds (or more), expressions of marginalization which emerge from migrant experience and cultural border zones: plural and fractured voices, multiple personalities struggling with placelessness and rootedness of old, hollowed-out belongings. (Bromley, 2019, p. 4)

The theme of nostalgia and be/longingness are always multiplied by gender identity in the South Asian diaspora women writings. Another plot can also be observed where female characters are willing to leave their country to escape the patriarchal structure of their homeland. For instance, Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* (1988) and Taslima Nasreen's *French Lover* (2002) have shown that their protagonists want to leave their homeland and home to enter the new land thinking that they can escape the patriarchy. This point has become one of the most debated themes of the South Asian diaspora women writings: the illusion of host land as a land of freedom (Gupta, 2018). The writers make us realize that there is no escape, rather in a new land, they are marginalized in multiple forms because of their multiple identities such as race, class, colonial background, and gender. The South Asian diaspora women are burdened with their cultural patriarchal norms which they carry with them. Further the patriarchal norms are continued by keeping these women under the vigilance within South Asian communities living in the host land. The South Asian communities as closed diaspora groups do not let their women get out of their patriarchal system. Once the "illusion of free land" for women fails them, there is an urge to return to the homeland creating another illusion of "return." For instance, Taslima Nasreen's protagonist travels back to her land in search of her home.

In this regard, Avtar Brah writes, “the homeland which is left was a different place years ago or months ago; it does not remain the same. It could be possible to visit the geographical territory that looks like the origin” (1996, p. 192). However, a “return” is impossible; this is doubly so for the South Asian diaspora women because of their gender as shown by Nasreen. The writer shows that the protagonist who goes back to homeland after leaving her host land and her husband is not accepted in her home/land. Here, homeland and host land symbolize the father’s home and the husband’s home, especially for a diaspora woman who crosses the border of the home/land after marriage. Susan Strehle’s (1998) comparison of home with homeland expresses that both are based on the same theory of women’s suppression:

Like home, homeland connotes a settled, homogeneous place of mythic origins. Homeland is the country-sized space of the home, of kin and belonging, and therefore of sentimental unity. In the settled spaces of home and nation, women are read as representing what they cannot exercise, while the system of representation naturalizes their subordination and renders it invisible. (Strehle, 1998, 2-3)

Once a woman goes out of her father’s home to her husband’s home cannot return to her father’s home. She returns to physical space, but her presence is not validated by her father. After all, for the South Asian women, home/homeland is a social and cultural construct that follows the convenience of the patriarchal system (Gupta, 2022, p. 14). The host land and husband’s home for South Asian diaspora women follow the same norms. Women must be functional as wives in their marriages and must act as carriers of the culture while living in the system. Because they cannot return to father’s home. Such instance can be seen in Taslima Nasreen’s *French Lover,* who wants to return to her homeland and her home leaving her husband but is not accepted by her father.

The themes which have been discussed in the above three sections are not the only topics discussed by the South Asian diaspora women writers. However, these three aspects summarize most of the South Asian diaspora women writings. Further, in the next section, we will talk about Mukherjee’s novels and their diasporic themes in detail, where we can see some other aspects of the South Asian diaspora women writing such as autobiographical aspects, un/belongingness, conflict between past and present, and conflict between the identity of expatriate and migrant.

Thus, before delineating the intersection of caste and gender, it is significant to talk about such diasporic themes which she has portrayed in her writing.

1.9. Bharati Mukherjee's writings and their diasporic themes[8]

This section is a part of my published article, which will review the novels chosen for the first case study and their diasporic themes. Bharati Mukherjee is one of the known diaspora writers who gave a new color to diaspora women writing. Mukherjee has written several novels, some of which are best sellers: *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971), *Wife* (1975), *Jasmine* (1989), *The Holder of the World* (1993), *Leave it to Me* (1997), *Desirable Daughters* (2002), *The Tree Bride* (2004), and two anthologies of short stories, *Darkness* (1985) and *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988).

Mukherjee's works present autobiographical elements where Mukherjee, through her character, portrays her struggle of negotiation with the traps and opportunities of the old and new, and the past and present, first as an exile from India, then as an Indian expatriate in Canada, and finally as an immigrant in the USA. Her works correspond with the various phases of her life, as her protagonists are close projections of herself. In one of her interviews in Madrid, she says "each novel is, in a sense, covered autobiography, or disclosure of my own psychological state" (Rodriguez, 1995, p. 302). In another one, she states, "I thought I was writing about people outside of me. I realize now that the novels are way station in my Americanization" (Shefali Desai et al., 1998, p. 131). Again, in an interview with María Elena Martos-Hueso and Paula García-Ramírez in Jaén, Spain, Mukherjee while talking about *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Desirable Daughters* has said that she has portrayed a lifestyle, especially caste and class from where she comes from (2010). In this way, Mukherjee intends to represent herself through the characters of her novels. Indeed, she puts her characters in different scenarios in diaspora lives and shows her socio-economic and mental conflicts through her protagonists in different novels. In the interview with Martos-Hueso and García-Ramírez, Mukherjee discusses about the political facts behind her novels such as terrorist attack of 1985 in demand of a land called Khalistan

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[8] This section of the chapter is a part of a published article: Gupta, Shilpi. (2021). Reconceptualization of national spaces: A Close reading of Bharati Mukherjee's selected novels with Gloria Anzaldúa's Nueva Conciencia Mestiza. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities, 13*(3).

(2010, p. 135). She has been widely known among her readers not only through her novels, but also because of her interviews. In an interview with Clark Blaise, M Connell, and G Grearson (1990) just after the publication of *Jasmine,* she talks about the presentation of her psychological aspects through the character of the protagonist. In another interview with Alison B Carb (1988-89), She discusses about the inspiration for her work and her struggle as an outsider in Mainstream American writing. However, through her interview she conveys her motive of writing that she wants to introduce a new world to the American readers. In an interview with Shefali Desai, Tony Barnstone (1998), Mukherjee expresses the process of Americanization from a perspective of a South Asian diaspora woman who is married outside her religion and prefer to call herself American than Asian-American. Bradley Edwards (2009) has published an edited book of most of the interviews of Bharati Mukherjee.

In the same line, we can see other works such as Laura Peco González (2003) discusses about the multicultural identity of a woman through Mukherjee's novels where she has delineated the celebration of diaspora multiple identities, which González calls, Hindu imagination with her American identity. Juan Ignacio Oliva Cruz (2001) again talked about the construction of identity of diaspora women through the novels of Mukherjee. Similarly, Christine Harris (2001) expresses the creation of cross-cultural identity through her novels.

Emmanuel S Nelson has edited a book *Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives* (2007) where her novels are analyzed from different perspectives based on her migratory identity, immigrant consciousness, her novels as autobiography, a search for identities based on her gender, race, and Americanness, representation of past and present in her works, and representation of the subaltern in her novels.

Her novels *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971), *Jasmine* (1989), and *The Desirable Daughters* (2002) debate the diasporic themes from the perspective of the Third World diaspora women who carry the baggage of their class, caste, religion, nationality, colonial background, and their feminine duties as a mother, widow, and wife. It is vital to comprehend that the writer does not write only as a diaspora, expatriate, or immigrant. In each novel, her South Asian diaspora woman is portrayed in different social structures: married to a foreigner, unhappy wife, widow, or divorced single mother.

Through her writings, from *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971) to *Desirable Daughters* (2002), one can sense the conflict she was going through being an expatriate, then immigrant till becoming an American citizen (González & Oliva, 2015). The three novels, *The Tiger's Daughter*, *Jasmine,* and *Desirable Daughters,* narrate the stories of diaspora women, their migration stories, and their struggle with their diasporic and gender identities. Indeed, all three novels have presented different women regarding their class, marital status, university qualification, and location. There has been an ongoing quest from "expatriation" to "immigration" (González & Oliva, 2015). Then there is also a shift from being a "hyphenated" Asian-American to a "genetic" American. In her novel *Jasmine*, and her interviews afterward, she refused to be called an Asian-American, a hyphenated identity, where she finds problematic "the dash and the use of double epithet to define her identity" (Rodriguez, 1995, p. 293). Instead, she chooses to be called a "genetic"- an American, which shows her adaptation to the American society and getting rid of nostalgia (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 222; Rodriguez, 1995, p. 293).

Mukherjee's distinction between expatriation and immigration displays what Edouard Glissant explains in the Caribbean context. Expatriation, according to him, is an "obsession with a single origin" who does not wish to change what they perceive to be the "absolute state of being." They revert to avoiding cultural contact and interaction. On the other hand, "the immigrant is willing to be changed into something new, into a new set of possibilities" (Glissant, 1989, pp. 14-16).

Mukherjee's works reveal a movement from expatriation to immigration and a change in her internal conflict. This movement coincides with her immigration from Canada to the USA. In *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971), where one can see the attempt to search for Indianness, her past, trying to become an Indian, struggling between be/longingness, dis/loyalty, going through internal conflict, trying to fulfill the roles which she carried along, searching her home, searching to settle, being rejected by her homeland and not able to accept the new one. Confusion, fear, and being lost are characteristics of the protagonists of her novels.

The journey from *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971) to *Jasmine* (1989) is a severe psychological change in the protagonist, the writer, and the readers. The writer expects her readers to undergo unlearning and learning from an expatriate to an immigrant. Tara, of her earlier novel *The Tiger's Daughter*, has freed herself from the social norms and reincarnated as Jyoti. As far as the

writer is concerned, 1984 was a turning point in her sensibility and style when she shifted to the USA. Mukherjee reveals that it was a time when she freed herself from the debility of expatriate nostalgia by the stringencies of life in the "new world." In the second half of her career, she wrote *Jasmine* (1989) and *Desirable Daughters* (2002), where her "immigrant" is prepared to discard the nostalgia which she carried for a long. *Jasmine* is a novel of re-incarnation where Mukherjee affirms,

> I have been murdered and reborn at least three times; the correct young woman I was trained to be and was very happy to be, is very different from the politicized, shrill, civil rights activist I was in Canada and from the urgent writer that I have become in the last few years in the United States. I cannot stop. (Mukherjee, 1990, p. 18)

Similarly, in *Jasmine*, we see the evolution of the central character as she enters the unfamiliar American culture and goes through an oscillating series of painful and joyful experiences. The character shows that the diasporic people must undergo the transformation process in the host land, saying they must kill the old inner self to accept the new persona. She experiences a series of deaths and rebirths as her identity(ies) evolve from her life as Jyoti, the Punjabi villager, to Jasmine and then Jane. Jasmine carries her past but is ready to flow with the present because she has few options.

The next novel, *Desirable Daughters,* was written in 2002 when the writer declared herself an American in 1997 "I am not an Asian-American, I am an American" (Mukherjee, American Dreamer, 1997). Calling herself an immigrant and not an expatriate, she changes her discourse of an immigrant. Her earlier novel*, Jasmine,* suggests that migration to America means a new opening and freeing the self from the conventional bound society and past. In *Desirable Daughters,* she considers various patterns of belonging from a global perspective. The ties with the homeland and past are essential in creating the interstitial space in the host country. The past in the novel plays a critical role in constructing the present. To understand herself and recreate a new identity, she must delve into the past and unfold its intricacies. She narrates the story of her ancestral namesake, Tara Lata, the "Tree Bride of Mishtigunj." The story moves with ease from past to present, from India to America, and from Calcutta to California, and it seems that the boundaries between these two different geographical worlds do not exist.

In the novel, it is intriguing to see the picturization of three sisters from the same family, the same culture, the same school, the same upbringing, and even having the exact birthdate, but they take different paths in their lives. With this background, the writer accepts differences among diaspora who may have similar roots, but their routes may differ. Padma, the eldest daughter, and Tara, the protagonist, lived in the USA and symbolized expatriates and migrants, respectively. Padma and Parvati, the middle sister, do not need to widen their horizons and are less assertive and stick to the safer side. Tara, the protagonist, on the contrary, challenges the Indian dominant caste, an upper-middle-class wifely role that she was taught and that two other sisters were following. She also challenges the border, which divides Indians and Americans. She flows from one side to another easily and accepts the new identity. As far as the use of language is concerned, Tara, an assimilated immigrant, comfortably switches her language between India and America. She calls herself a "border crosser" (Mukherjee, 2002, p. 129). For such a change in her identity, she is criticized for becoming American and losing Indianness in the novel.

If we observe the evolution of Mukherjee's novels, there is a transformation in character from the first novel, *The Tiger's Daughter*, to *Desirable Daughters*. A similar psychological change can be seen in the writer who moved from her first writing to *Jasmine* (1989) and *Desirable Daughter* (2002). Mukherjee decided to be "called an American and not Asian-American" (1997), an immigrant and not expatriate, moving forward and not suffering from the past, nostalgia. She is conscious that measuring oneself through the eyes is not psychologically healthy, which she is doing primarily in her first novel. In *Jasmine*, Mukherjee becomes more adaptive and prefers to move ahead without letting others label her. She changed her writing style and was "genetic" rather than hyphenated. In 2002, with the publication of *Desirable Daughters,* she showed her new self. She chose to find a balance between her memories and the present. Besides, Mukherjee's immigrant aesthetics in claiming an American national cultural identity and opposing a hyphenated (Asian-American) in a political and ideological movement refuses to categorize national space as the dominant/minority and the center/periphery. As the writer in her interview says, "there is a kind of covert racism implied in saying that they are just regular Americans, and the rest of you are not quite hyphenated" (Martos Hueso & García Ramírez, 2010, p. 128). This is a colonial binary division of self and others where Europeans

coming to America are not hyphenated as German American but are included in the category of American.

Announcing being American, she accepts being called a traitor by her compatriots and accepts the challenge of being called an outsider, non-European, Third world woman within the American mainstream. Later in 2010, she said she thinks of herself as an “American writer” writing different versions and “changing the American scene” (Martos Hueso & García Ramírez, 2010, p. 129). Mukherjee became one of the writers who gave the diaspora a new color within American society and culture. She has truly created a “borderland” where Indian Bengali taste has mixed with American culture. Laura Peco Gonzaléz writes that in producing a unique and different version, she adores being an American of Hindu Indian origin with Bengali taste (2003). She chooses to be an “in-betweener” and not suffer for both sides.

1.10. Digital presence of the South Asian diaspora

The connection of the South Asian diaspora with the digital sphere has started building up from the last decade of the twentieth century with the liberalization of the Indian economy and the internet boom in the 1990s. Radhika Gajjala, in her works, has researched profoundly on the digitalization of the South Asian diaspora (2003; 2004; 2008; 2010; 2019). Besides, Gajjala (2019) states that the internet and digital connectivity open a new platform of research in the field of South Asian diaspora. She indicates that the researchers should understand the multiple presences of the internet among the South Asian diaspora. First, she delineates that the internet plays a crucial role in shaping the political and cultural identities of South Asian diasporas. Second, she also indicates that the internet has served as a medium for raising voices, activism, and collaborations beyond the local spaces to a global platform, especially among the marginalized section of the South Asian diaspora.

Third, she mentions that digital spaces should be studied critically, questioning who has access to the internet. This question will lead to understanding how the internet creates misinformation and surveillance and controls marginalized sections of the South Asian diaspora community. The internet and the question of the representation of different sects of the South Asian diaspora are two significant points she emphasizes in her studies. In this regard, she presents the

heterogeneity of the South Asian diasporas showing the difference in internet accessibility, affordance, and visibility within the South Asian digital diaspora. Also, the South Asian digital diaspora is divided based on nation-based "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983), creating imagined homelands. We will discuss the construction of nation-based "imagined communities" concerning gender and caste in Chapter 3. The section "Representation of the "other"" will juxtapose the question of representation (Butler & Spivak, 2007) and "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983) to see the representation of the gendered caste and caste-d gender other among South Asian diaspora community.

In one of her books, Radhika Gajjala (2010) talks about a United Nations-sponsored program on the digital diaspora, which targeted Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) from the professional and educated classes in 2000 to help bridge technology gaps. "These diasporic Indians were drawn into connecting India to globalization by training and educating labor and investing capital into mostly information technology-related businesses in India" (Gajjala, 2010, p. 532). She says that this South Asian digital diaspora became a workforce for developed countries where they were socially, culturally, and technologically trained to be part of the digital global economy. They created a new South Asian diaspora population worldwide called "techno-elite" (Zurawski, 1996). Bollywood, primarily based on diaspora characters, became a representative of such South Asian diaspora representing the modern social life in public spaces and traditional Indian culture in personal spaces (Gajjala, 2010, p. 528). At the same time, social network systems became the sites to share and connect with South Asians and diasporas. Many digital platforms were developed to connect diasporas to their mainland, including the matrimonial sites.

Several available digital platforms have contributed to the visibility of different voices among the South Asian digital diaspora. However, educated, upper-middle-class cosmopolitan Brahmin male migrants have occupied most South Asian digital spaces (Gajjala, 2019; Mallapragada, 2014). That is the reason that dominant caste Hindu male discourse has occupied the majority of South Asian diaspora (digital) spaces. Gajjala (2019) and Madhavi Mallapragada (2014) state that these South Asian digital diaspora groups have created an "imagined community" based on upper middle class dominant Hindu caste heterosexual male identities. There are many digital sites and platforms which are written from the dominant caste and upper middle class heterosexual male perspective. One of them is the development of matrimonial sites during

1990s and spreading worldwide to connect South Asian digital diaspora. In this research work, we will concentrate on matrimonial websites to underline the function of caste and gender together.

There are also groups of South Asian diaspora, the gendered caste or caste-d gender "others" who are at the "margin within margins" (Soundararajan, 2022). They are not visible in the metanarrative of online worlds or even within the plotlines of South Asian cyberspace. However, there are studies which prove the existence of gendered caste and caste-d gender other. Such as, Equality Labs (2016) has published a report showing testimonies of Dalits (lower caste male and female)[9]. In those testimonies, they have testified their verbal and physical abuse because of their caste. Also, they have said that they are rejected in marriage proposals because of their lower caste identity. Because of their caste, they are unwelcomed at the South Asian diaspora cultural space. Vivek Kumar (2004) describes Dalit diaspora have their presence from the colonial times who migrated forcibly to work as slaves.

Hence, it is necessary to move toward online writing produced from the "margin within the margins" (Soundararajan, 2022, p. 4). In her works, Gajjala (2019) focuses on digital spaces which have turned out to be recently a space of activism, protests, and movements. For instance, we see an emerging transnational Dalit Twitter and racial coalitions connecting the issues of black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) (Gajjala, 2019, p. 3). SAYHU, South Asian Women Network is another diaspora community working on connecting South Asian diaspora women against violence (SAWNET,1999). Dalit diasporas carry their movements linking to their communities and mainland with the digital platform among the digital public. They have stories and experiences that can be heard through different media globally; otherwise, they would not be easy to hear or read. Reading their narrative facilitates insight from the periphery into the center and from the local microlevel to the structural macro level. It indicates how minority groups negotiate structures in which racism, casteism, and gender differences are embedded.

The two perspectives, dominant caste upper middle caste heterosexual male diaspora and Dalit diaspora, invite two case studies to delineate the representation and then self-representation of

[9] I have talked about Equality Labs' report in chapter 7 in detail.

caste and gender in their writings. Now, I will briefly review the matrimonial sites and blogs investigated in earlier works and then introduce the case studies I will work on in this research.

1.10.1. Matrimonial sites and its popularity[10]

Online Indian (diaspora) matrimonial advertisements are among those booming advertising sites which attract people of Indian origin to find their partners online. The online matrimonial market evolved in the 1990s with the internet and soon crossed the border with the "new diaspora" (Gupta, 2020). According to the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry in India, the online matrimony business was expected to be a $250 Million business by 2017 (Bhatia, 2014). According to The New York Times, over 1500 matrimony websites operate in India (Sinha, 2015). Then in 2022, an analysis of the matrimonial sites states that there are 1500 matrimonial sites working in India and attracting non-residential Indians (Vyshnavi, 2022). There has been rapid increase in the market due to COVID-19 where two matrimonial sites Jeevansathi.com and Shaadi.com made a market of 50 million US dollars (Vyshnavi, 2022). Tanushree Basuroy published a statistic showing that in India matrimonial sites in 2017 has made a market of 0.11 billion U.S. dollars and in 2022, the market is expected to rise up to 0.26 billion U.S. dollar (2022).

Some of these matrimonial websites have expanded their business beyond the Indian borders among the Indian diasporas. At the same time, some matrimonial sites are handled locally among diaspora specific to their regions. There are three top matrimonial sites in India which have spread all over the world Jeevansathi.com, Shaadi.com, and Bharatmatrimony.com. Besides, desijodi.com, lifepartner.com, and lovevivaah.com are some regional South Asian diaspora matrimonial sites functioning in the USA.

In general, matrimonial websites are visually appealing to visitors with attractive pictures and tag lines such as "Jeevansathi: Bringing People Together," "Love is looking for you … Be found,"

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[10] This section of the chapter is a part of a published article.
GUPTA, Shilpi. (2020). Does caste travel with the gendered body?: Reading Indian (diaspora) online matrimonial website. *Investigación joven con perspectivade género V.* Madrid: Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Instituto de Estudios de Género, 38-55.

and so on. Besides, many video advertisements run on television persistently to take viewers to a promising world of marriage (some video links are given in the bibliography). *Jeevansathi.com* is a matrimonial site popular among Indians and Indian diaspora to find a suitable spouse. The word *Jeevansathi* itself carries an evocative power to the people of India and Indian origin. *Jeevansathi* is a Hindi word of Sanskrit origin but is commonly known to other speakers of Tamil, Telugu, or Malayalam because of its significance. "Jeevan" means "life," and "sathi" means "friend" or "partner"; hence, "Jeevansathi" as a collective word stands for "life partner." Besides, there are other well-known matrimonial advertising sites, such as Bharat Matrimony.com and Shaadi.com. These websites also carry Hindi names where *Bharat* signifies an old traditional India of *Hindutva* to connect the people with traditional India and its marriage system. *Shaadi* is a *Hindustani* term that stands for marriage. The Hindi name of the websites emotionally binds them and ensures the Indian and Indian diaspora, the Indian traditional marriage system, which is rooted in their culture.

Jeevansathi.com was founded in 1998 by Sanjeev Bikhchandani, executive vice chairman of Info Edge India, a dominant caste upper-class man. In 2016, its logo "Be Found" campaign won a bronze award in the "Services: Other" category of The Advertising Club's EFFIE awards (The Advertising Club, 2017). *Jeevansathi.com* uses the customer-to-customer (C2C) business model. Although the website has a free list, search, and express interest and accepts other expressions of interest, users must pay for contact details. It assures a hundred percent privacy by allowing the profile creators to control who can see the profile and pictures with advanced privacy settings. According to the website, the candidates' ages, addresses, and incomes are verified. Jeevansaathi.com is a strategy of binding Indian diasporas with their culture and homeland through marriage, who fear losing their homeland while living host land (Gupta, 2020).

Many scholars have researched matrimonial sites. Sandeep Shako (2004) in his research argues that matrimonial sites are the need of the South Asians who are relocated. Technology has helped the South Asians living outside their land to stay connected to their land specially in the process of finding bride and groom of their community. Similarly, Nainika Seth (2011) investigates the role of matrimonial sites in arranging marriages in India. She talks about the social changes due to the shift from the traditional marriage style to arranging marriage through modern technologies. In her study, she has focused on the benefits of matrimonial sites in arranging a

marriage. Along the same line, Sarbeswar Sahoo (2017) focuses on advancing social structure and identities through matrimonial sites. In this regard, she discusses the changing concept of marriage, love, and gender roles. She sees that female candidates have achieved more freedom in looking for grooms and talking with them, which was not given in the traditional marriage arrangement. Fritzi Marie Titzmann (2016) also explores the changing values of marriage from the traditional to the modern style of searching for bride and groom. In her study, she critically discusses the changing gender image, especially of the "new Indian woman" imposed by traditional and modern values. This role model has also been used in matrimonial sites' advertisements (pic 4). Sucharita Sen (2020) examines the impact of globalization on Hindu-Bengali matrimony. She affirms that there has been a shift from old model of looking bride and groom to technological advancement in searching life partner. However, she argues that patriarchal norms have been tied with globalization resulting in a "tradition-bound society, putting tradition and technology in a curious and cumbersome paradox" (2022).

1.10.2. Blog article: "Spearheading a survey of caste in South Asian diaspora"

A blog is a space where diaspora can connect in their communities globally and locally. Blogs do not limit themselves to any specific group, community, or friend circle. It is widely open to readers who desire to be connected to any community, knowledge, and idea globally. The South Asian diaspora from different backgrounds has started writing blogs to connect with their mainland, writing for their diaspora compatriots or following the blogs by diaspora bloggers about culture, politics, and homeland. Some blog articles are "Lal salaam: Reflection on the culture of politics and the politics of culture," blogging about Indian Diaspora culture. "Indiaspora," another blog which writes about efficient India and its culture among Diaspora.

Besides, many South Asian scholars have worked on the South Asian diaspora and blogs together. On the one side, some scholars have researched blogs as a site of South Asian cultural dissemination worldwide. For instance, Radha S Hedge (2014) has worked on food blogs and the virtual images of local food shared on the blogs by the South Asian diaspora bloggers. She has observed that virtual images of the local food of the diaspora's native countries signify the

globalization of regional food. Conversely, some scholars have used blogs to analyze from a feminist perspective. For instance, Rahul Mitra and Radhika Gajjala (2008) have mapped the themes of queering and transgendering practices in the Indian digital diaspora. Ishani Mukherjee (2013; 2015) has worked on blogs which narrate the gender disparity, intersected by ethnicity, race, migration, and globalization among the South Asian diaspora community. Ajaya K Sahoo and Anindita Shome (2020) have discussed raising activism among the young South Asian diaspora through social websites. They have explored Facebook, Twitter and Hashtags spreading via blogs for their study.

Hence, blogs have been used by the South Asian diaspora in different directions. They have used them to connect with South Asians and their homeland and to globalize their cultures, such as food, dress, and religious ceremonies. South Asian diaspora scholars have also found blogs as a rich source for their research studies to demonstrate their marginalization in the South Asian diaspora community. Mitra, Gajjala, Mukherjee, Sahoo, and Shome have studied blogs as a platform of activism and connectivity.

In this research work, I have chosen a blog article "Spearheading a survey of caste in South Asian diasporas" (2016) written by Valliammal Karunakaran, Asmita Pankaj, Thenmozhi Soundararajan, and Prathap Balakrishnan, as a case study. The bloggers are Dalit research scholars, activists, and writers who have collaborated with other Dalit activists worldwide to create Dalit activist groups online. This blog was written as the concluding remarks of a "Survey of Caste among Diaspora" conducted by organizations working in the USA against caste oppression. In the blog article, Valliammal Karunakaran et al. also share the experiences of young South Asian diaspora from different gender groups to show the reality of gender, caste, and the space of South Asian Dalit diaspora among the South Asian diaspora writing. The bloggers have put their stories without alteration as testimonies against dominant histories, which are shown to be casteist (his)stories in the final instance. Choosing the internet, especially blogs, to rewrite history has projected their activism as collective cyber activism. The blog has also connected the readers to other platforms such as Facebook pages, Instagram profiles, You Tube channels, research websites, other bloggers, and Twitter pages where they are raising the voices of the gendered caste and caste-d gender other.

1.11. Questions beyond gender: Caste

Caste is a salient issue in understanding South Asian society, whether living inside their land or beyond its border. Since this research work focuses on the South Asian diaspora, I will briefly go through the texts which have explored gendered caste and caste-d gender issues in their texts. Then I will discuss the case studies and connect them with the question of caste and gender.

It is necessary to emphasize that earlier, while writing the research proposal, I did not find any literary texts written by Dalit diaspora writers. However, renowned writers such as Arundhati Roy and Amitav Ghosh have given glimpses of caste apartheid in their novels The God of small things (1997) and Sea of Poppies (2008). Arundhati Roy (1997) presents the inter-caste love affair between an upper-caste woman and a Dalit man. Through them, she shows the consequences of such relationships. The whole upper caste community wanted to kill the Dalit and finally murdered him, and ultimately his body was not found. The protagonist (upper caste woman) lived a miserable life without financial support from her family. Ghosh (2008) shows a similar plot where an upper-caste widow elopes with a lower-caste man, crosses the border, and escapes caste discrimination. However, some studies have argued the loss of caste while migrating. For example, Omendra Kumar Singh (2012) writes in the novel that “though the traditional caste hierarchy was practically lost in the migratory process, it continued to exist in alternative form and only waited to be found in time” (p. 47).

Further, Radhika Gajjala (2003, 2019) writes about the invisibility of Dalit diaspora women in the South Asian digital diaspora community. She finds that the upper-middle-class dominant caste Hindu male society controls the digital spaces. Other scholars have introduced caste and gender as intersecting factors of discrimination in their studies—Sameera Dalwai (2016) talked about Permila Tirkey’s case (discussed in the introduction). Shweta Majumdar and Anjana Narayan (2017) narrate the stories of the Dalit diaspora living in the USA and their multiple marginalizations because of race, caste, and gender. Sonam Roohi (2017) delineates the marginalization of women of the *Kamma* community (Andhra Pradesh, India) who live in the USA. She demonstrates the double burden of being a traditional and modern woman in their community living in the USA. Suraj Milind Yengde (2015) writes about caste-based endogamy marriages as the reason and result of the caste system. Suraj Yengde’s book Caste Matters (2019) give a detailed reading of caste-based discrimination among the South Asian diaspora

worldwide. In his book, he theorizes caste as one of the crucial factors among the South Asian diaspora in constructing "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983). He argues that the South Asian diaspora creates a caste nation far from their homeland. Within such a "nation," they practice caste apartheid. In her autoethnography, Thenmozhi Soundarajan (2002) narrates her experiences of being marginalized in a caste South Asian diaspora community. She introduces the trauma through which a Dalit diaspora goes. Dedicating her book to the Dalit diaspora, she presents the healing process. She states that self-healing of the multigenerational trauma is equally or more important than fighting outside against the caste apartheid.

Coming to the case studies, Bharati Mukherjee's novels are debated from the point of a diaspora woman and feminist perspective, but it has been rarely investigated with the question of gendered caste or caste-d gender hence leaving an essential aspect of diaspora feminism. As far as this research can visualize, Mukherjee, herself coming from the dominant caste and bourgeois class, has picturized the women protagonists from different socio-economic backgrounds in her novels. For instance, her novels, *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Desirable Daughter*s, project the protagonists from the dominant caste and class, whereas Jasmine's protagonist struggles due to her class. Such socio-economic positions have produced different narratives of migration and settlement in the host land. That way, she challenges the readers to question the socio-economic background of the protagonists and how their gendered body is differently treated because of their social status. Also, it is interesting to see how a diaspora writer with the baggage of *Badhralok* (dominant caste and upper middle class) society has represented diaspora women of dominant caste and lower caste.

Matrimonial sites have also been researched as one of those media which have strengthened the ties of the diasporas with their Indian origins. Matrimonial sites have made their space among the Indian diaspora to connect with the Indian culture, Indian marriage system, community, and homeland. The advent of matrimonial sites represents the introduction of new technology into the complex social process of arranged marriages. Matrimonial sites bridge the gap between the South Asian diasporas living on different continents. However, despite technological advancement and a representative of modern South Asian customs, matrimonial sites bring the question of caste into existence. Whether the matrimonial site has eradicated the caste system

from the marriage system of Indian culture or has borrowed and made the caste system stronger within diaspora marriages?

Unlike the other two case studies, the blog is written by the South Asian Dalit diasporas, who carry the gendered caste or caste-d gender stories. Contrary to the matrimonial sites, the blog is written by the other strata of caste people calling themselves Bahujan,[11] who talk about their representation within mainstream South Asian diaspora writing. It is essential to see how they have represented themselves and what are the critical aspects of their representation.

In all the case studies, the question of representation is significant, especially in the third case study (the blog). There has been a shift in the notion of representation to self-representation from the first case study to the third case study. Thus, in this research work, the question of representation has been discussed in three phases. The first phase is discussed in Chapter 2, "Methodological strategies." The representation discussed by Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak (2007) has been studied together with the notion of "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983). These two concepts show how "imagined communities" are rapidly constructed among the South Asian diaspora based on different factors. Caste is one of the essential factors which intersects with gender and results in the marginalization of gendered caste and caste-d gender others. Then how the "others" intend to self-represent themselves.

The second phase is discussed in Chapter 3, which debates the question of representation from different theoretical frameworks. It starts from postcolonialism, where the texts of Homi K Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak discuss the term representation. This section delineates the representation of a colonized subject using the theory of "hybridity" and "third space" (Bhabha, 1994; Bhabha, 1990). Then it emphasizes the representation of Third World brown women under an imperialist Brahmanical and patriarchal structure (Spivak, 1988). Then the debate moves to decoloniality and a comparative reading of Spivak's "Can the subaltern speak?" (1988) and María Lugones's "The coloniality of gender" (2007) to understand the representation of Third World women and women of color globally, especially in White feminism. Finally, we see the

[11]Bahujan is a political term, which is a Pali word frequently found in Buddhist texts and means "the many" or "the majority," and which Ambedkar used to refer to the majority who were caste-oppressed from Shudra castes, Dalits, and Indigenous communities (Jaffrelot, 2003, p. 153).

question of representation in Dalit diaspora feminism discussed through the text of Thenmozhi Soundararajan (2022).

The third phase of representation is delineated in Chapter 7, where the question of representation is revised from Dalit diaspora women. Here, the debate shifts to self-representation which starts from Ella Sohat's (1995) text and then goes further with a real-life death incident of a 13-year-old Dalit diaspora girl. In this discussion, the question of self-representation, especially of Dalit diaspora women, seems impossible, but simultaneously, it is an urge. Hence, in this chapter, we see the intent of self-representation by Dalit diaspora women.

Chapter 2. Methodological strategies

This chapter briefly discusses the skills, methods, and methodologies (Griffin, 2011) chosen for this research work. It starts from the need to connect the humanities and the social sciences in this research work, where the terms representation and self-representation need to be explored from a broader perspective to go through the varieties of texts chosen in this study. Hence the chapter will delineate the advantages and political benefits of interdisciplinarity through the texts of Gabriele Griffin (2011) and Gayatri Spivak (2003). Then the chapter will discuss the notion of representation from the text of Judith Butler and Spivak (2007) together with the concept of "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983). As already said before that through these two concepts the chapter will show how "imagined communities" are constructed among the South Asian diaspora based on different factors. Caste is one of the essential factors which intersects with gender and results in the marginalization of gendered caste and caste-d gender others. The chapter will also look into the methods used by the gendered caste and caste-d gender others to self-represent themselves and project their activism. In this research, the focus is on digital platform used by Dalit diaspora to create activism, i.e., cyberactivism. Finally, it will discuss the methods and methodological strategies used to conduct the research of the chosen case studies.

2.1. Building bridges between the humanities and the social sciences

Many scholars have combined the humanities and the social sciences to achieve the proposed aims of their research. They have discussed the differences between the humanities and the social sciences and their methods to build bridges between them as per their research. In *Death of a discipline* (2003), Spivak highlights the differences between disciplines in their modes of producing scientific knowledge (2003). Gabriele Griffin has talked about their methodological differences (Griffin, 2011). However, both writers have suggested that their readers cross the border of disciplines to meet the study's demand. In this thesis, the interdisciplinarity of the humanities and the social sciences is looked upon as beneficial for connecting three pillars: (self)representation, gender, and caste to discuss the representation and self-representation of gendered caste and caste-d gender other from different perspectives of the South Asian diaspora writing. The different perspective, here, demands getting into different kinds of text to

understand the (self)representation of caste and gender comparatively. Hence, borrowing methods and methodologies from other disciplines has helped achieve this work's aim.

First, as Spivak (1994) affirms that very few narratives are available on South Asian diaspora tribals/Dalits as no Anglo-Indian tribal/Dalit writers are writing about themselves (1994, p. 196). Tabish Khair (2001) also shows his concern towards the lack of literary texts produced by the Dalit diaspora. Khair gives examples of the texts by the Dalits in South Asia written in their vernacular languages. Then, he emphasizes the lingual and socio-political discourses as a reason for the absence of Dalit diaspora writers in English literary writing. He uses the discourse of the "Babu" (mostly upper caste) and the "coolie" (lower caste) distinction, even for the South Asian diaspora, to show how colonial language has benefitted only the "Babu" section of the society.[12] He writes "language is a central vehicle in the process by which subjects are constituted (socially and individually) and that language and ideology are intricately interwoven" (2001, p. 6). The "Babu" section, including among the South Asian diaspora, is writing in English, and is read worldwide. Dalit writers writing in their vernacular languages remain limited to their society.

While searching for the resources written by Dalit diaspora writers, I found autoethnography, articles and digital texts written by the second generation of Dalit diaspora writers. However, the Dalit diaspora writers have yet to explore literary texts such as novels. One cannot ignore the novels which present caste and gender intersection, such as *The God of small things* (1997) and *Sea of Poppies* (2008), written by Arundhati Roy and Amitav Ghosh, respectively. However, their writing has focused on upper-caste women, not Dalit diaspora women. At the same time, Dalit diaspora writers, scholars, and activists have used digital platforms widely to share their experiences. Hence, choosing to go from literary texts to the field of social sciences is to build the gap, especially the texts written by the Dalits diaspora on caste and gender intersection. I emphasize that for this study, it was necessary to include text written by Dalit diaspora in order to visualize their notion of self-representation.

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[12] Tabish Khair defines the "Babu" as middle- or upper-class people of Indian origin, mostly urban (cosmopolitan), Brahminized and/ or 'westernized,' fluent in English. The "coolie" classes are non-English speaking, not significantly 'westernized,' not or less Brahminized, economically deprived, culturally marginalized and, often, rural or migrant-urban populations. Khair, further, expands this concept within a postcolonial scenario, which is constructed between the Coolie Indian, the upstart-Babu or cultural coolie and varieties of cosmopolitan and accomplished Babu.

Hence, in this research, literary studies need to explore new alliances to understand the subject (Eagleton, 2012) and its representation and self-representation. Thus, there is a need to find alliances based on the need of the research work. However, from the researcher's position, it is not an easy task because of the differences between the humanities and the social sciences. Neither is it easy for readers to switch from the humanities to the social sciences within a thesis, especially if they are from one of these fields.

I started my thesis by questioning my capability to extend my work from literature to digital social sites. As Rosemarie Buikema et al. have stated, "feminist research is a critical urge to challenge the conventional way of doing scientific and scholarly work. Feminist research is often post-conventional and unorthodox" (2011, p. 1). Inspired by these words, I chose digital sites to look further for primary sources for the research work, which could give scope to expand more perspectives on the intersection of caste and gender. Here, as I have already said, Bharati Mukherjee's novels open a debate on caste and gender from the upper caste woman's perspective and then, how she represents the gendered caste and caste-d gender other is interesting. Matrimonial sites also add another perspective to see Dalit diaspora women, i.e., from a dominant caste upper middle class male's point. At the same time, it is pertinent to see how Dalit diaspora women self-represent themselves, as we will see in the case of the blog.

In the course of searching the primary sources, in 2018, I found matrimonial sites working across borders. At that time, my family was looking for a groom for one of my sisters. There, I saw many profiles of diaspora available looking for a bride or groom in India, Europe, and the USA. It was an active site where everyday marriages were promised by asking the visitors to fill in their forms, and interestingly, one of the first questions was about caste. A public matrimonial site encouraged curiosity regarding questions related to caste and gender, their role in matrimony, and how diasporas of different castes are represented in the matrimonial sites. Blogs, also digital texts, became another primary source for research because of personal interest as they are easy to follow, short in reading, and give the knowledge and opportunity to comment. During 2016-18, as I was researching for my master's dissertation, I decided to choose the blog as my primary resource because I found Dalit diaspora scholars active on blogs, giving a new turn to see the representation of caste and gender. As blogs written by Dalit diaspora women delineated the self-representation of gendered caste and caste-d gender others. Thenmozhi

Soundararajan, one of the blog writers, said that when they came online, they felt they could finally sideline the monopoly of Brahmanical media. Then, they found a direct platform to share with the world. She said, “I had a voice; I had a platform” (2022, p. 117). Hence, this way, I was able to get into the discussion on caste and gender from different perspectives– novels written by dominant caste and upper-class diaspora feminist writers, matrimonial sites managed by dominant caste and upper-class businessmen and finally, the blog written by a group of Dalit diaspora scholars and activists. Here, the intention is to see how gendered caste and caste-d gender others are represented and self-represented in the case studies.

After this initial research on the primary resources and finding their connection with each other on the question of (self)representation of gendered caste and caste-d gender other, I planned to connect the disciplines from where these case studies were coming, humanities and social sciences, with a methodology to build a bridge between them. So, this chapter will first discuss the advantages and disadvantages of connecting two different fields to write an academic work discussed by Griffin (2011). Then, I will talk about the political benefits of connecting two disciplines, especially in this research field, using Spivak’s work (2003).[13]

2.1.1. Research work between the humanities and the social Sciences

Many books have presented different strategies to connect the humanities and the social sciences, to name a few, Kirszner & Mandell (2012); Owens (1997); Cunningham & Reich (2009); Outhwaite & Turner (2007). Their approaches rely mainly on the area of knowledge referring to writing a scholarly work. According to Griffin, different disciplines have different methodological strategies. For instance, the humanities’ methodological strategies are not separated from the theoretical ones as their methodological plan is already a part of the theoretical framework, which defines the concepts and enables the strategies. Whereas, in the social sciences, methodologies are the plans in which cause, and consequences play a crucial role and look more like instructions for the research analysis. However, going beyond this method,

[13] Here, I would like to thank Beatriz Revelles from the University of Granada who helped me in choosing the texts of Gabriele Griffin (2011) and Gayatri Spivak (2003) in order to understand the need to connect different disciplines.

Griffin emphasizes that giving shape to a method depends on the researcher and his/her research work, where the question of “how you do what you do” should be straightforward (2011, p. 93).

Another point she refers to is the interdisciplinary (different disciplines work in collaboration), where she says that the intention of collaboration must be clear. Besides, Griffin’s concern in any collaborative or interdisciplinary research is the “object of research,” as she says, “literary research is much more than textual analysis. The failure to recognize this is a failure of the research questions” (Griffin 2011, p. 95). This is a significant point as she makes it clear that the aim of the study should not be harmed in collaborative or interdisciplinary research.

In this regard, she states that fields such as landscape and environment, security, sustainability migration, or gender require researching across humanities and involve different knowledge domains such as the social sciences. Hence, the humanities have developed various methods for collaborative research with the social sciences. Analogously, depending on the research theme, the social sciences have taken several methods from the humanities. One can see a diverse discussion in an edited book by her together with Nina Lykke and Rosemarie Buikema *Theories and methodologies in postgraduate feminist research: Researching differently* (2011) on visual methods, discourse analysis, textual analysis, computer-aided discourse, ethnographic research methods, and creative work, which have been employed not only in the humanities but also in the social sciences.

Griffin points out that skills/methods and methodologies are essential research strategies in many disciplines. Research skills, as she defines, are the techniques for handling material; research methods are concerned with how one carries out one’s research, and the choice of method depends on the kind of research one wants to conduct. Whereas methodologies are the perspectives, one brings to bear on one’s research. She argues that there are many research methods in social sciences compared to humanities, and she also says that there is an appropriation of research methods entirely derived from the arts and humanities (2011). Thus, according to her, we should reclaim methods and make them more explicitly our own. Such reclamation can open interdisciplinary communication and collaborative opportunities, inspiring us to think divergently about the research we want. Thus, even though the social sciences and the humanities formally follow a different methodological structure, in this research work, the methods and methodologies used to connect the case studies are essential to meet the aim.

The research methods and methodologies to handle literary texts such as novels and working on matrimonial sites and blogs are different because they have different writing and production styles. Thus, while going from one case study to another, there has been a shift in the methods of approach. However, Jasmina Lukic and Adelina Sánchez' (2011) "feminist close reading" is a crucial method which is used commonly in all the case studies to do an analytical study. For instance, Mukherjee's novels are approached with postcolonial, diaspora, and Dalit diaspora feminist close reading. Whereas to approach the matrimonial site, digital ethnography and autoethnography are used to collect data and share my experience in collecting the data apart from the postcolonial and Dalit diaspora feminist close reading. The blog is again studied through Dalit diaspora feminist close reading where the question of self-representation is revised from Dalit diaspora feminist perspective. Indeed, the writer's, reader's, and researcher's involvement differ in all the texts. However, this research work is not about distinguishing novels and matrimonial sites, or the blog based on different writing and production styles, but rather, about questioning who is writing the text and how caste and gender are represented or self-represented in the texts.

2.1.2. Political benefits of interdisciplinarity

> What I am proposing is not a politicization of discipline. We are *in* politics. I am proposing an attempt to depoliticize in order to move away from a politics of hostility, fear, and half solutions. (Spivak, 2003, p. 4)

With this quote, Spivak opens a discussion about the discipline of comparative literature, which must be renovated to include the rising questions in other disciplines, as she named "multiculturalism and cultural studies" (p. 4). She focuses on comparative literature that needs to move to the premises of Area Studies, which can give more scope in broadening the research area of comparative literature and hence be more inclusive.

Spivak does not directly use the disciplines such as humanities and social sciences in her discussion in the same way I have used them in this research work. However, a similar relationship can be established between the humanities, especially literature and social science, which Spivak relates to Area Studies in her book (2003, p. 7). "Crossing borders," the title of the

chapter of her book, not only talks about the crossing of the disciplines from one to another, but she also relates the need for going beyond one discipline: to revise one's position and to broaden the knowledge about the "others." Such as comparative literature and Area Studies to include voices of the subalterns or Global South. She writes that Area Studies should include foreign "areas" beyond the geographical borders of the US-European nations:

> In the field of literature, we need to move from Anglophony, Lusophony, Teutophony, Francophony, etc. We must take the language of the Southern Hemisphere as active cultural media rather than objects of cultural study by the sanctioned ignorance of the metropolitan migrant. (2003, p. 9)

Spivak has interestingly linked Area Studies to the subjectivity and representation of the global other or Global South, whose presence is affected by the absence of their language (their identities). As she says, it is necessary to engage with the languages of the Global South, which are not present as "voices" but rather present in the European or American university structure "via the objectifying, discontinuous, transcoding tourist gaze of anthropology and oral history" (2003, p. 10).

A similar need is felt in this research work while deciding to cross the border from the humanities to the social sciences: language and knowledge of the "other" link to his/her identities and representation. As Anzaldúa states, "my language is my identity" (1987, p. 39). However, Spivak's primary concern is to include the literature of former British colonies in Africa and Asia with the British, French, Spanish, and Portuguese. She urges researchers to go further to map the indigenous narratives and languages, which were programmed to vanish from the world map. As far as the South Asian diaspora and their writings are concerned, caste/gendered South Asian diaspora are under-represented, especially the gendered caste or caste-d gender others. South Asian diaspora writing has focused chiefly on cosmopolitan diaspora, their language, identity, and issues such as race, colonial relationships, religion, etc. Thus, it is time to put the history of gendered caste/caste-d gender South Asian diaspora parallel to the present the South Asian diaspora narrative. Spivak rightly says that:

> If we seek to supplement gender training and human rights intervention by expanding the scope of comparative literature, the proper study of literature may give us entry to the performativity of cultures as instantiated in the narrative. (2003, p. 13)

Analogously, suppose we sensitize the researchers on the gendered caste and caste-d gender issues. Properly studying literature, matrimonial sites, blogs, or any other types of text “may give us entry to the performativity of cultures as instantiated in the narrative” (ibid). “This will be a preparation for a provisional and forever deferred arrival into the performative of another in order not to transcode but to draw a response” (ibid). The languages or the knowledges of the Global South, which have not prospered because of being underrepresented worldwide, will also be able to attract readership. This way, combined with the social sciences, the humanities can give better prospects and results to researchers ready to dive into them.

2.2. Literature, technology, and the “other”

This research aims to bring literary texts and social networking sites together to question the (self)representation of gendered caste and caste-d gender among the South Asian diaspora. Concerning the shift from the literary texts of Bharati Mukherjee to social networking sites, one can observe a technological shift, a change in generation from a time of letter writing to fast email writing.

Bharati Mukherjee’s texts date from 1971, 1989, and 2003 which also indicates the changing phase of the internet. 1971 was the time when the internet was not present and then in 1989 the internet was developing and in 2003, the internet already spread all over the world. Three novels of Mukherjee cover three decades which mark a huge change in the world in terms of digitalization. That is also the reason that I decided to work specifically with these novels, as these novels delineate the changing notion of the internet. Matrimonial sites started in the 1990s and updated periodically. Matrimonial sites coincide with the period when Mukherjee’ second novel came. The blog was written in 2016 much after the publication of her third novel. The three different types of texts indicate the change in the world in terms of the internet boom and

how traveling and settling down in Europe and the USA has changed. For instance, in her first two novels, Mukherjee portrays traveling as not economically viable. Besides, the availability of telephones and telegrams is limited, as it is expensive and inaccessible sometimes (Mukherjee, 1989). The presence of cinema, radio, images, and other video watching resulted in one-way traffic (Mukherjee, 1971). Through her first two novels, she also indicates that traveling is not same for the diaspora women who are coming from different classes. In her third novel (*Desirable Daughters,* 2002), Mukherjee shows a glimpse of traveling where only professionals, primarily upper caste, and upper class, western-educated, traveled from South Asia for higher studies, to work in a better company, and to earn more. As she has shown, these movements are realized because of the already existing diaspora group, which used to help the new coming diaspora on the host land. They also created a closed community of diaspora of similar class, language, and religion where the term "home" is a distant, photographic image in the memories of diaspora created with nostalgia. Mukherjee's third novel shows the presence of digital sites indicating hypermobility which comes with modern means of communication. Nowadays, the diaspora is seen at the airports rushing to different countries with smartphones, laptop bags, and speaking fluently in more than two languages, carrying foreign passports. Matrimonial sites are one of the results of faster means of communication. This new technological method helps in connecting the diaspora with their Indian land. In the fast-moving world there are also South Asian diaspora who are do not want to fit into the homogenized South Asian diaspora group of upper caste, upper middle class, Brahminical community because they carry other identities such as caste. The caste intersects with gender and creates further marginalization of the Dalit diaspora women. Hence, their presence in the digital spaces stresses a need to revise these texts produced pre-internet and during internet period from a Dalit diaspora feminist perspective.

Despite the change in time and technology shift, the notion of representation binds them together and brings the texts of Mukherjee, the matrimonial site Jeevansaathi.com and the blog on the same platform. Further, in the next section, we will discuss the theory of representation given by Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak (2007). This theory will be studied together with the concept of "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983). These two concepts will show how "imagined communities" are constructed among the South Asian diaspora based on different factors. Caste is one of the essential factors which intersects with gender and results in the marginalization of

gendered caste and caste-d gender others. Hence, how caste and gender are (self)represented in the caste based "imagined communities" constructed by the South Asian diaspora.

2.2.1. Representation: the "other"[14]

The theory of representation of a subject and its political and judicial qualification, given by Butler and Spivak (2007), is crucial in connecting and categorizing the case studies selected for the thesis. Butler and Spivak maintain that representation only applies to politically acknowledged subjects of the nation. According to them, the qualification for being a subject is met when the subject is politically and judicially qualified. Butler and Spivak further discuss the situation of those "who cannot fit" or "do not want to fit" into the political or judicial box to achieve their subjectivity (Butler & Spivak, 2007, pp. 5-7). For such subjects, they write that there is no complete exclusion, but the "others" (who cannot or do not fit) are excluded in "the mode of certain containment, where the other is not outside of politics" (2007, p. 5). Further, they also clarify that there is no space outside the political and judicial power system; only a critical genealogy of its legitimating practices can exist (2007).

This section recollects Benedict Anderson's discourse of "imagined communities" as the fruit of the nation-state-based ideology (1983). It connects with the above theory of "representation" to delineate the presence of South Asian Dalit diaspora in the dominant South Asian diaspora community. According to Anderson's, the "imagined community" is a creation of a modern European colonial system that traveled during colonization. He calls "print media" a new power unleashed in creating nations: "imagined communities." The print media spreads nationalism: "love towards the motherland among the colonized countries" (1983, p. 6). He states that the community "is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation do not know most of

[14] This section contains parts of the following published papers:
Gupta, Shilpi. (2018). (Dis) locating Homeland: "In-betweenness" in Monica Ali's Brick Lane and Taslima Nasreen's French Lover. GEMMA TFM. Instituto de las mujeres y género, University of Granada.

Gupta, Shilpi. (2019). Negotiation of Un/Belongingness between the "(Imagined) Homelands" from a Transnational, South Asian, Brown Woman's Perspective: A Case Study of Taslima Nasreen's French Lover. *Indialogs*, *6*, 97-113.

Gupta, Shilpi. (2022). (Dis) Locating Homeland: Border (Home) Land in Taslima Nasreen's French Lover and Monica Ali's Brick Lane. In *Gender, Place, and Identity of South Asian Women* (pp. 1-22). IGI Global.

their fellow members, but still, in the mind of each lives the image of their community" (1983, p. 6). He further states that a "(colonial) motherland is a domain of dis/interested love and solidarity, which demands loyalty, patriotic inclination, and self-sacrificing love from all the members" (p. 144).

Later, Arjun Appadurai argues that in the proceeding centuries, there has been a technological explosion in transportation and information (Appadurai, 1996). The world has shrunk enough to be called a "global village" (Clair, 2017). Media is creating communities with "no sense of place" and a world that seems "rhizomic" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). There has been a paradigm shift from colonization to capitalism, from the mass movement of enslaved people to immigration to a capitalist world. Still, the sense of "imagined communities" continues in different forms.

Interestingly, the research focuses on a nation– "an imagined community" that travels from the Third to the First World with its diaspora. Radhika Gajjala writes, "Indianness is re-envisioned through an idea of the nation where the nation is not a bounded geographical unit but an ideological force" (Gajjala. 2019, p. 4). The South Asian digital diaspora creates "imagined communities" with the help of different scapes such as ethnoscape, technoscape, financescape, mediascape, and ideoscape (Appadurai, 1996). According to Appadurai, these scapes are the building blocks of an "imagined world," "imagined communities" and "imagined homelands" (p. 33).

Appadurai focuses on the shifting world with ethnoscape because of the population movement. For instance, "tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers etc. constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the policies of nations to hitherto unprecedented degree" (p. 36). Technoscape covers technological development and its impact on blurring the borders and creating a trans-national world. Financescape delineates "the currency markets, national stock exchanges, commodity speculations which move megamonies through national turnstiles at blinding speed" (p. 37). Mediascape and ideoscape are two influencing scapes which are closely related to images.

> Mediascape, whether produced by private or state interests tend to be image centered, narrative based account of strips of reality, and what they offer to those who experience

> and transform them is a series of elements out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places. Ideoscapes are also concatenations of images, but they are often directly political and frequently have to do with the ideologies of states and counter-ideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it. (Appadurai 1996, p. 36)

All these scapes slowly build up the love towards an "imagined homeland" for non-resident South Asian populations. For instance, the South Asian diaspora includes splitting themselves into nation-state-based ideologies based on religion, region, class, gender, and caste (Gupta, 2018; Gupta, 2019).

Further, Bhim R Ambedkar has precisely observed that each caste is a nation as each has its caste consciousness (2014). Suraj Yengde adds that the "caste-nation" feeling grows robust as more insecurities hit society regarding unemployment, poverty, and partisan control over resources (2019, p. 18). The South Asian diasporas, following Hindu majoritarian ideologies, construct their caste-conscious communities where inside, men and women are given different duties to carry out to protect their caste-based nation. Here, Butler and Spivak appropriately explain that the nation-state signifies the legal and institutional structures and serves the norms for the obligation and conditions of judicially bonded citizenship (Butler & Spivak, 2007, p. 5). Ambedkar and Yengde point to a caste nation created by the Hindu majoritarian diaspora. Dominant caste diaspora symbolically carries the matrix for the obligation and prerogatives of citizenship for the high caste diaspora. They are obliged to follow their cultures, such as food, dress, language, visits, religious ceremonies, and marriage, to create their caste community as an "imagined community." Comprehending the words of the above scholars, a particular section of the South Asian Diaspora from dominant caste, class, and gender becomes an active part of the state in the sense that they participate in law formation.

Those idealizations of dominant caste male figures reinforce many films and television programs. "The production of an ideal–a combination of traditional and modern–Indian female identity, therefore, still has its roots in the colonial encounter with western masculinity and a re-articulation of Indian masculinity in response to the British male officers' perception of Indian Brahmin male 'effeminate'" (2014, p. 6).

Butler and Spivak (2007) further argue that the state binds the citizens forcefully or powerfully through the rules continuously imposed on them. Nevertheless, some do not conform to the nation's norms; in this case, the nation lets them go. However, releasing those citizens does not signify freedom; the nation unbinds them while controlling and monitoring their movement. Whenever the nation needs it, it often exercises its power on them differently. So, they are called the "insider outside" (pp. 4-5).

> [T]he stateless are not just stripped of status but accorded status and prepared for their dispossession and displacement: they become stateless precisely through complying with certain normative categories… In different ways, they are significantly contained within the polis as its interiorized outside. (pp. 15-16)

Coming to the South Asian diaspora, social formation in the physical spaces reproduces the notions of India, which is the "dominant Hindu caste, upper class," leaving all other sections of the South Asian diaspora aside. Even the Indian diaspora cultural spaces, images, food, and music are of a particular section of society and represented by the Indian diaspora. Thenmozi Soundararajan calls this phenomenon the "browning of the South Asian diaspora population" (2022, p. 36) which does not consider the heterogeneity based on caste or gendered caste. She states that under white supremacy, we are racialized into the social category of South Asian, which "homogenizes and masks the tensions and hierarchies within our national, cultural, caste, gender, and linguistic identities" (p. 35). As a result, being pigeonholed into this category erases the "multiple histories, experiences, and identities and perpetuates caste violence and other historical traumas" (ibid).

Butler & Spivak (2007) explained that those who are effectively stateless are still under the control of power of those who have constructed those "imagined communities" (Anderson, 198. The case referred to in the introduction about Permila Tirkey is one of those instances where a diaspora citizen belonging to a lower caste or gendered caste is denied her citizenship by her diaspora community. Being an Adivasi Christian woman from rural Bihar belonging to the servant class and lower caste is expected to be a domestic servant. The lower caste woman is treated as an outsider within the South Asian diaspora community and is controlled and dehumanized by the South Asian diaspora family (Dalwai, 2006). The instance demonstrates that

she is considered inferior to the rest of the South Asian diaspora and is not/cannot be represented among South Asians.

Further, Butler and Spivak argue that there cannot be "radical politics of change without performative contradiction" (2007, p. 66). They write that the contradiction must be relied upon and worked on to move towards something new. It is a mobilization of discourse with some degree of freedom without legal legitimation based on demands for equality and freedom (ibid). However, coming from the position of the "other" to the one who stands for equality and freedom is a long process. Rosi Braidotti (2000) expresses that those who are already the "other" may first need to go through a phase of "identity politics," that is, claiming a fixed location before getting into the struggle against its construction (p. 36). Hence, Soundararajan states that Dalit diasporas who have moved from the position of the "other" carry a narrative of fear, suffering, and trauma of being caste oppressed. The narrative of the Dalit diaspora itself serves as the "performative contradiction" against the dominant discourse of the South Asian diaspora community.

This discussion on representation gives an angle to classify the case studies starting from Mukherjee's novels written by a South Asian diaspora woman who carries the dominant caste and upper-class privileges with her. Mukherjee writes against the "nation" based on a dominant gender group from the position of a diaspora woman. However, she carries her *Badhrolok* (upper caste and upper-middle-class) status and writes from that privileged position which complicates the relationship among women/dominant caste women/lower caste women and further with the question of class. Mukherjee's novels become an interesting point to see the debate of gendered caste or caste-d gender from the perspective of a dominant caste diaspora woman in her novels.

In the following case study we analyze, *Jeevansathi.com,* the South Asian diaspora matrimonial site, originated in the Indian mainland and spread among Indian diaspora to connect Indians, Indian tradition, and culture worldwide. Started by a dominant caste Indian-origin businessman, matrimonial sites have become one of the tools to filter the South Asian population based on caste, color, profession, and class. The filtered "others" are forced to accept the prescribed norms of the gendered body, class, and profession by the matrimonial sites, or they have no space in the matrimonial sites.

Unlike the other two case studies, the subsequent case study, the blog, is written by a group of South Asian diaspora population who call themselves *Bahujan* or Dalit. Through the blog, Valliammal Karunakaran, Asmita Pankaj, Thenmozhi Soundararajan, and Prathap Balakrishnan have narrated their and other Dalit diaspora's experiences which challenge not only the his-story but also casteist his-story. They have chosen the internet, mainly blogs, to rewrite history and self-represent themselves. Such narratives of collective voices, intended to be theoretically and socially silent, have projected their activism through connecting with more Dalit diaspora online. The blog connects us to different organizations, YouTube Channels, online journals, articles, bloggers' followers, Tumbler.com, Medium.com, Instagram handlers, Facebook pages, and Twitter handlers working for the Dalit diaspora. It has become a platform of their activism for the Dalit diaspora online. Although the digital platforms are Brahamanized, colonized, and corporate surveilled space (Soundararajan, 2022, p. 120), digital spaces can also be approached to connect with Dalit diasporas living worldwide to share, participate and stand for their causes and create a space of activism.

2.3. Cyberactivism: Going political through the blog

The South Asian Dalit diaspora blogs on *Medium.com* and *Tumblr.com* become a medium of writing about experiences and starting activism. In this blog, calling themselves *Bahujan*, their writing stands as a challenge to the Brahmanical mainstream writing, which has sidelined the significant population of South Asians worldwide. Outside mainstream media, the blog becomes a platform for marginalized people to write their narratives through their experiences and perspective (Somolu, 2007).

Helene Snee defines the term blog as a "form of internet communication in which the author writes dated entries that appear in reverse order (i.e., earliest first) that can also link to other web pages and usually allow readers to comment" (2010, p. 1). She further talks about the typology of the blogs and their origin as "weblogs" (ibid). It has become a dynamic and accessible source of knowledge in which the writer, text, reader, and context relate to each other in a continuous process and debate. The conversation begins with one person publishing an article on which readers comment. Even the success of a blog is measured through the comments and number of

readers. Eventually, readers' input becomes community postings where discussions occur (Thevenot, 2007, p. 287). A blog opens its space for discussion where a response to the blog article could be longer than the article itself. If we see the manner of the production and the blog's readership, there is no distinction between writer and reader. Writers share their texts, which can be a story or their opinion, through a blog, and readers use the same platform to discuss, which can further translate into knowledge. This way, blogs become a platform to create collective knowledge (Somolu, 2007). It also subverts the distinction between writer and reader to bring them together and have a fruitful discussion.

Blogging has become one of the most popular social media and networking tools. David Beer and Roger Burrows call "blog as a part of web 2.0 content, an archive of everyday life" (2007). Nina Wakeford and Kris Cohen describe the broader scope of blogging, which includes:

> [R]egular and frequent updating, whether writing, photos, or other content; the expectation of linking to other bloggers and online sources; a month-by-month archive; the capacity of feedback through comments to the blog; a particular style of writing which is often characterized as spontaneous and revelatory. (Wakeford and Cohen, 2008, p. 308)

Further, many scholars have used blogs in their research work from an interdisciplinary point of view and have claimed that this digital social media platform can become a medium of activism and cyberactivism. Activism, as Pamela Oliver defines it, is a set of actions inviting social participation to generate changes or reach common goals (Oliver, 1984, p. 601). When the digital environment and activism merge, activism finds a bigger space to express itself and to exist through the tools and scopes provided by information technologies. According to Manuel Castells, cyberactivism gives a larger platform to traditional social movements for reaching a global community with an objective (2011, p. 11). Cyberactivism is understood as "a strategy to form temporary coalitions of people that, by using network tools, generate a sufficient critical mass of information and debate to transcend the blogosphere and to go out to the streets or to modify the behavior of a great number of people perceptibly" (De Ugalde, 2007 cited in Edixela K P Burgos 2017). Ramirez Morales and María de Rosario also write that cyberactivism feeds on the production and circulation of content through the internet and on the reactions received by the users (Morales and Rosario, 2019, p. 4). According to Edixela Burgos, cyberactivism is

characterized by empowerment, collaborative culture, free distribution and access to information, questions that generate culture, free distribution and access of information, and strategies and forms of collective actions from the internet and offline context (2017). That is why the internet is converted into a forum of deliberation that extends civil rights, experiments with them, and expands the limit between liberty and the discourse, political field, and activism. It protects from direct physical violence and allows connection to the broader world. One can observe the booming activism online via Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and personal blog. Charlotte Bunch notes that social activism is neither coherent nor homogeneous. Digital activism is entangled in conflicts and disputes: the various situations in global society and complexities, such as war zones, poverty zones, ethnic and religious conflicts, poor digital accessibility, and social inequalities (2001, 145).

There have been many scholars who have researched the internet as a medium of activism. Ashley Baker and Emily Ryalls (2014) discuss how feminist activism can grow through blogs among young college students in the USA. They said that blogging helped them not in learning but also teaching about feminism which was before limited to their classroom. Now, they are discussing daily life issues connected with feminist theories. Isvani Mukherjee (2013) delineates that among South Asian immigrant women in the USA, blogs have served as a space for sharing experiences of domestic violence. These immigrant women have found blogs as a space for sharing their experiences and a space for collectiveness against domestic abuse. Sonia Núnez Puente and Antonio García Jimenez (2011) point out through their case study on the feminist websites *Ciudad de Mujeres* and *Mujeres en Red* that cyberspace should not be idealized exaggeratedly as a utopian space. According to them, these “websites challenge utopian vision either by inhabiting the web in meta-spaces or virtual cities or by turning to strategies of occupying the web, through tools of feminist activism such as hacktivism” (p. 53).

Bloggers Valliammal Karunakaran, Asmita Pankaj, Thenmozhi Soundararajan, and Prathap Balakrishnan handle blogs at medium.com and tumblr.com; they also work in a group organization SAYHU[15](South Asian Youth Houston Unite) that collect writings on the representation of caste and gender among the South Asian diasporas. Two bloggers, Karunakaran

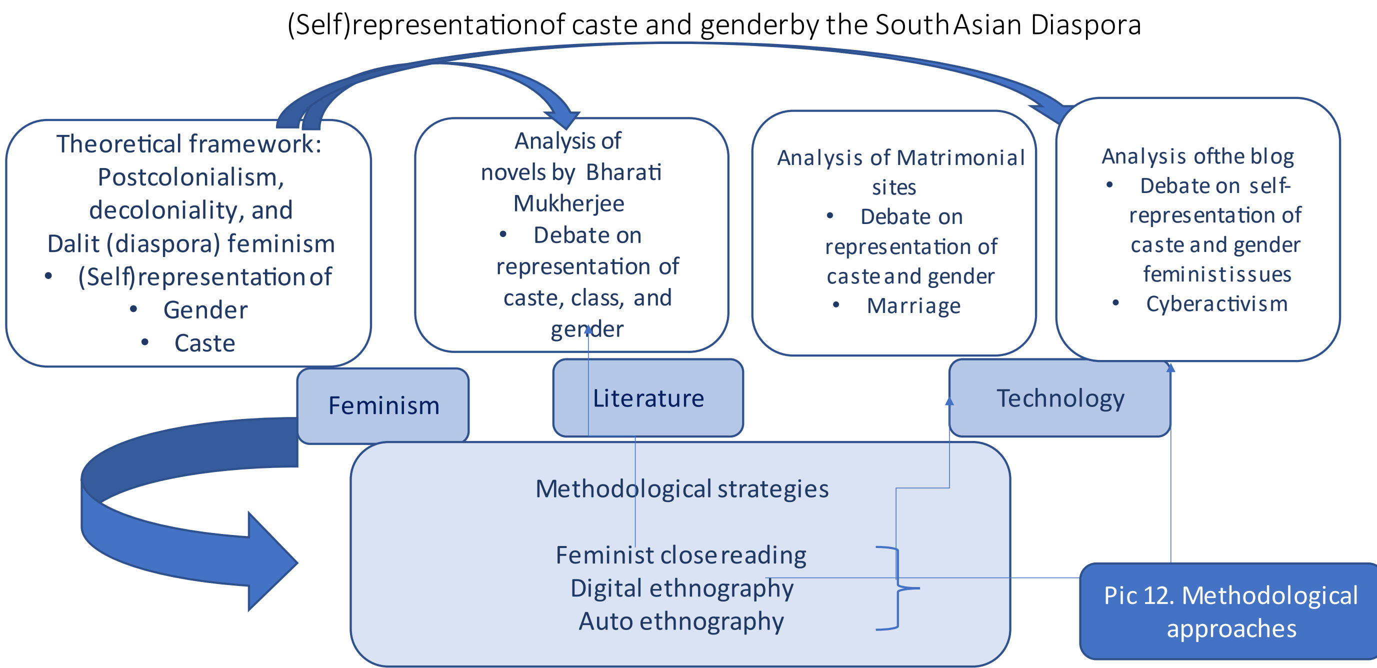
[15] https://www.sayhu.org/anti-blackness-caste-colorism

and Soundararajan, have an active life online, especially on blogs. Karunakaran can be easily followed on medium.com and tumblr.com. Intriguingly, the blogger has not posted his/her photo on any social media; instead has a picture of a tribal woman (the picture is given in the appendix), and the profile has a masculine name. That is how the blogger challenges the reader with his/her caste and gender. Thenmozhi Soundararajan is a Dalit diaspora feminist currently living in the USA. She has used different methods, such as transmedia storytelling, hip-hop music, and technology, to spread her/their collective message globally (Amanda, 2015). She can also be followed on Twitter, Instagram, and medium.com, where her account name is "Dalit Diva." Soundararajan, with her name frees her caste and gender from the position of the "other" and proudly represents herself with the caste and gender she carries. Her Instagram and Facebook pages show her activism against caste oppression among the diaspora, racism against immigrants and fights against Islamophobia. She has actively participated in smashing Brahminical patriarchy and calls herself a Dalit (diaspora) feminist. Soundararajan is an active leading member of different organizations working towards the empowerment of marginalized sections of the diaspora, such as Women of Color Media and Media Justice Network. Recently she started a podcast called "Caste in the USA," where she converses with other Dalit diasporas about caste discrimination in different places.

Asmita Pankaj and Prathap Balakrishnan do not have separate blog accounts or active virtual presence (or I could not find them in the digital world). They have participated in the blog writing and have shared their experiences and pictures in the blog (present in the appendix). In the blog, the writers have written their experiences and shared fragments of the experiences of others. They have handled their profile with a certain anonymity and, at the same time, represent the whole community. They, too, have collected the individual stories of those discriminated against and have experienced the existence of caste and gendered caste disparity. The bloggers are creating a space of multiple voices, a collective voice. These scholars have emphasized the significance of social contexts and physical space in constructing collective identity. Besides, the blog links itself to many other sites, and one of them is a singing group representing themselves as "The Casteless Collectiveness," which proves that they have a voice. The band refuses to adhere to the Brahmanical playbook such as *Manusmriti,* which essentially says, "if you belong to the lower caste, if you are untouchable, you do not get to have a voice." "The Casteless Collectiveness" demonstrates a voice made up of funeral musicians who learned to play their

instruments in a graveyard. Now, they are singing against systematic oppression, inequality of the caste system, and the oppression of women and minorities by the state. The Casteless Collective's music is engaging and disruptive (Vice Staff, 2019). The blog has linked to other organizations, such as SAYHU, to collect academic writings and debates on caste and gender among the South Asian diaspora. Indeed, technology, in this case, has facilitated the caste-d gender and gendered caste "other" an inexpensive and extensive communication with the "other" worldwide and created their online space activism. It is a political intervention that allows activists to connect domestically grounded communities and participate in large-scale protests.

2.4. Methodological strategies to approach the case studies



Pic 12. Methodological approaches

As shown in the picture above, I have blended different methods to approach the literary texts of Bharati Mukherjee, the matrimonial sites, and the blog in this research work. The approach toward the texts is mostly based on the theoretical framework, which covers a variety of theories borrowed from postcolonial feminism, decolonial feminism, and Dalit feminism towards an

analytical reading of what I consider representation and self-representation. According to this approach, I have used a qualitative strategy that embraces feminist critical discourses, feminist close reading, digital ethnography, and autoethnography. The research debates caste and gender to understand the raising feminist agendas from the point of the South Asian Dalit diaspora women. This analytical debate is based on reading the feminist articles defining caste and gender and gendered caste and caste-d gender.

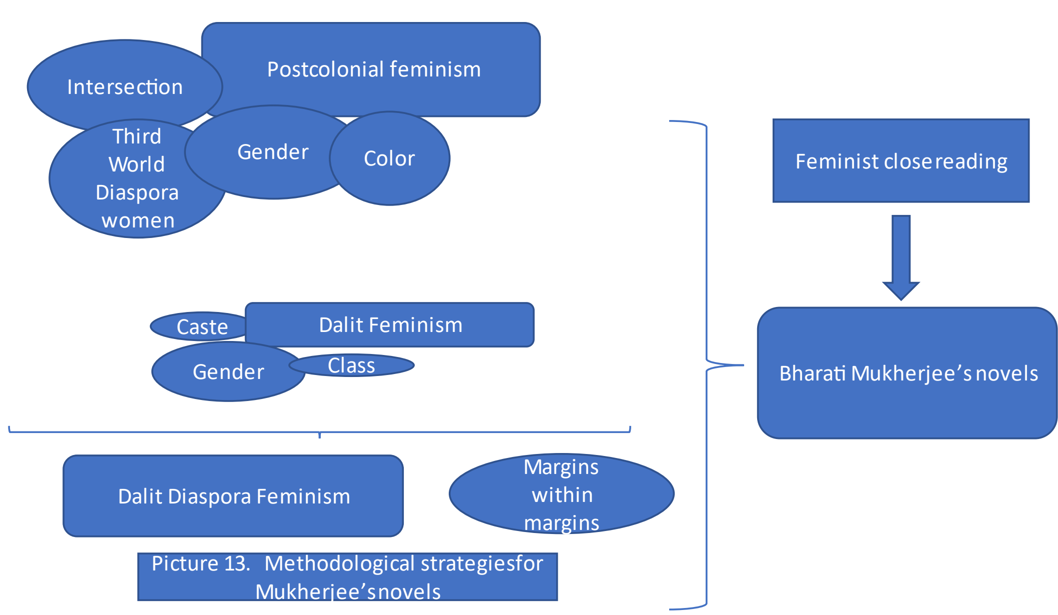
In the theoretical framework, the thesis will base its study on postcolonialism, decoloniality, and Dalit (diaspora)Feminism. Feminist close reading (Lukic and Sánchez, 2011), which I will discuss in the subsequent section, is the significant method for the analytical reading of the case studies which will be accompanied with the mentioned theories. Using the above-mentioned theoretical framework, this research work will analyze the case studies produced by different sectors of South Asian diaspora population.

2.4.1. Feminist close reading

Jasmina Lukic and Adelina Sánchez (2011) have revised the importance of close reading from a feminist perspective. This method can be one of the crucial methods in investigations when combined with different theoretical frameworks. According to them, close reading as a link between different theoretical approaches can emphasize the "contextuality and historicity of any reading" (p. 160). They have defined close reading saying that it cannot exclude the context of the text such as who is writing the text, when the text is written, for whom the text is written apart from the theoretical framework of the text. Close reading, according to them, also considers the position of the reader or researcher. A feminist close reading changes according to the other skills, methods, and methodologies, and socio-political standpoint of the feminists/feminisms.

This research thesis using feminist close reading as main method to approach the case studies combines with other methods and methodologies to fulfill the objective of the research. As in the following case studies, we are going to see.

2.4.2. Bharati Mukherjee's novels and feminist close reading[16]



Picture 13. Methodological strategies for Mukherjee's novels

In the first level of analysis, as picture 13 shows, I present a feminist close reading (Lukic & Sánchez, 2011) or textual analysis, as Gabriele Griffin (2011) calls it, of the literary texts of Bharati Mukherjee. Lukic and Sánchez say that close reading should be informed by background research, such as context and historical aspects (2011). Hence, close reading relies on additional research methods and methodologies or perspectives to give focus to the reading one produces.

The close reading of the novels of Mukherjee hence includes postcolonial feminist, diaspora feminist, and Dalit feminist discourse, which goes beyond gender to include various factors which construct the identity(ies). A postcolonial South Asian diaspora feminist discourse prioritizes the reading, which goes beyond gender to include other factors such as class and race that overlaps with gender and result in multiple suppression. The "new geography of identity" by

[16] Parts of this section of the chapter has been published:
Gupta, S. (2023). Gender, Caste, and Class in Transnational Urban Spaces: A Reading of Bharati Mukherjee's Novels. In *Urban Poetics and Politics in Contemporary South Asia and the Middle East* (pp. 37-58). IGI Global.

Susan Friedman has complicated the understanding beyond gender geopolitically. These are the discourses of “multiple oppression,” “multiple subject positions,” “contradictory subject positions,” “relationality,” “situationality,” and “hybridity,” which emphasize a broader understanding of gender (1998, p. 19).

Further, the chapter will underline the notion of representation as one of the crucial postcolonial, diaspora feminists, and Dalit feminist theories questioning “who is writing” and “who is represented” and how the gendered caste and caste-d gender “other” is represented in the novels (Spivak, 1988; Khair, 2001; Yengde, 2019). Understanding what Ato Quayson says about close reading is vital: a method that helps understand literary structures and social reality (Lukic & Sánchez, 2011 cited Quayson, 2005, p. 122). In this case study, an analysis of social reality will be considered significant.

Lastly, to develop a deeper understanding of the texts as “social reality,” my approach in this section draws upon the contribution made by an Indian diaspora writer Tabish Khair (2011). Khair defines “reading” as “to read literature is to read the gaps, silence, obstacles, and noise in its language, in its narrative” (Khair & Doubinsky, 2011, p. 11). The close reading of “gaps,” “silences,” “noises,” and “obstacles” visualizes the characters which are underrepresented in the novels. It is the task of visualizing the “margins within the margins.” For this purpose, I would include the discourse from Dalit feminism to understand the female characters from the caste point of view.[17]

2.4.3. *Jeevansathi.com*: Digital ethnography and autoethnography

The second case study deals with the digital presence of the South Asian diaspora, especially with the Indian (diaspora) matrimonial sites. The chapter combines digital ethnography and

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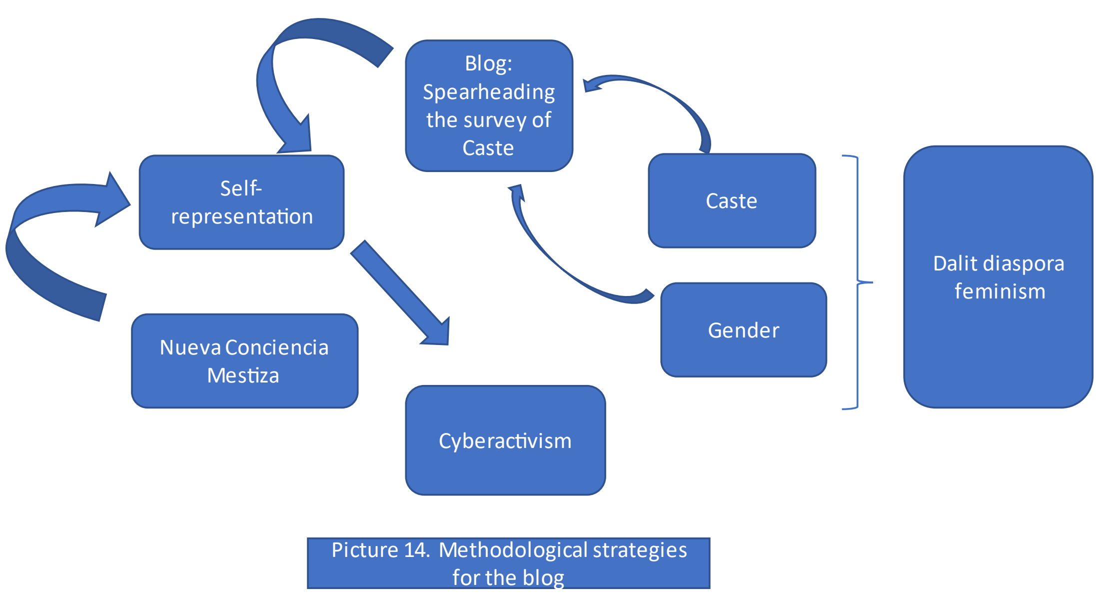
[17] At this point, I would like to credit the scholars who have shaped the idea and importance of “silence” from different feminist perspectives. The course, *Feminism: Silences and absences in English literature* imparted by Adelina Sánchez (UGR), Gerardo Rodríguez Salas (UGR), and José de la Torre Moreno (UGR) has broadened the concept of reading “silences” through different feminist texts. Rodríguez Salas´s (2007) article made us think about silence beyond the passive reaction to a feminist strategy against patriarchal linguistic despotism. I, too, have worked on the “silences” as a space and time to go from the position of the “other” to the “conscious other,” which is inspired by the theory of “Coatlicue State” by Gloria Anzaldúa. In this research thesis, in Chapter 5, reading “silences” reflects on the historical and cultural aspects hidden between the lines and can delineate the “other´s” narratives.

autoethnographic experiences together with postcolonial and Dalit feminist close reading. Ethnography has been explained in various manners based on the research need. Martyn Hammersley (2018) defines ethnography as a research strategy of collecting data, description of what to do, and how to do the research. Digital ethnography defines the doing ethnographical research predominantly in a digital environment. Sara Pink et al., (2015) state that when there is a shift from the offline world to the online world, there can be new benefits and challenges in terms of data collection, and ethics in doing research. According to the handbooks published such as Pink et al, 2015; Varis, 2016; Hjorth et al., (2017), digital ethnography has been defined as an umbrella term, describing different aspects of doing research online.

Sara pink et al., (2015) have combined five important points to summarize digital ethnography which have let the work go according to the need of the research. Digital ethnography has followed the five mantras given by Sara Pink: multiple uses of digital media; non-digital-centric-ness; openness of digital ethnography; reflexivity of experiences, lives, knowledge, and ethical process; and being unorthodox towards the method (Pink, 2015, pp. 8-13). These five principles have given the basis to this chapter, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, to broaden the horizon of the methodological use of digital media. For instance, TV series on Indian diaspora *Match Making* (Netflix series on diaspora matrimony), YouTube videos on *Jeevansathi.com* (matrimonial site) advertisements, interacting with friends to talk on matrimonial sites through different means, creating own matrimonial profile has given an interesting turn to the debate on caste and gender in matrimonial sites. Besides, collecting data, talking with people, and creating profiles have given an autoethnographic approach to this chapter. A postcolonial, South Asian diaspora feminist and Dalit feminist reading attempts to critically analyze the matrimonial sites which promise a dream of a “happy marriage” showing a “happy couple” with a “perfect body” on the cost of segregation of people based on their color, size of their body, profession, family background, and most importantly caste.

2.4.4. "Spearheading a survey of caste": Self-representation and cyberactivism



Picture 14. Methodological strategies for the blog

Unlike the above two chapters, the third case study demands an analysis of caste from the margins. As picture 14 shows, the question of representation and (self)representation play a crucial role where gender and caste are debated from the point of Dalit diaspora feminism. At this point, the study includes decolonial feminism together with Dalit feminism. It is a reading of the South Asian Dalit diaspora narrative concerning the self-representation of the marginalized sections of South Asian diaspora based on their caste-d gender and gendered caste. The blog article by Valliammal Karunakaran, Asmita Pankaj, Thenmozhi Soundararajan, and Prathap Balakrishnan is a compilation of self-narrated experiences. Their stories narrate the emotions attached to their experiences, such as their wound, pain, suffering, and trauma. These experiences describe their life which needs to be represented.

Moving on to Peggy Kamuf, we must "understand the deconstructionist strategies of close reading: reading from the margin" (cited by Lukic & Sanchez, 2011, p. 108) where "the margin is wholly other" (Spivak, 1990, p. 4). Soundararajan calls Dalit diaspora women a "margin within the margins" (2022, p. xvi). Hence, South Asian Dalit diaspora feminist discourse is used to debate the notion of self-representation to delineate the representation "of the margin" by "the one who is at the margin." Additionally, the theory of "Coatlicue State" and "Nueva Conciencia

Mestiza" by Anzaldúa sheds light on the trauma, pain, suffering, pain, and separation as an oppressive mechanism continues among the South Asian Dalit diaspora based on gender and caste. At the same time, sharing their wound, suffering, pain, and trauma creates an empathetic ambience of healing, caring, and gathering knowledge and hunger to address it. "Once you see the truth of the cause of suffering, you can't unsee it" (Soundararajan, 2022). Hence, Anzaldúa's theory of the "Coatlicue State" will help to see the movement of the caste-d gender or gendered caste "other" to the "conscious other" (Anzaldúa, 1987; Gupta, 2021).

In the next chapter, we are going into the theoretical framework, which will start from postcolonialism and decoloniality and finally enter the Dalit diaspora feminist theory and its agendas. In these theoretical discourses, the question of (self)representation is significant where there is a shift from representation to self-representation. Before entering the chapter, it is necessary to clear the concept of (self)representation with which I want to enter the theoretical debate. Postcolonialism's primary objective has centered on the representation of the colonized and shifted the world's perspective to see the colonized from the colonized's point of view. Homi K Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, whose theories will be discussed in the coming chapter, and their intent to represent and self-represent as 'colonized (women) subject.' However, this research study emphasizes the question of caste and gender in an intersectional form resulting in gendered caste and caste-d gender. Hence, there is a change in question to how gendered caste and caste-d gendered "others" are represented in postcolonialism. Then, moving towards the Dalit diaspora feminism, we will see how they intend to self-represent themselves. In this regard, we will get into the question of representation and self-representation from postcolonialism, decoloniality, and finally, Dalit diaspora feminism.

Chapter 3. The question of (self)representation from postcolonialism and decoloniality to Dalit diaspora feminism[18]

> *Postcolonialism neither presents itself in easy packaging nor offers ready-made solutions for the issues raised and investigated*. (Sandra Ponzanesi, 2012, p. 1)
>
> *We can't achieve decolonization without debrahminization*[19] *and vice versa. We can't effectively contribute to the process of decolonization, for our first core wound of Brahminism is still to be healed.* (Thenmozhi Soundararajan, 2022, p. 47)

Postcolonialism is a term that has been debated, discussed, and criticized by many scholars. Postcolonialism has been spread in various research fields in academia and has become a significant theoretical umbrella armed with various conceptual tools. Some of the game-changing books and concepts are Frantz Fanon's (1952) *Black Skin, White Masks*, Edward Said's (1978) orientalism, Gayatri Spivak's (1988) the subaltern, Homi K Bhabha's (1994) hybridity and many followed this. Trinh Minha (1989), Fredric Jameson (1991), Anthony Appiah (1992), Aijaz Ahmad (1992), Arif Dirlik (1994), Stuart Hall (1997), McClintock (1995), Ania Loomba (1998), Chandra Mohanty (1994), Gandhi Leela (1998) As far as this work is concerned, I must be particular with the postcolonial terms I am going to use so that the aim of the work does not get derailed.

I want to start with Sandra Ponzanesi, who says that "postcolonialism refers to a consciousness that emerged after the period of colonization of the countries that were once colonized and are now independent" (2012, p. 3). She adds that "there is no consensus on when the postcolonial

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[18] Some sections in this chapter contains part of my GEMMA master's thesis and a published article:

Gupta, Shilpi. (2018). *(Dis) locating Homeland:" In-betweenness" in Monica Ali's Brick Lane and Taslima Nasreen's French Lover*, Submitted to the Instituto de las Mujeres y género, University of Granada, Spain.

Gupta, Shilpi. (2022). Silence Matters from the "other" to the "Conscious other": Reading Monica Ali's Brick Lane with Gloria Anzaldúa's "Coatlicue State". In III Working Paper Series. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6323514

[19] Soundararajan states that debrahminization is a multilayered project that would encompass political, economic, geographic, and psychosocial realms and is a process that we must engage with internally, interpersonally, and across all institutions in society to rehumanize ourselves to abolish caste (2022, 47).

consciousness started because all colonized countries did not share the same colonizer" (ibid)[20]. According to her, "if we look at postcolonialism from a strictly historical perspective, we can agree that it emerged with the fall of colonial empires" (ibid). Nevertheless, "if we approach it as an ideological and intellectual awareness that has marked the uprising of colonial countries from political and cultural dominance, then we must concur that postcolonialism began much earlier than independence" (pp. 3-4).

Further, the principal agenda of postcolonial writers, scholars, and theorists, as Ponzanesi has noted, "is to reverse the position of the postcolonial subject from an 'object' scrutinized and 'spoken for' to a 'subject' who can speak back" (Ponzanesi, 2012, p. 1). In this regard, Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge have also stated that "postcolonialism has been a proactive and radically anti-colonial theory of and from margins, an articulation from the position of silence and exclusion" (Mishra & Hodge, 2005, p. 395). Therefore, according to these scholars and many more postcolonial theorists, postcolonialism qualifies as a set of strategies to reverse the supremacy of the West over Third World countries. In this work, I would focus specifically on two postcolonial theorists, Homi K Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, who have changed the world's perspective–divided into colonizer/colonized to a complex subjectivity.

Among many, in this study, I chose Bhabha and Spivak because, first they come from the geographical space which I am also referring to, South Asia. Second, Bhabha and Spivak get into postcolonial debate from two different perspectives. Bhabha breaks the colonizer and colonized dichotomy from a male cosmopolitan elite colonized subject whereas Spivak gets dipper into the debate from the Third World women's perspective. Since my study moves slowly towards the Dalit diaspora women's subjectivity, I start first from a male South Asian diaspora scholar, Bhabha and his projection of colonial subject. Then, the study leads to a female South Asian diaspora, Spivak and her projection of female subaltern colonial subject.

However, postcolonialism has also been criticized by thinkers such as Anne McClintock who intervenes by saying that the term "postcolonialism is too celebratory of the so-called end of colonialism" (1995, p. 13). McClintock and many other scholars such as Leela Gandhi (1998)

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[20] Here, I am conscious about the colonization of Latin America and its difference in terms of the anti-colonial theory, i.e., decoloniality. Hence, postcolonialism and decoloniality are different theoretical and political engagement developed in different continents.

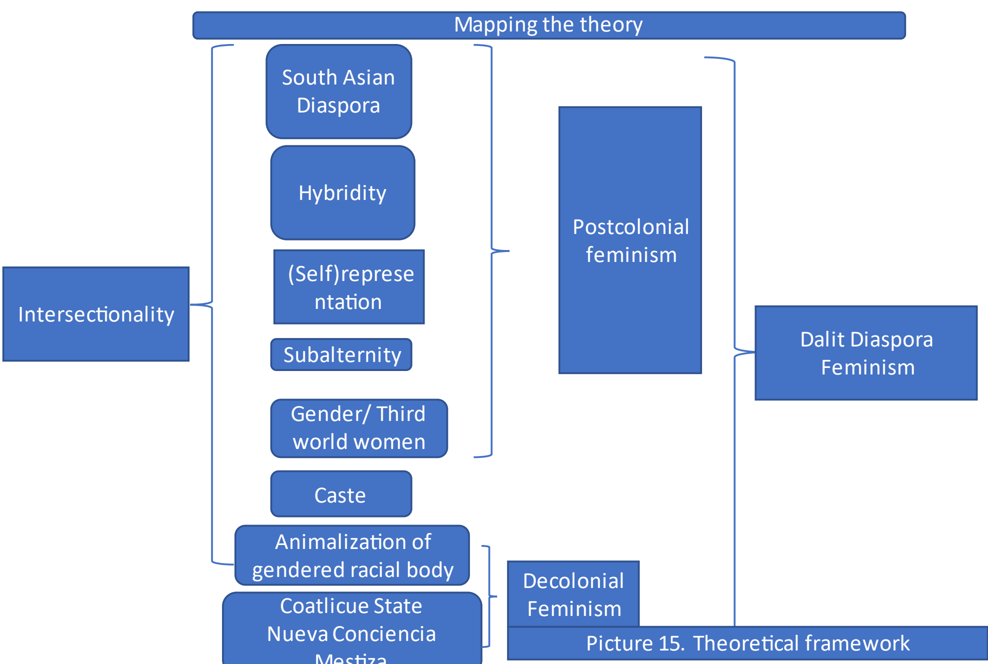
and Gauri Viswanathan (1998) have shown their concern towards postcolonial thinking as it can also end in the creation of further binary oppositions. Along similar line, another group of postcolonial thinkers have tried to remind scholars that "postcolonialism does not symbolize the end of colonization. Instead, it symbolizes the beginning of something after a period of colonialism and imperialism–in the wake of it, in the shadow of it, inflected by it" (Stuart Hall in an interview with Julie Drew, 1998, p. 189). Besides, Ponzanesi also states that "postcolonialism neither presents itself in easy packaging nor offers ready-made solutions for the issues raised and investigated" (Ponzanesi, 2012, p. 1). This postcolonial perspective has given hope to see it not as a failed theory but as something new that can be carried forward.

With this background, the research work will go through the significant outcomes of postcolonialism that have shaped this work, especially regarding representation. It starts with Bhabha's "hybridity," "third space," and the resistance strategy (1990; 1994). This theory applies to most South Asian diaspora searching for their "ambivalent" identity, which is a "resistive" strategy (Bhabha, 1994). However, postcolonial scholars such as Mishra and Hodge (2005) have criticized that this theory has been written from the perspective of upper-caste cosmopolitan males where other groups at the margin do not see themselves only as "inbetweener" but carry other identities that cannot be compromised within the homogenized diaspora group. Intriguingly, Spivak's question of representation in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) reminds us of the heterogeneity of the Indian population and situates women within the imperialist colonized Brahmanical patriarchal system. Spivak's example of "Third World women" as "brown women" and "*Sati* women" clears the position of Third World women in the global scenario (1988).

Postcolonial feminism has also shared views with decolonial feminism on many points, as they both share the history of colonization and racialization of their women by White feminism. However, Dalit feminism has been critical of postcolonialism which does not acknowledge the caste and caste-based oppression (Jangam, 2015). Dalit diaspora women also see themselves far from postcolonialism and postcolonial feminism because they have been kept out of their discussion (Soundararajan, 2022, p. 51)[21]. The Dalit diaspora women remain at the "margin within the margins" because their urge was to go beyond "brownness" and gender to their caste

[21] We will see further in the chapter a brief debate on postcolonialism and caste.

which intersects (Soundararajan, 2022, p. 36). Dalit diaspora women intend to break the homogenization of diaspora brown women because their caste intersects with their race, class, and gender. To start the discussion, I provide the chart on how reading will continue in the following section.



Picture 15. Theoretical framework

3.1. Homi K Bhabha's hybridity and representation of the colonized subject

It is vital to understand the present relation between the colonizers and the colonized in a postcolonial phase. In this regard, Bhabha states that remembering is "a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the present trauma" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 63). Bhabha recognizes that the present can only be understood by putting together the past, which means the colonizers' presence. According to him, a colonized subject cannot deny the consequences of colonization even after the period of colonization. He has signaled the impact of colonization on the colonial subject, especially in creating a new identity: a "hybrid" identity. In this argument, Bhabha covers varieties of subjects, such as diaspora, exiles, and migrants who are crossing the border and breaking the definition of the nation and the binary position of colonizer and colonized. Through his subjects' "multiple geographical positions" and their

"hybrid" identity, Bhabha reminds us of the "resistance which is produced through ambivalence" (Bhabha, 1985, p. 153). Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge (2005) have also stated that Bhabha's "hybridity" has become the guiding principle of much recent postcolonial theory, where it serves as a "redemptive sign in giving agency to the postcolonial subject" (p. 383). In his interview with Jonathan Rutherford, Bhabha explains that:

> Hybridity is not about tracing two original moments from which the third emerges. Instead, hybridity is the 'third space' that allows the emergence of other positions. This third space displaces history but constitutes it and creates a new structure of authority and political initiatives. (Rutherford & Bhabha, 1990, p. 211)

Although Bhabha focuses on thinking beyond the dividing line between colonizers and colonized in creating a "third space," he talks about it from the perspective of a colonial elite, high caste, and cosmopolitan male migrants from the bourgeois anti-colonial struggle. For this reason, he has been criticized by many scholars such as Mishra and Hodge who argue that for Bhabha "hybridity" has been the fundamental strategy in the anticolonial discourse of ambivalence, but that he talks from "a space that is semiotically the same since it is invested with the same bureaucratic and judicial system" (2005, p. 305).

Indeed, scholars have shown concern towards the illusion created by Bhabha's theory of "hybridity." According to Deepika Bahri, the numerous lower-class immigrants crossing the border illegally with difficulties finding their lives in First World countries are not able to fit themselves completely into such "postcolonial" theory. They are aware that crossing the border is risky and fatal. Hence, according to her, one should also understand the profound racial and class-segregated nature while crossing the border, which goes beyond the question of "hybridity" (Bahri, 1998, p. 39). Aijaz Ahmad has also been critical of the "erasure of existing class relations in contemporary postcolonial critical and literary production," especially when he talks about Salman Rushdie's and Edward Said's narratives (1994, p. 86). It only creates the "cosmopolitanism and bourgeosification" of the Third World elites over the First world mind (ibid). Hamid Naficy, while talking about different communities in North America, adds that in understanding the differences in diaspora, one should not only consider class and ethnicity but "comprehend their migration and settlement" (1993, p. xvi). Hence, this research work invites a discussion beyond the cosmopolitan male expatriate with high caste and upper-middle-class

baggage with qualified British education and links with the colonial position. It is necessary to go into detail about the 'Dalit diaspora women' subject. We must pay attention to the intersectionality of their identities, and their representation in the South Asian diaspora community. In the next section, we move to the question of subalternity by Gayatri Spivak (1988) and the position the Third World woman within an imperialist Brahamanized patriarchal system.

3.2. The question of representation: Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

The issue of representation is at the heart of postcolonialism. Earlier in the chapter, we saw the representation of postcolonial subjects through the presentation of "hybrid" subjects across borders. The concept of "hybridity" and "third space" has broken the binary position of the West/rest. In this section, we will see another postcolonial text, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" which has also changed the perspective of representation from the position of Third World women. Rosalind Morris states that Spivak's primary debate in most of her works is the representation which has been debated starting from "Can the subaltern speak?" to her recent work. According to Morris (2010), Spivak sees representation as an impossibility and, simultaneously, as the need to break the colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal system (Rosalind Morris, 2010). In her text, "Can the subaltern speak?" one can see how Spivak points out that patriarchy cannot be separated from colonialism and capitalism as they all work in intersections. Hence, when Spivak argues the position of Third World women, she always points out the layered oppression in their representation on their land and outside their land (ibid).

In this approach, according to Morris (2010), Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" does not invite a debate on subalternity asking– "Who is the subaltern?" but consciousness, which turns out to be the question of representation. Morris states that subaltern consciousness is Spivak's primary subject in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?." Morris delineates Spivak's concern that creating a "pure" subaltern representation is impossible because the "subaltern cannot speak," but s/he is spoken for. As Spivak, according to Morris, debates that "subaltern cannot speak" because his/her words are not adequately heard and understood. Hence, the silence of any subaltern is a failure of representation by others and not a failure of articulation. It is a failure of

those philosophers who are not ready to learn and understand the subaltern's language and knowledge.

Spivak has extensively theorized the concepts of "silence" and "speaking" while discussing representation. Spivak is critical of such viewpoints of Western philosophies that allow themselves to be the ones to "speak of/for" the "others," those that believe that "speaking" is an empowered act and introduce the concept of "speaking for" those who are subaltern. Spivak is also critical of such representation within the postcolonial criticism where the "Others" speak for the "others," and the "others" are not heard, not understood, or misinterpreted. In this case, it is crucial to understand the difference between the "Other" (O in the capital) and the "other" (o in lowercase). Spivak (1988) uses the concept of the "Other" and the "other" to delineate the complexity of understanding the subaltern subject. For this purpose, she has explained the hierarchy within the Indian land together with the colonizers, first dividing them into four groups: the dominant foreign groups, the dominant indigenous groups on the all-India level, the dominant indigenous group at the regional and local levels, and finally the 'people' and 'subaltern classes' (P. 79) After this she discusses the *Sati* concept (we will discuss in detail in the coming sections) to demonstrate the double marginalization of women within an imperialist and patriarchal society. Spivak says if a colonized subject is marginalized, then a colonized woman subject is double marginalized. Hence, she has used the concept of the "Other" and the "other" to indicate the subaltern position of the Third World women as the "other."

She uses the word representation to describe the act of speech (the speaker, the listener, and about whom the speaker talks) and understands the difference between speaking of/for and speaking as. The subaltern often attempts a self-representation or perhaps a self-representation that does not fit into the official institutional structure of representation or is beyond knowledge. In this respect, she asks the eponymous question, "Can the subaltern speak?" (Spivak, 1988). This question throws up many other questions: Are the subalterns allowed to speak? Are the subalterns heard? What if the subalterns are not allowed to speak? What if they speak with their silence? Is their silence understood? What if we are not able to understand the subaltern? (Gupta, 2018; Gupta, 2022, p. 11).

In response to her question and the questions raised above, after a lengthy and convoluted philosophical and historical debate, Spivak ends her article with an example of a young Bengali

woman, Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri's suicide. The suicide of a sixteen-year-old woman in colonial India makes the whole text comprehensible regarding representation. Bhuvaneswari committed suicide during her menstruation in Bengal's small village in 1929. Within Patriarchal discourse, her suicide might have been interpreted as "the outcome of illegitimate passion" or "too old to be not yet a wife." Instead, her suicide was triggered by the failure to meet her political task against imperialism in India. Hence, according to Spivak, her menstruating dead body was a counter-discourse against patriarchal and imperialist discourse. Besides, she may not know English or Hindi, and her language might not be in the record. She is colonized, oppressed by the hegemonic power of her land, and oppressed by Brahmanical patriarchy. Still, she speaks through her dead menstruating body. Her body, in Spivak's opinion, becomes the narrative of the subaltern. Her suicide during menstruation challenges the discourse that sees women's suicide as only resulting from an "illicit affair." Hence, she is "speaking," but whether her voice is "heard" becomes a question. Her dead menstruating body also speaks against the Brahamanized patriarchal cultural norms of viewing the female menstruating body as "impure." Therefore, "her suicide is an unemphatic subaltern rewriting of *Sati*'s social text and a hegemonic account of the blazing, fighting, familial Durga" (Spivak, 1988, p. 104). Again, will her narrative get enough space in a Brahmanical patriarchal and imperialist society? Spivak clears that dominant discourses impose repetitive silence on the bodies even if the subaltern is ready to speak. Hence, Spivak targets the patriarchal, Brahmanical, imperialist systems in silencing the subaltern women's voices in their writings. Through this text, Spivak states that the subaltern discourse, especially when it is by women, is "silenced," but it is not "silent." At the transnational level, the Third World or postcolonial feminist discourse, and the notion of hybridity intersect to present the diasporic elements from the South Asian women who carry the burden of their color, colonial background, culture, religion, and different roles of gender. At this point, caste is also an important factor, but diaspora feminists have rarely intersected their suppression because of caste.

Now, we will discuss the question of representation from postcolonialism and decoloniality comparatively to see the position of Third World women, especially caste women, globally. I have included decoloniality in this framework as this theory has many fruitful discussions to offer to understand Dalit diaspora feminism. Before that, I would like to bring postcolonialism

and decoloniality together to see how postcolonialism should broaden its horizon to be more inclusive regarding caste-d gender and gendered caste.

3.3. Postcolonialism and decoloniality: Representation of the female subject

Postcolonialism and decoloniality have emerged from the broader politics of knowledge production and political development, contesting Europe's colonial world in different times and locations**.** Both these theories decenter Euro-centric ideologies, mainly Euro-centric feminist ideologies. Postcolonial and decolonial feminism share a long history of resistance to colonial rule from the geopolitical Global South. Gurminder Bhambra writes about their emergence as the diasporic scholars of their continents have developed these theories. Postcolonialism has emerged from the works of diaspora from mostly "South Asia and the Middle East living in Europe or the USA." Decoloniality has emerged from "South American diasporas residing in Europe and the West from South America" (Bhambra, 2014, p. 115).

This section will see a discussion on female subjects (Women of color and the Third World women) through two texts, "Coloniality of gender" (2008) by María Lugones and "Can the subaltern speak?" (1988) by Spivak. The scholars have discussed coloniality and modernity (Lugones, 2007), and the international division of labor (Spivak, 1988) to go deeper to dig out the layers of domination and marginalization, starting from gender which intersects with race, class, sexuality, and colonialism.

3.3.1. The Colonial/Modern system in decoloniality

According to Anibal Quijano, "the coloniality of power, manifested through political and economic spheres, is closely related to the coloniality of knowledge (or imagination), articulated as modernity/rationality" (Quijano, 2000, p. 342). Quijano contends that the "two axes of modernity and coloniality are inseparable when discussing European colonial dominance over Latin America" (ibid). Quijano outlines how these two axes "serve as the framework for the Euro-centered capitalist power" (ibid). Coloniality and modernity, working parallelly, order "the disputes over control of each area of existence so that the meaning and forms of domination are

thoroughly infused by the coloniality of power and modernity" (ibid). María Lugones and other decolonial theorists see that the "coloniality of power," which introduces the fundamental social stratification of the world based on race, is also the center of understanding global capitalism. Lugones articulates that "the global capitalist wage labor relation is the basis of the creation of structural forms of control of labor, such as slavery, servitude, small independent mercantile production, wage labor, and reciprocity. The division of labor is thoroughly racialized" (Lugones, 2008, p. 15).

Later, Lugones discusses the colonial/modern gender system, which is based on Quijano's view of colonial power, to understand that "they are simultaneously shaped through specific articulations of race, gender, class, and sexuality" (Lugones, 2008, p. 15). According to Lugones, "colonization has not only created the colonized but upended the social patterns, gender relations, and cosmological understandings of the communities, societies, and families" (ibid). She also writes that colonization has "erased the concepts related to gender, sex, and sexuality which existed before the colonization" (ibid). Further, "the colonial/modern system has divided the world into homogenous but different categories arranged through hierarchical dichotomies, erasing colonized women from most spheres of social life" (ibid). In addition, "any other form of knowledge which went against the European colonial/modern structure was eliminated" (ibid). Then, women of color were imposed by "heterosexuality, racialized patriarchy, biological dimorphism, control over production, knowledge production, and collective authority" (ibid).

3.3.2. International division of labor in postcolonialism

Quijano and Lugones have based their discussion on the "coloniality of power and modernity," shaping the global division of labor. Race, class, gender, and sexual-based division are central in Euro-centered global capitalism. In her text "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak also discusses global capitalism's "international division of labor" (1988). She focuses on the long-going exploitation of the Third World, which happened to be the colonized land, as "cheap labor." In this process, as she says, the First World countries use the land in the Third World countries and their labor (cheap and ill-protected) in their production. "A standardized education system, transportation, and laws are developed to maintain capitalist growth. The local industries are

destroyed, land distribution is rearranged, and the raw material is transferred to the colonizing countries" (p. 83).

Moreover, the Third World countries simultaneously act as the hub for product consumption. The "international division of labor" is based on colonization and carried on to the capitalist system. Spivak bases her discussion on Althusser's notion of reproduction, who says that "labor as a Third World country subject is reproduced within the global capitalist system. This reproduction is not about the reproduction of the skills but the reproduction of the workers and their mindset to submit themselves to the dominant worldview of submission" (Althusser, cited by Spivak, 1988, p. 83).

As discussed in the respective texts, the coloniality/modernity of power and the international division of labor, dig into the colonial structure, which is also the base of the Eurocentric capitalist system. The colonial structure and modern system have divided labor based on color, which happened to be geopolitical. Besides, the colonial/modern system does not end only with racial classification. "It permeates all control of sexual access, collective authority, labor, subjectivity/inter-subjectivity, and the production of knowledge from within these intersubjective relations" (Lugones, 2008, p. 3). The structure of Euro-centered capitalism is based on the division done during the colonial system. The racial geopolitical division is a step to move toward the colonial female subject and their representation. Lugones reworks the female position by stating the "coloniality of gender," which goes together with the coloniality of power and modernity (p. 16). Spivak, too, puts the female within the "international division of labor" in a Eurocentric global capitalist system as "the subject of exploitation and is doubly in the shadow" (p. 84).

3.3.3. Colonial female subjects and the question of representation

In the context of South Asia, Spivak writes that a group of South Asian "dominant indigenous groups" who constitute the "Other" are a "group of people who are Indian but are very similar to the English in their knowledge and opinion" (p. 79). She targets a group of Brahmins (higher caste) from the dominating religion (Hindu), who maintained bourgeois nationalist elitism. This

section is a dominant indigenous group on all Indian levels who are cosmopolitan Indians with high-level British education. Further, Spivak sees the dynamic stratification grid in India, describing colonial social production at large:

4. Dominant foreign groups.
5. Dominant indigenous groups on the all-India level.
3. The dominant indigenous group at the regional and local levels.
4. The ‘people’ and ‘subaltern classes.’ (P. 79)

Spivak emphasizes the class-race-gender division in this heterogeneous group in her text and the regional power distribution to understand the people of a colonial land like India. Spivak affirms that these segregated groups, especially the third and fourth groups, have been homogenized into the second group in the Western world. That is the reason that most Western philosophies have failed to deeply understand the violence done by imperialism and the “international division of labor” among the subalterns.

After the first group of colonizers and the second group of Brahmins, as discussed above, the third group is heterogeneous because of their varying regional and social position, which differ from place to place. This vast and complex difference among colonial subjects challenges the postcolonial theory. The fourth section describes the people at the margin who are silent or are the silenced center. They can speak, but their representation is not accepted. Then Spivak shows the double marginalization of women in the fourth category (1988, p. 82). If the subaltern cannot speak (or is not heard), the female subaltern is in double marginalization because her subalternity is multiplied because of her gender. The question of women seems most problematic in this context.

Further, Spivak introduces us to the *Sati* ritual: (self)immolation of Indian women on the pyre of their deceased husbands to discuss the link between “brown men” and “white men” and between “brown women,” “brown men,” and “white men.” She notes that local brown men argue that “the women wanted to die” and that the British banning of the rite has been regarded as “white men saving brown women from brown men” (Spivak, 1988, p. 93). According to her, both arguments have failed to encounter a representation of women as her “voice” was not taken into account. The above sentences refer to protecting women/objects of her kind. With this, Spivak

concludes that “women’s figure vanishes not into a pristine nothingness but rather into a violent shuttling that is displaced figuration of ‘Third world women,’ caught between tradition and modernity, patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation” (p. 102).

Regarding the women of color, Maria Lugones uses McClintock’s description of the “colonial scene in work by Jan Van der Straet, who depicts the discovery of America as an eroticized meeting between a man and a woman” (Lugones, 2008, p. 14). It was about colonizing the colored female body– imposing patriarchy and feminizing the colonized land. She starts positioning the colonized, racialized, and sexualized bodies of women of color. Lugones explains the suppression of women of color under the colonial patriarchal rule where the European male deities replace the local female deities. Women are removed from knowledge, economy, and politics and brought into the closed private space to remain sexually functional. Lugones writes that such gender classification did not exist before the imposition of the colonial system. She says that colonized men were patriarchized by White men, and patriarchal arrangements were introduced where sodomy, third gender, homosexuality, and lesbianism were animalized.

Lugones demonstrates that women of color are marked female but without the characteristics of femininity, where the term femininity is defined according to the White European women. Women of color, as racial bodies, less “feminine,” and hypersexual, were turned into animals to make them fit into the “Euro-centered global capitalism” process. Thus, on the one hand, as Lugones points out that “White men perceive men of color as an aggressor and a danger” (2008, 14). Conversely, women of color are seen as “over-sexualized and thus do not deserve the social and sexual protection which are accorded to White middle-class women” (ibid).

Spivak and Lugones have argued the position of women showing the subaltern position of women on both sides, either as a *Sati*–a good sacrificing wife or animalized sexual body women of color. Both writers, through their texts, have made it clear that the issue of representation is complicated in the current dominant structures of knowledge production.

3.3.4. White feminism and the "others"

Lugones writes that animalization and less feminization of the bodies of women of color were the reason for not considering women as part of white feminism. According to Lugones, "White feminism is built on gender stratification and focused its struggle against the idea that women are fragile, delicate, and isolated in private life in addition to being sexually passive" (Lugones, 2008, p. 13). White women did not see that "those traits simply served to define White bourgeois womanhood" (ibid) and that all the women were not White. White feminism saw only gender, and their struggle centered around the "gender roles, stereotypes, traits, and desires imposed on White bourgeois women's subordination" (ibid). White feminists assumed a sisterhood, "a link created by the submission of gender, avoiding race, and understood women to occupy White bodies without bringing up the issue of race" (ibid).

According to Lugones, women of color feminists have made it abundantly evident that the subjugation and exploitation of women of color can only be revealed appropriately when the focus is the "intersection of the following categories: of race, gender, class, and sexuality" (Lugones, 2008, p. 1). Women of color can only be represented with their challenging position when intersectionality is emphasized, and they are not reduced to merely "women" (ibid).

On the other hand, Spivak says that the representation of the Third World, which is necessary, is only possible when the heterogeneity of the population and space of women within that structure is visualized. The factors she underlines to get closer to the Third World women are the understanding of colonized women, racialized women, women in the capitalist system, women in Brahmanical nationalist patriarchal Hindu elitism, women in imperialism, and women in patriarchy at the same time.

3.3.5. Towards (no)conclusions

Both writers have countered the position of women within the "colonial/modern system" and "international division of labor." Spivak debates around the term *Sati* used for colonized brown woman, a sacrificing woman, a good wife, a mythical goddess immolating herself for the honor of her husband. The woman, whose testimony is out of the record, becomes only an imperialist

object and victim of a native colonized patriarchal system. Analogously, Lugones discusses the women of color within the colonial/modern system who have been cornered to the functional roles of hypersexualized or animalized women from the public spaces of economy, politics, administration, and decision-making. They are doubly or multiply marginalized because of racial, class, gender, and sexual differences. This way, a hierarchy of gender, race, class, and sexuality is maintained, which can be understood through intersectionality.

The texts have brought this work to the question of caste, which is held behind in Spivak's text. Spivak infers the Western philosophies and philosophers with race-class-gender facts in subalternizing Third World women's voices. However, she has talked from the perspective of a higher caste woman who has witnessed the suppression of women within the imperialist racialized Brahmanical patriarchal system. She limits her discussion to *Sati*, a high-caste woman, a victim of the imperialist Brahmanical patriarchal system. However, the issue of caste changes the image of a woman as projected by Spivak–a good wife, a mythological figure of *Sati*, to an "untouchable" woman. I repeat here what Spivak has said–if "the subaltern cannot speak (or is not heard), the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow," (1988, p. 65) and the Dalit women subalterns are even more in the shadow. The question of the representation of women seems most problematic in the Dalit context.

Dalit women's portrayal differs as Suraj Yengde writes about the dehumanization of caste women "I am not a human; I am a Dalit" (2019, p. 40). A Dalit woman is at the "margin within the margins," whose identity questions the homogeneity of the Indian or Indian diaspora population. At the same time, Spivak, as a postcolonial theorist, opens a door for discussion for postcolonial researchers when she writes,

> What is important in work is what it does not say. This is not the same as the careless notation 'what it refuses to say,' although that would in itself be interesting: a method might be built on it, with the task of measuring silences, whether acknowledged or unacknowledged. (Spivak cited Pierre Macherey, 1988, p. 81)

This line challenges postcolonial studies with the task of "measuring silences." As far as this research work is concerned, the question of caste is a critical factor in all the debates starting from the heterogeneity of the Indian population, suppression of women, and elitism of upper-

caste natives. Lower-caste women are animalized and "do not need protection." They are even more suppressed than dominant-caste women. Uma Chakravarti explains the complexity of caste and gender through the rape law discussed during British colonization. She writes that during the formulation of the rape law, it was seen that if a lower caste rapes a woman of the upper caste, then that rape would be considered worse than death to the woman. Whereas, if a lower caste woman is raped, the woman's violation is not considered like that of the upper caste woman (Chakravarti, 2018, p. 117). In this view, as Chakravarti discusses, dominant caste women's sexuality and body are linked to honor, which should be guarded, whereas the "lower" caste women are linked to their "lower" character (Chakravarti, 2018, p. 117).

In this last section, the women referred to are distinct from the women Spivak talks about based on caste. The distinction drawn in this case differentiates between women of upper caste and lower caste, where women of dominant caste are protected from the lower caste men and women of lower caste because of their socio-economic status. They are easily assaulted by men of the dominant caste. However, in Spivak's text, caste is not a primary aspect or a matter of analysis, especially from the "below." Even Spivak's example of *Sati* refers to the women of the upper caste, where oppression of women can be seen from the "above" –the dominant caste women's perspective. Besides, when Spivak talks about Bhuvaneshwari Bhaduri, she gets closer to the caste question but does not consider caste a vital factor.

Further, Chinnaiah Jangam (2015) has debated on the term subaltern which has been discussed by Ranajit Guha (1988). Guha has been one of the members who outlined the intellectual agenda for the Subaltern studies. Guha defines the term "elites" and "subaltern classes" at all India level. These terms have been revolutionary from the non-elite point of view. However, Guha's analysis has not focused on caste but rather on class to differentiate the "elites" and "subaltern classes" (2015, p. 65). Hence, subalternity by scholars like Guha has been conceptualized on the basis of class and not on caste which is one of the oppressive mechanisms in India.

Further, we will see some other postcolonial scholars and their opinion on caste issue. Before that, I want to position myself in the debate between postcolonialism and Dalit diaspora position. I have always carried a postcolonial feminist critical perspective who got the privilege to study in European universities with one of the prestigious scholarship Erasmus Mundus GEMMA scholarships. Till my master's thesis, I have centered my reading from a postcolonial perspective

and finally realized that I have left an important section of the South Asian diaspora population– Dalit diaspora. Now, I am writing my doctoral thesis from a Spanish university, the University of Granada. With these privileges, I have gone through the questions: Am I the correct person to talk about the Dalit diaspora? Should I reject postcolonial feminism to enter Dalit diaspora feminism? However, during my research time, I realized my objective is not to decide between two sides. Also, as per my caste, neither I come from Brahminic family background, nor I belong to the Dalit group. I come from a position mixed with privileges and marginalization, as per caste. I do not want to limit myself theoretically to postcolonialism when my mind keeps on struggling with caste issues. That is why, I chose to stand as bridge between postcolonial and Dalit diaspora feminism in order to move toward a collaborative understanding between both the schools of feminism. I have been inspired by many postcolonial scholars who motivated me to see postcolonialism open to self-criticism.

3.4. Postcolonialism and caste

Ironically, most postcolonial theorists who speak for themselves (as colonial subjects) are sitting in American or European academia, including me. They have studied and are trained in Western universities and have settled in the Western universities as a representative of their land and their people, for instance, Arjun Appadurai, Aijaz Ahmad, Arif Dirlik, Gayatri Spivak, Lata Mani, Chandra Mohanty. However, some postcolonial theorists have also come forward and questioned their position as postcolonial. As Leela Gandhi points out, "postcolonial critique speaks through a Western Lexicon and vocabulary" (Gandhi, 1998, p. 175). Kwame Anthony Appiah states that "postcoloniality is the creation of a comprador intelligentsia," which he defines as "a relatively limited group of Western-educated scholars who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery." They are the ones who represent their land to the world (Appiah, 1991, p. 348). He talks about the Afro-American diaspora writers, similar to the case of South Asian American diaspora scholars. Mishra and Hodge point out that it is essential to see that "bourgeois anti-colonial nationalism invariably affected neocolonial class consolidation whereas a proper non-bourgeois anticolonialism that leads to decolonization brings the future of capitalism radically into question" (Mishra & Hodge, 2005, p. 384).

Many scholars have also pointed out that the postcolonial scholarship emerging from South Asia, including the groundbreaking and frequently acknowledged work, has been dominated by upper-caste scholars with a few exceptions. Despite their emphasis on race, class, and gender categories, postcolonialism ignores caste and caste-like enslavement systems globally. If caste becomes a topic, it emphasizes only the dominant caste women's suppression, as we have seen earlier. Gauri Vishwanathan talks about such an incomplete project of postcolonialism concerning the issue of caste (1998). Most postcolonial scholars have accepted the limitation of the postcolonial theory, especially in not being able to talk about the native (Dalits) of their land.

In this research study, I will focus on Dalit diaspora wo/men outside the framework of postcolonial debates. Even though Dalit diaspora migrated at the same time and even before, they settled in the foreign land but remained outside the postcolonial theory. The postcolonial theory, which was developed by diaspora and focused diaspora population, ignored other sections of diaspora population. Also, postcolonialism's innovative ideas, such as "hybridity" and "third space," have often obscured the subaltern subjects, supposedly the primary agents of the whole postcolonial enterprise. Because of its limited perspective, a large section of the South Asian population has been kept outside and is not represented at all globally. This has resulted in the "disappearance" of Dalits inside their land or outside the land. Or in the separation of Dalit diaspora from the postcolonial agendas. Postcolonial theories have led to disappointment among the South Asian natives (Dalits) and, as we will see, among Dalit diaspora who have rejected the postcolonial theory. Further, Dalit women are marginalized in the South Asian feminist agenda (Chakravarti, 2018). Limiting the research area to the South Asian diaspora, caste among the diaspora has become a new question that scholars raise when facing postcolonialism.

Of course, as a research scholar, I recognized that self-criticism does not indicate the need to reject postcolonialism as an inefficient frame of analysis. Instead, it indicates the need to reorient postcolonialism to "measure silence" regarding caste, which has created a different narrative worldwide. Postcolonialism needs to reframe itself and reorient itself to let the "others" talk about their narratives, and not only the "Other" should lead the talk. Postcolonialism needs to step forward to dismantle connected ideologies of White supremacy and Brahmanical patriarchy altogether. As a proceeding in the thesis, postcolonialism has given some crucial points for forming Dalit diaspora feminism. Although Dalit diaspora is critical of postcolonialism, it is

undeniable that postcolonial theorists such as Bhabha have offered the theories such as "hybridity" to understand their in-between identity. Spivak has pushed in underlining the subaltern position of the Third World women's position in India and outside the mainland. These theories are the base of developing diaspora/ Dalit diaspora women's politics. At the same time, it demands the need to push the postcolonial borders even further to become more inclusive. As Dipesh Chakrabarty appropriately says that postcolonialism needs to:

> [R]e-historicize historicism to blast the grounds of a (received) historicism asunder and let newer, generally subaltern, postcolonial historicities surface, replete with those life practices or forms, collected under the performative against the pedagogic that had hitherto been consigned to what we may call non-rational nativism (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 10).

3.5. Building bridges: South Asian diaspora Dalit feminism meets decolonial feminism

When discussing the two diaspora groups of South Asia and Latin America, the two communities have suffered from severe social, economic, political, and cultural discrimination worldwide. Despite this, there are fundamental differences between caste and race, colonial differences, historical differences, and cultural and lingual differences, but their suppression and pain connect them. Decolonial feminists and Dalit diaspora feminists living in foreign land see themselves on the same table. Dalit diaspora feminists have raised recently (but always existed) in comparison to the decolonial feminist, have seen decolonial feminists as their inspiration, besides Black feminists. Dalit diaspora feminists have always collaborated with Black feminists and Latina feminists in inspiring their movements. One of them is the example of creating a group of Dalit Panthers, a movement of organizers, poets, and community leaders founded after the courage and inspiration of the Black Panthers to seed in the hearts of Dalits. Most young Dalit feminists have found their inspiration in Chicanas, Black feminists, and decolonial Latina feminists.

Although Lugones' decoloniality has not referred to caste, it brings us closer to understanding the animalization of the body of women of color, which has been analogously found among caste women. Lugones also refers to "intersectionality" as a big weapon for women of color, which

can be applied to Third World diaspora women to delineate their suppression geopolitically. As one of the Dalit diaspora feminists, Soundararajan writes that Dalits (women) are at the forefront of redefining what it means to be South Asian Americans today. It is not a "monolithic group of the middle class, upwardly mobile model minority families, nor a homogenized group of South Asian under White supremacy" (2022, p. 35). "Intersectionality is not optional in a Dalit feminist anti-caste vision of dhamma[22]–it is foundational" (p. 4). Intersectionality allows understanding of caste, class, gender, and race individually and at the same time how they overlap to produce multiple marginalizations based on "relativity," geopolitical "situationality," (Susan Friedman, 1998). Both the theoretical schools' motto is to go beyond gender to challenge the homogenization of their communities, and the tensions and hierarchies present within because of their race and caste. The term "intersectionality" is usually ascribed to the Black feminist movement in North America, with its roots in identity and standpoint theory (Kimberley Crenshaw, 1991). Later, the theory has become a central concept in understanding interrelations among sociocultural identification and differentiation categories such as gender, ethnicity, sexuality, race, age, dis/ability, etc. The concept emphasizes that the effects of these categories cannot be understood in isolation.

Caste women, far from the Brahmanical household, are always portrayed as the caretaker of the upper class and high caste wo/men who are snatched away from their human characteristics to servitude. They are snatched away from their female body, their identity to merely object to serve in labor or offer themselves sexually to others. This difference among women can only be seen through the intersection of caste with other factors such as class, race, gender, and sexuality, which are locational but result in multiple marginalizations. Uma Chakravarti writes that Dalit feminists in India, in this regard, have taken the initiative to set up a Dalit women's federation. Dalit women have formulated the position of the three-way oppression of Dalit women such as caste women "suppressed by the upper caste (men and women)"; "suppression because of their class by the upper class and dominant caste men"; and "Dalit women oppressed by men of her caste" (Chakravarti, 2018, p. 4).

[22] "Dhamma is referred to in buddhism's original language of Pali which refers to Buddhist doctrine and is often interpreted to mean the 'teachings of the Buddha'" (Ratanadipa Buddhist Temple) https://www.ratanadipa.org.nz/buddhas-teachings/.

Recently, some South Asian Dalit diaspora feminists came together in 2015 to conduct the first-ever survey about caste in the US. Dalit diasporas acknowledge Dalit Americans' trauma and suffering, especially women who are double marginalized. Thenmozhi Soundararajan talks about the trauma, violence, and suffering which continue to exist among Dalits diaspora women because of being oppressed and othered for centuries.

Dalit diaspora has also realized that "caste migrates and spreads, re-establishes itself in its new geographies as it arrives as settler colonial. Caste is embodied by all diasporic South Asians, regardless of their ethnic, national, linguistic, religious, sexual, or political affiliations" (Soundararajan, 2022, p. 22; Is caste a problem for America's South Asian diaspora?, 2022). Dalit diaspora feminists worked extensively in some directions after 2015 when they did a "Caste in the diaspora" survey with the support of some non-government organizations such as Ambedkar International Mission, Ambedkar Association of North America, and the Dalit American Women's Association. They are: a) Listening to the stories and experience of caste discrimination; b) Countering the dominant caste narrative that "caste does not exist"; c) Supporting Dalits who are afraid to be publicly identified because of the discrimination at their workplace or their locality; d) Countering the open bigotry and disgust by the dominant caste and their allies; e) Dismantling caste supremacy against mainstreaming of the dominant caste and their narratives and sidelining the culture, religion, practices of caste oppressed migrants; f) Going beyond brown and seeing the South Asian American through the lens of caste (Soundararajan, 2022, pp. 30-35).

In this chapter, I have talked about the representation through postcolonialism and decoloniality and then we entered Dalit diaspora feminism. Of course, at this point we understand, how postcolonialism has given the scope to the Dalit diaspora to build their agendas. Also, Decoloniality can be fruitful in underlining some important aspects of Dalit diaspora feminism. In this regard, I have discussed two critical points, "the animalization of Dalit body" and "intersectionality," to further understand Dalit diaspora feminist discourse. Now, I will be talking about self-representation of the Dalit diaspora especially Dalit diaspora women in South Asian diaspora, its difficulty, and its urgency.

3.6. The question of self-representation: Dalit women diaspora

The acts of representation are political. (Gajjala & Basu, 1999, p.14)

Being oppressed means the absence of choices. (hooks, 1984, p. 5)

I have already discussed the term representation from different perspectives starting from postcolonialism and decoloniality to Dalit feminism in the above sections. In chapter two, I used the notion of representation discussed by Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak (2007) to classify the chapters into three case studies. In this section, I will be debating the question of self-representation again from the point of Dalit diaspora feminists who have called Dalit South Asian diaspora group– "a margin within the margins" (Soundararajan, 2022, p. 4). I want to start the debate with a quote by Ella Shohat from her article "The struggle over representation: Casting, coalitions, and the politics of identification" (1975).

> The struggle to 'speak for oneself' cannot be separated from a history of 'being spoken' for, from the struggle 'to speak' and 'be heard.' Speaking for oneself is not a simple act but rather a complex process. (1975, p. 173)

Ella Shohat's comment revisits the challenge of self-representation, which she frames as the struggle to "speak for oneself," especially for the "others," which is not easy as it involves issues such as "letting the others speak" for the ones who have been speaking. Then, she says that the "other" who wants to "speak for oneself" carries a long history of "being spoken" and struggling "to speak" and "be heard." Spivak (1988) as we have seen before has argued that subalterns can speak, can self-represent, however, their self-representation is unrecognized, unheard, and questioned.

To discuss self-representation, I will go through one instance of the death of a 13-year-old Dalit diaspora girl in 1999 and her position in the South Asian diaspora. The death of a 13-year-old has become a newspaper report in the USA and attracted discussion on it (Anita Chabria, 2001; Matthew Artz, 2004; Koshy, 2005; Svati P Shah, 2008; Viji Sundaram, 2012; Lisa Fernandez, 2021; Thenmozi Soundararajan, 2022). I read about this case in Soundararajan's recently published book *The trauma of caste: A Dalit feminist meditation on survivorship, healing, and abolition* (2022). I investigated the case of Dalit diaspora woman' death further in the online

articles and found it an interesting way to discuss the self-representation of gendered caste and caste-d gender others. As Soundararajan (2022) states that it is important to revise the question of "marginality" among the South Asian diaspora community because the South Asian diaspora cannot be homogenized. South Asian community which is already considered a marginal group in the First world needs to go through the "marginality" again to understand the presence of a 13-year-old Dalit diaspora girl Sitha Vemireddy dead in an apartment suffocating because of excess of carbon monoxide, among the South Asian diaspora (2022). This case invites a discussion towards the numerous dividing lines in the world which go beyond the binary division: the West and the East, the colonizers and the colonized. Ella Shohat (1975), Kimberley Crenshaw (1991) Chandra Mohanty (2002) and Gayatri Spivak (1988), Maria Lugones (2007), Uma Chakravarti (2018) and Soundararajan (2022) and many other scholars have discussed the multilayered relations of domination and marginalization in which some are empowered along the axes, and some are at the bottom.

Understanding the complexity as indicated by these writers, I will read this case with the help of different online newspaper articles and delineate the question of self-representation of gendered caste and caste-d gender other. Anita Chabria (2001), Matthew Artz (2004), Koshy (2005), Svati P Shah (2008), Viji Sundaram (2012), and Lisa Fernandez (2021) are some writers who have written about the death case of Vemireddy. They explain that Sitha Vemireddy was brought to the USA by Lakireddy Bali Reddy in the 1990s, a well-known Indian diaspora, and the second-largest landlord in Berkeley. Behind his good reputation in the USA, among Indian diaspora, Indian society, and American society, he was involved in other illegal activities. The writers point out that he trafficked Dalit girls and other caste-oppressed Indian villagers to become undocumented workers in his restaurants and buildings. The Dalits worked in his restaurants and buildings and moved silently in his properties. He never hid his heinous activities because he had money and followed the caste norms of "exploiting lower castes" without harming the upper castes. In 10 years, as per the reports (Anita Chabria, 2001), Reddy and his family brought 33 Dalit men, women, and children into the country using "fraudulent visas, sham marriages, and fake identities" (Chabria, 2001). Soundararajan (2022) explains that Reddy enjoyed power over the victims and even enforced his law by keeping them isolated from society.

Anita Chabria (2001), Matthew Artz (2004), Koshy (2005), Svati P Shah (2008), Viji Sundaram (2012), and Lisa Fernandez (2021) explain that Sitha Vemireddy died from smoke inhalation after a carbon monoxide fire broke out in one of his buildings. According to Chabria, Lakireddy asked his workers to roll her in a rug and dump her body. The rug unfurled, and people watching the fire in the street saw her body. Since no hiding was possible, further investigation revealed that the thirteen-year-old girl was pregnant. However, at that point of time, Chabria explains the situation that when police started questioning other Dalit girls around the body, they could not understand or reply because they did not speak English. The Dalit girls spoke only Telugu, and the investigators found it hard to understand. Then, according to her, Lakireddy, a reputed landlord in the city, offered to speak on their behalf, and he spoke to the police.

According to what Chabria explains, we can deduce that a dominant caste man who is powerful in economic and social terms speaks on behalf of the Dalit girls, and everybody hears him. Sitha Vemireddy, even if a dead body, loses her voice to him, thus losing visibility and agency. An important factor here is the language. Dalit women, companions of Sitha Vemireddy are unable to talk because of the lack of the language of the host land. It is interesting to note that the language also symbolizes the discourse because the point Lakireddy starts speaking in English, he also transmits the discourse of a dominant caste diaspora's narrative. Hence, language on the one hand and the social and economic status, on the other hand, of Lakireddy changed the narrative. We can see how the narrative of a South Asian Dalit diaspora has been mediated by an upper caste brown man to the White men in his own way which has silenced Sitha's voice. We can refer to the newspaper article where Anita Chabria writes what Lakireddy said in the investigation:

> Reddy told police that 18-year-old Laxmi Patati (another Dalit girl) shared a one-bedroom Reddy-owned apartment with Sitha (the victim) and Lalitha Vemireddy (the victim's sister). Patati came home that afternoon to find both girls unconscious. Because she spoke little English, she called Reddy's restaurant, where the three girls worked. Reddy came immediately with Venkateswara Vemireddy claimed to be Sitha and Lalitha's father, and Reddy maintained that they were rushing the girls to the hospital when outsiders stopped him. (Chabria, His own Private Berkeley, 2001)

According to Chabria (2001) and Svati Shah (2008), the police believed Lakireddy's story, and after a few investigations, he was let go.

This example throws fresh light on the representation of Dalit diaspora women in a complex and layered society where power functions in different and multiple forms, as it indicates that the hierarchy of power is geographical, cultural, social, economic, and political. Here, the self-representation of a Dalit girl is complicated and is nearly denied, first, because of the language, and second, the one who is representing– "speaking for" –the Dalits is a dominant caste South Asian diaspora man who is trying to cover up his own "crime." He succeeds to some extent as his narrative becomes "the truth."

However, as Chabria has reported that in December 1999, an anonymous letter was sent to the Berkeley police department which suggested that Reddy misguided the investigation by lying about the victim's identity and the incident (Chabria, 2001). Again, as Chabira explained that the investigation started, many lies came out because a new interpreter was hired this time such as Vemireddy was not the daughter of Venkateswara Vemireddy. Nevertheless, as Chabria reported that most of the Dalit women victims in the case could not speak against Reddy and she also said that on their continuous silence, the American judiciary system expressed that it was a "relentless fear of retribution" (2001).

Interestingly, one can refer to the historical suppression of Dalit women which clarifies that it is not about sexually assaulted girls speaking against a man. Instead, it is the horror of speaking against the Brahmin system because they know that system will not spare them, their family, and their community. The trauma and horror of the caste system is so intense that they do not even believe the American judiciary system. At the same time, it is difficult for the West to understand the complexity of caste, gender, and race geopolitically.

Then, Chabria again reported that a new Brahmin narrative came out that the new interpreter has intentionally recreated the testimony of the Dalit women:

> [D]espite two years of investigation, a trial and an eight-year jail sentence, Reddy's case is still not closed. There is even a chance his plea bargain could be overturned. New facts–such as an interpreter who encouraged witnesses to lie–continue to emerge, while old facts dissolve into fiction. Reddy's transgressions and the flawed investigation of

> those offences are so culturally complex that, in the end, U.S. law may be unable to punish him fairly. He committed his crimes in an ethnic community where culture and law often collide, leaving the truth in pieces. (Chabria, 2001)

Matthew Artz (2004) stated that Reddy was convicted for seven years and paid a sum to the victims' families. However, as Artz and Soundararajan pointed out that despite the crime done by Reddy, he received an enormous support during that time from the dominant caste community. It was said, according to them, "his trafficking of minors was a misunderstanding, and these were consensual relationships; Reddy was an upstanding man, and this was how things are done, so he should be excused" (Artz, 2004; Soundararajan, 2022, p. 27).

Again Chabria (2001) stated when Reddy was detained for seven years, he apologized to his family for being caught for the crime, but he never felt ashamed for the people he suppressed under the Brahminical patriarchy (Chabria, 2001). Chabria said that till now, he continued to have a philanthropist face among Dalits, as this news did not spread much and was told and re-told in Brahmanical patriarchal moulded forms. The girls have been projected culprits because of whom the *messiah* of the poor Dalits had to go to jail.

It is interesting to see Ella Shohat argue that self-representation is denied, and it is repeatedly suppressed especially for those who are multiply marginalized (1975). When we come to this incidence of 1999, it is true because even if Reddy is penalized, people believed in him more than justice or the Dalit women. Starting from the first day of the incident or even before that, Lakireddy as a dominant cate male diaspora observed that a Dalit woman is a fixed object within the Brahminical patriarchy, who can be approached sexually, dehumanized in terms of labor, humiliated at any time, and does not deserve any justice. As per the debate, the theory of a Dalit woman's life is framed according to the Brahmanical male actors where a Dalit woman is not a threat to Reddy, is a sexualized racialized caste-d body who must follow the established order. Conversely, the suppression of the Dalit woman is related to his privileged position and power over a lower-caste woman. Further, without documents, as illegal migrants in the USA, the bodies and experiences of Dalit diaspora women and girls are not legible to the American society where she migrated. Further, not knowing the language of the host land suppressed their discourse. Caste, class, and gender have triply played a huge role in the marginalization of Dalit

diaspora women. These three factors made Dalit women invisible in the American society and South Asian dominant community.

Further, Dalit women and their families are even more “othered” for speaking against their *messiah*. Dalit diaspora women’s self-representation repeatedly failed for several reasons, such as language, patriarchy, Brahmanism, and racism. Besides, the representation of Dalit women has been insulted by the dominant section of society repeatedly: first that they are unworthy of self-representation. Second, they are not capable of representing themselves (or not letting them represent); third, the empowered people care little about their representation.

Going broader, one can see that most South Asian diaspora writings are not meant for people from lower castes. In his book *Caste Matters* (2019), Suraj Yengde argues that “the print/digital social (news) media remains Brahmins’ business with extensive editorial and journalistic control over narratives” (Yengde, 2019, p. 248). Radhika Gajjala also states that diasporic Indian space on the internet is “shaped implicitly and explicitly by ‘Hindu’ majoritarian ideologies–with mostly dominant caste participation in such publics” (Gajjala, 2019, p. 7). Soundararajan uses the term “Brahmanization of the internet” to explain the marginalization of Dalits on the internet. She says:

> We do not have enough scholars or watchdogs looking at the development and architectures of algorithms and software through a caste lens, as, most probably, caste disparity is built into algorithms, data, and internet practices. (Soundararajan, 2022, p. 118)

Dalits have been trying to represent themselves, but their representation is denied either with fear, force, or lack of language, and it is historical, generational, and geopolitical, as seen in the above example. According to Yengde, the privileged fear that discussing caste issues may lead to questions about their unjust position. Hence, “the dominant caste South Asian diaspora has already created a myth of a ‘caste-neutral nation’ while continuing to hold die-hard loyalties to its caste nation” (2019, p. 20).

All the writers mentioned above have claimed that the whole system, whether IT, media, Bureaucracy, or academia, belong to the dominant caste of the South Asian diaspora. Thus, a Dalit struggles for self-representation within a system designed to demean his/her attempts for

autonomy. Furthermore, their legitimacy is acknowledged only when the "colonizers–or Brahmins or Brahminical institutions of power–recognize it" (Soundararajan, 2022, p. 50). Soundararajan further states that Dalits are in a "double bind" where White supremacist knowledge structures and Brahmin gatekeepers must recognize them. However, it is challenging because Dalit women writers or professors are scarce in the USA and European academia. Then, as Soundararajan points out, Dalits are invited in the spirit of diversity but not given the power to shape the discourse. "There is a seduction with assimilation, which asks them to sacrifice their self-determination or deracialize their demands for equity to achieve visibility" (Soundararajan, 2022, p. 52).

In addition, within Dalit communities, there are some Dalits who have been trapped in Brahminical power as their "loyal." Suraj Yengde talks about the variety of Dalits who go away from the Dalit struggle for temporary self-benefits. Some educated Dalits who are privileged to go to university, have learned to please the dominant caste to save their position in the job and get over the inferiority complex of the lower caste. Because of their closeness to the upper caste, they claim a superior position among their less educated caste group. Ultimately, these *chamchas* (people without dignity), as Yengde calls them, follow the same hierarchical system borrowed from Brahmanism "they look like a Dalit, but their opinion and taste are Brahmanical" (Yengde, 2019).

There are scholars who have also talked about the self-representation of the Dalits. Charu Gupta (2015) has also talked about Dalit representation where she discusses about Jacques Ranciere who affirmed that representation is often "embodied allegories of inequality" (p. 101) Charu Gupta also writes about Spivak that "subalterns have always been represented as an object of study who are studied from the above" (ibid). Dalit women's representation are suppressed because of caste hierarchy and then patriarchal hierarchy of upper caste women. Charu Gupta expresses that representation for the Dalits will be a site of counter images "challenging dominant visions and carving out contingent, varied and flexible modes of resistance" (101).

Cosimo Zene (2011) who has emphasized on the Dalit activism, emphasizes that there has been a shift from Dalits' mere awareness of their "oppression" toward the mobilization of consciousness as a "transforming agents" of subalternity, and hence a new path taking them from "desperate cries" to liberating action (p. 95). In this regard, she gives the example of Jyotirao Phule,

Valangkar Periyar and Ambedkar who have fought and given the theories to conceptualize the suppression of the Dalits and their activism against Brahmanism.

In this regard, there have been a number of scholars who have focused on the use of different genres by the Dalits to self-represent themselves. Sarah Beth Hunt (2014) talks about Dalit literature produced by Dalits in India. Beth Hunt (2007) has also talked about the Dalit autobiography produced by Dalits in India and the question of identity in it. Manuela Ciotti (2010) talks about the self-representation of lower caste's women through their political activism in North India. Az Causevic et al. (2020) have written an article which is a conversation among six authors about how online platforms have given opportunity to the marginalized section of the society in raising their voices. Maari Zwick Maitreyi, a Dalit diaspora feminist talks about online spaces which has created a platform for the Dalits at international level. She talked about creating Wikipedia page, for instance, for Dalit history and activism which is a revolutionary step towards liberation. Wikipedia, according to her gives a space to edit and add which this has created an opportunity to Dalits all over the world to add their history and self-represent themselves. She states "it is deeply momentous to be able to self-represent on an international open-knowledge platform like Wikipedia. It is not only about self-representation but an act of protest and transformation" (2020, p. 15). Arvind Kumar Thakur (2020) has also discussed the self-representation of Dalits through online platforms. He has analyzed the protests and activism of Dalits online. In his article he refers to the Rohith Vemula's suicide in India, who took his life because of the caste-based discrimination with him in his university, University of Hyderabad. This incident, according to Thakur, brought online campaigns worldwide. Further, Alia Saha (2022) discusses the online activism of the Dalits. She talks about #dalitlivesmatter which created an international uproar against casteist, patriarchal and racist discourse. She also delineates the spread of this hashtag brought Dalits together in the campaign. These scholars have debated about the self-representation of the Dalits in India and outside India. In this line, my research focus is also on the self-representation of the Dalit diasporas and see what are the aspects that they share in their narratives. For this, I have already said that I will take a blog article written by Karunakaran et al. (2016) where they have underlined thirteen small testimonies of the Dalit diasporas.

Next, I will talk about Gloria Anzaldua's Nueva Conciencia Mestiza. In my GEMMA master's thesis, I talked in detail about Anzaldúa's theories mentioned above while talking about the South Asian diaspora women (Gupta, 2018). Referring to the case study, I will use Anzaldúa's theories "Coatlicue State," and "Nueva Conciencia Mestiza" and use same debate as I have found Dalit feminists' strategies closer to the one Anzaldúa gave. She writes about the psychological aspect through the theory of the "Coatlicue state" and "Nueva Conciencia Mestiza" which make the Dalit women's experience comprehensible. As Dalit diaspora feminists' priority is not only to materialize their revolution against caste oppressors; instead, their focus is on the caste oppressed healing of the internal conflict, the trauma through which their body and soul have lived and are living. Indeed, their experiences differ from those of the Chicanas, but understanding both sides' words has created a space of sharing and collectiveness.

3.7. Gloria Anzaldúa's "Coatlicue State" and "Nueva Conciencia Mestiza"

3.7.1. Border, Borderline, and Borderlands

In her text *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The Nueva Mestiza* (1987), Gloria Anzaldúa defines the border based on her Chicana identity, her "in-betweenness" in Mexico and the USA. Anzaldúa states that the "Border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the First and bleeds (1987, p. 3). She goes on to argue that the "borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish 'us' from 'them'" (ibid). Finally, she goes beyond the duality defined by the border. She says that "a borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant transition. Its inhabitants are prohibited and forbidden" (ibid). She also suggests that "the borderland is not a comfortable territory to live in; this is the place of contradictions. Hatred, anger, and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape. Hence, living in the borderland is like trying to swim in a new element, an "alien" element" (ibid).

3.7.2. "Nueva Conciencia Mestiza" and "Coatlicue State"

In this research, the definition of the physical border and the metaphorical meaning of borderline and borderlands are paramount and ubiquitous, as discussed above. Anzaldúa explains the borderlands to understand the "Nueva Conciencia Mestiza" (1987). Anzaldúa underlines that the "Nueva Conciencia Mestiza" develops at the borderland and among those who are prohibited and forbidden. For instance, they could be women in a phallogocentric society, lesbians in a heterosexual society, Chicanas in the United States, or brown and black in the white racial power structure. In this work, I am using this theory to understand the position of South Asian Dalit diaspora women already in the position of the "other" and their way of self-representing themselves, primarily through the narratives provided in the blog. Anzaldúa proposes the idea of the "Nueva Conciencia Mestiza," that is mestiza, *una conciencia de mujer* (a consciousness of a woman) –a consciousness of the borderlands–which lives on the border space, on the 'barb wire' (1987, p. 25).

To reach the stage of consciousness– "Nueva Conciencia Mestiza," one needs to accept oneself to be able to fight against oppression. "Coatlicue state," as Anzaldúa says, illustrates the mental state of subjects who live in the borderlands. In her work, Anzaldúa concentrates on achieving the "Nueva Conciencia Mestiza" through "Coatlicue State." Coatlicue's theory is crucial in comprehending the psychology of Dalit diaspora women who have endured the "trauma, pain, suffering, and wounds of century-long suppression. Their narrative becomes their representation in their voice" (Soundararajan, 2022, p. 5). Moreover, Dalit diaspora feminists have said that "narrating their trauma, pain, suffering, and wounds becomes their teacher" (ibid). The Dalit diaspora women move from being the "other" to the "conscious other" (Gupta, 2018; Gupta, 2022). Coatlicue is a mythological term that Anzaldúa explains:

> An Aztec goddess of death and birth. She has a human skull and serpent for a head, a necklace of human hearts, a skirt of twisted serpents, and taloned feet. She is the creator of the celestial body. She contained and balanced the dualities of male and female, light and dark, and life and death. Simultaneously, depending on the person, she represents duality in life, a synthesis of duality, and a third perspective-something more than mere duality or synthesis of duality. (1987, p. 46)

Anzaldúa uses the term Coatlicue to talk about the mental state of the person in the state of "in-betweenness," and struggling to get out from the position of the "other." This state is critical because it stresses the acceptance of one being a minority, a woman, and the "other." Anzaldúa, in this regard, exerts that first, the struggle must be "inner," and then it can be played out in "outer" terrains; she claims that "nothing happens in the 'real' world unless it first happens in the images in our heads" (p. 87). The "other" needs to get out of the "otherness" created by the layered dominance to stand against it. It is an essential step as Soundararajan discloses the mental conflict, fear, and hesitance among the Dalit diaspora, which make them far from themselves and their identity. Dalit diaspora moves into the darkness, hiding their caste identity (2022). Anzaldúa explains such mental condition with the "Coatlicue State," which seems to be a painful mental and emotional state of perplexity as the site of conflict between inner and outer voices. However, it is a stage of awareness, consciousness, and knowledge of being different. "The knowledge of being different is very painful because after knowing 'it' (the otherness), one cannot stay in the same place and be comfortable. One is no longer the same as before" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 48). This "new other" is conscious about the "otherness" and hence leaves from one side, free from the bind of the duality of the oppressor and oppressed, to reach the borderland. I would say that the "Coatlicue State" is the movement from the stage of the "other" to the "conscious other" (Gupta, 2018; Gupta, 2022, p. 20). However, getting out of the duality does not signify the neutrality of the subject, whereas "a massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle," and it becomes the position of standing against or reacting against dominant views and beliefs. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 80)

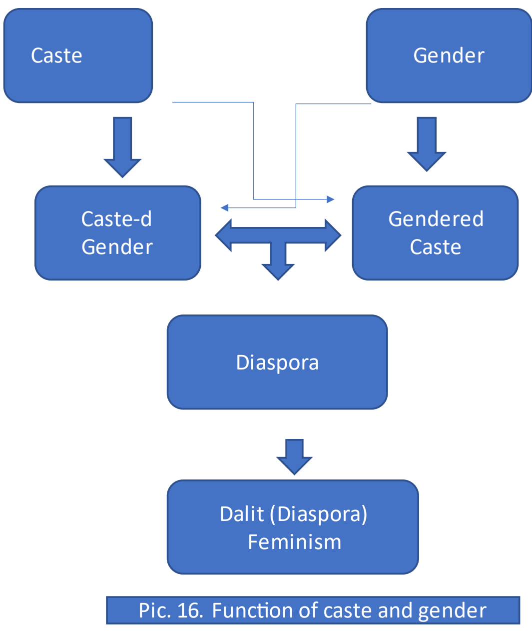
Chapter 4. Gendered caste and caste-d gender

> *Caste cannot be destroyed without eradicating patriarchy, and you can't destroy patriarchy without eradicating caste.* (Thenmozhi Soundararajan, 2022, p. 97)

This chapter will talk about caste and gender, not as separate but rather as juxtaposed identities. Much research has been done using caste and gender individually, resulting in a partial response to the Third World feminism or Dalit movement, especially among diasporas. Jillet Sarah Sam, for instance, affirms that most of the research on caste are generally limited to the country of the origin. Vivek Kumar (2004, 2009) has researched on Indian Dalit diaspora and has detailed the presence of Dalit diaspora in different parts of the world. He has problematized the academic invisibility of the Dalit diaspora in South Asian diaspora communities.

Then Uma Chakravarti also states that Third World (urban) feminists do not count caste as an essential factor in the marginalization of upper-caste women because they feel that caste issues are related to the lower-caste population (Chakravarti, 2018, p. 1). That is why the aspect of caste among dominant caste women writers has not been explored, and not even considered that caste hierarchy affects the upper caste women. A similar trend has been followed beyond the border among diaspora women writers who intersect gender with race and the colonial hierarchy, but caste has rarely been explored with gender. Thus, Dalit diaspora women in diaspora women writing are not given enough space and are under or not represented. As shown in the picture, the chapter will review the caste system in Indian land[23] (and its subcontinent Pakistan and Bangladesh, which were considered part of pre-1947 Indian land), called the origin of caste apartheid. Then, there will be a discussion on the historicization of caste and gender, which produces gendered caste and caste-d gender. Finally, the chapter will emphasize the function of caste and gender in diaspora through different examples.

[23] Before 1947 India used to be a collective land of what we know–India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.



Pic. 16. Function of caste and gender

4.1. The caste system in South Asia

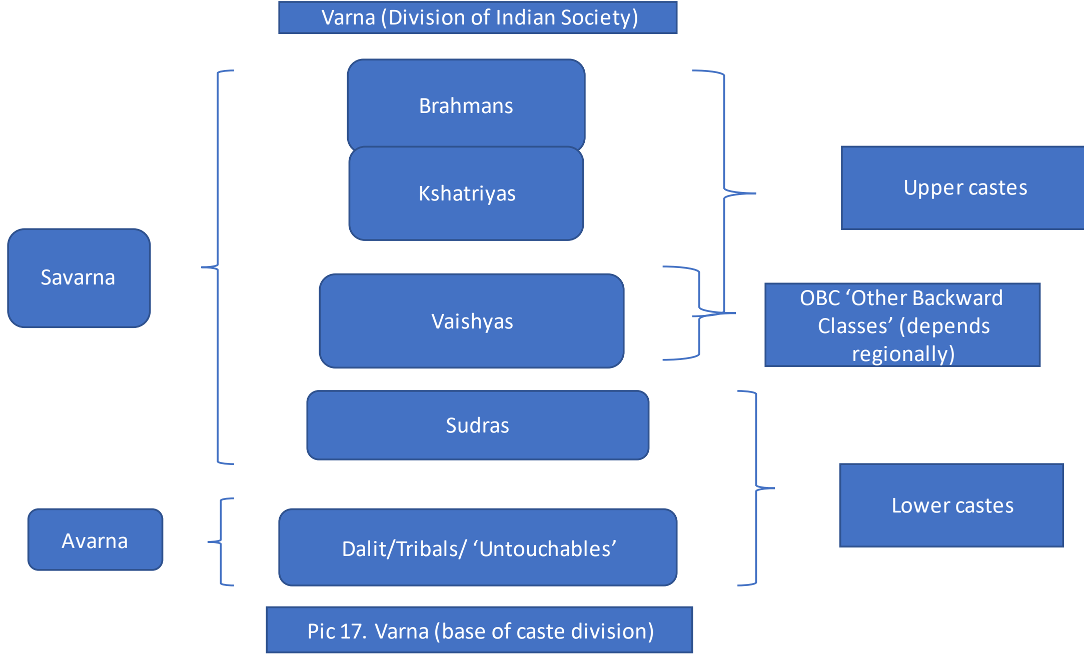
Many scholars such as Bhim R Ambedkar (1946), Edmund Ronald Leach (1960), Hugo Gorringe (2017), Uma Chakravarti (2018), Suraj Yengde (2019), and Thenmozhi Soundarajan (2022), to name a few, have stated that caste is the distinguishing characteristic of the social structure in the South Asian countries. According to them, caste is one of the most potent symbols used to describe the society of India and the sub-continent. John Henry Hutton writes that even though caste has been criticized and repeatedly called into question, it continues to be a kicking factor in dividing South Asian society (1963, p. 44). Swapnil Sinha explains that South Asia has used caste in two manners; first, as a community in which caste identity passes from parents to children, and the caste belongs to a particular profession. That means that the son of a carpenter will be a carpenter and his caste will also be based on his carpentry profession. Caste will not change even if a lower caste secures other jobs because caste is a birth identity. According to her, second is that the caste category is used in creating a society based on domination and hierarchy, where the dominant caste oppresses the lower caste (2015, p. 80). As per Singh, the second manner, splitting of South Asian population into privileged and oppressed caste groups have created the problem.

Who were Shudras? (1946) by Bhim R Ambedkar describes the origin of the caste system dated 1300 BCE-1000 BCE. According to him, in order to understand the construction of the caste apartheid, it is vital to see the origin of the *Chaturvarnya* in the Indo-Aryan society[24]. *Chaturvarnya* is discussed in the ninetieth hymn (called *Purusha Sukta*) of the Tenth *Mandala* of the *Rig Veda*[25] (Gail Omvedt, 2003). *Purusha Sukta* presents a cosmogony, a theory of the universe's origin, which describes the creation of man. The hymn says:

Purusha has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, and a thousand feet. He is this whole (universe) …is the lord of immortality: (1) Brahmins or priests, are his mouth (2) Kshatriyas or soldiers, are his arms (3) Vaishyas or traders, are his stomach and thighs and (4) Shudras or menials, are his feet, and all of them arise from the body of the Creator. (Ambedkar, 1946, pp. 21-22)

This way, the Indian (Hindu) society, as shown in the picture 17, was divided into four significant *varnas* (classifications/ divisions): Brahmans (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (merchants), and Shudras (servants). This was a fundamental social division, which was not yet caste but a vision based on inequality that decided the profession, physical training, education, and neighborhood of the people in the groups (Ambedkar, 1946, p. 24). The four varnas were symbolically linked to the body parts of Purusha, where the upper one stands at the higher caste hierarchy and goes down accordingly. However, there are other groups which were not even considered part of any *varna*. As shown in the picture below, we see five divisions where four were socially divided and hence called *sa(varnas),* and one of them is called *a(varna)* which was not part of *varna.* Thenmozhi Soundararajan, a Dalit diaspora feminist, explains that the caste privileged of four *varnas* defined in the caste system is called *savarna*. Those who do not belong to any *varna* are called *avarna*, which encompasses all the other communities not part of the *varna* system, such as tribal communities and Dalits (2022, p. 45).

[24] Bhim R Ambedkar writes that Chaturvarnya is the theory on which the division of Indian society is based. He refers to Chaturvarnya to discuss the four primary divisions in the caste system in India.
[25] Rig veda is a Brahamanical text which talks about the Indian society from a Brahamanical perspective.



Pic 17. Varna (base of caste division)

The term caste entered the Indian land during the late 15th century. The term is derived from the Spanish and Portuguese word *casta*, which means breed or lineage, race, clan, or kind. On the one hand, when the Spanish colonized Latin America, they used *casta* to describe the hierarchies of mixed-race people in the post-conquest period. On the other hand, the Portuguese applied the term *casta* to the thousands of Indian social groups they encountered upon their arrival in India in 1498. They used the term to classify the labor based on their occupation in India. Nevertheless, in the end, more than the division of work, it divided the laborers based on race and color, hence dividing the Indian society even further into castes (Estes, 2013; Sinha, 2015, p. 80).

Uma Chakravarti (2018) discusses *varna* and *jati* (Hindi translation of caste) in detail. She writes that the two terms have been used to describe the Brahmanical system of stratification in traditional Brahmanical literature, such as *Manusmriti* and the *Vedas*: *varna* and *jati*. "*Varna* referred to a status order system: Brahmans (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (merchants), and Shudras (serving class)" (Chakravarti, 2018, p. 8). Later, another category was regarded, but it was kept outside the pale of the *varna* system, comprising "untouchables" (called by upper caste), tribals (also called Adivasis), or Dalits (the term coined by an activist who

belonged to this stratum of Indian caste system)[26]. Members of a *jati* are a descending group that is traditionally assigned to a particular employment. It refers to an endogamous unit within which one is required to marry. In addition, each jati has its cultural traditions, including its dietary customs, rituals, dress, and even art forms. This way, each jati is a closed group functioning along an axis of difference (p. 9).

As shown in the picture above, this caste system has three major divisions: The upper caste, which may comprise the *varna* group Brahmans, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas. However, within Vaishya *varna*, some jatis/castes are called Other backward classes (OBCs) either because of their social class or minority presence in the region. These castes are also considered dominant and "not polluting." Then there is Shudra *varna,* which is a lower caste. The fifth group, not part of *varna,* is also considered lower caste, comprising Dalits, tribals, and "untouchables." The last group is at the bottom of the hierarchy, and its touch is often regarded as degrading (Chakravarti, 2018, p. 9).

The picture below, taken from the Equality Labs' website, illustrates that the power and status of a caste group increase as one moves up the pyramidal structure of the caste system. While going down the scale, the caste groups are considered dirty, polluting, and not permitted to mix with the upper castes (Ambedkar, 1946, 2014, p. 24). Finally, the Dalits in the lowest position are deprived of dignity and personhood due to caste apartheid. One essential aspect of caste is that those who have structured the system control its knowledge, labor, means of production, and power (Chakravarti, 2018, p. 7). Indian judicial system has already banned "untouchability" just after the independence of India in 1950[27] however; it has never been able to shake the system of exploitation, exclusion, humiliation, sexual violation, and murders which are based on the caste division (Samisti Legal, 2018; Soundararajan, 2022, p. 2).

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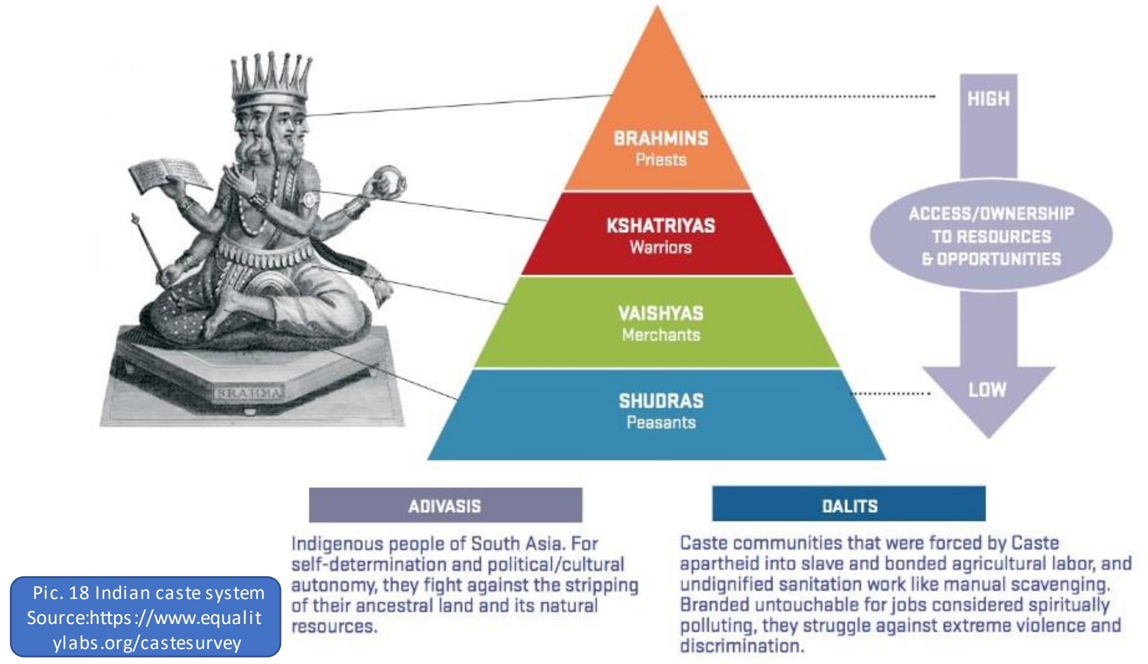
[26] Dalit is a term coined by Jyotirao Phule, a Dalit activist and social reformer in 1880s, to denote the extreme exploitation of directly affected by the Indian caste system. It means 'broken,' 'scared,' or 'downtrodden' (Shared by Reena Tete, 2021). Soundararajan writes that Dalits are broken by suffering, broken by caste, broken by the horror of enormity of human potential that was lost to this violent system–lives not fully lived, and souls who never got to sing their full song (2022, p. 2).

[27] Article 17 of the Indian constitution bans untouchability: "Article 17 of the constitution," Samisti Legal, 2018, https://samistilegal.in/article-17-of-the-constitution/.



Pic. 18 Indian caste system Source:https://www.equalitylabs.org/castesurvey

Another piece of Brahmanical literature called *Manusmriti* (200 BCE-200 CE) further solidified the varna system. This book exhorts all members of the *varnas* to adhere to the standards of moral and social behavior outlined in it. This book is one of the many religious scriptures designed to separate, regulate, and punish individuals based on categories of purity and pollution. These scriptures have been utilized to legitimize caste and slavery, establish permanent caste inequalities, condemn inter-caste unions, and socially stigmatize inter-caste children (Paul Hacker, 2006; Soundararajan, 2022, p. 53). *Manusmriti* provides a definite social status to women and lower castes in Brahmanical and patriarchal society and lays down the ideas of ideal womanhood and servitude in the religious and ideological sphere (Edmund Harper, 1964, p. 155). Some excerpts show how a lower caste is snatched from his/her personhood to merely an object of servitude. A Shudra is not even allowed to read the books which have decided his/her fate:

> A Shudra, whether bought or not bought (by a Brahmin) is compelled to practice servitude, for that Shudra was created merely for the service of the Brahmin. Even if freed by his master, the Shudra is not released from servitude; servitude is innate in him. (*Manusmriti*, 2 Chapter VIII, Verses 412- 414, cited in Karunakaram, 2016)

> [I]f he (a Shudra) listens intentionally to (a recitation of) the Veda, his ears shall be filled with (molten) tin or lac. His tongue shall be cut out if he recites (Vedic texts). If he remembers them, his body shall be split in twain. (Gautama Dharma Sutra, 4 Chapter XX, Sutras, cited in Karunakaram, 2016; Patrick Olivelle, 2000, p. 98)

Manusmriti also preaches the duties of a man and a woman about their heteronormative and reproductive functions in society. It talks about the need for a woman's dependence on a man, either father, husband, brother, or son, economically. A man in any form should control a woman's movement and sexuality, and guard against outside impurity, otherwise, a free woman is seen as tending to bring dishonor and sorrow to the family. Conversely, it states that no woman, no matter her age, should ever do anything independently, even in her own (maternal) home. She should be under the control of her father in her childhood, under her husband's control in her youth, and when her husband is dead, then under the control of her sons. She should never have independence and should never try to separate from her father, husband, and sons as that would mean contempt to all the families related to her. She should always be cheerful and clever at household chores, keep the house and utensils clean, and should spend very little money. When her father gives her to a groom, she should obey her husband and keep her vows. Giving her away makes the groom her master, and she should treat him so (Doniger, 2014, pp. 146-149; Olivelle & Olivelle, 2007, p. 145; Jois, 2015, pp. 1-7). Besides, the husband should ensure his sexual relationship with his wife and give a son to his caste community. To keep his progeny clean, he should be more cautious about guarding her (Jois, 2015, pp. 9-10).

Also, according to *Manusmriti*, if a woman from a lower caste marries a man from an upper caste, then the status of the man's family falls, and the children born in that relationship are considered "bastards." Even a priest who has a sexual relationship with a maid or other servant will end up in hell. If he has a son with her, he will no longer be eligible for the priesthood, and even god will not accept sacrifices from such a person (Rama Jois, 2015, pp. 14-19).

4.2. Historicization of caste and gender

4.2.1. Caste and gender

In scholarly discussion, caste and gender have been separated in analyzing the position of women or the position of Dalits; in this way, Dalit women and their writing are sidelined and lose visibility among South Asians. In this regard, Shailaja Paik argues that caste cannot be separated from gender when discussing Indian women, whether outside or inside the Indian land. Caste oppression which goes unsaid becomes a point of double marginalization of women. Paik emphasizes centering the attention twice–Dalit and Dalit women–which allows for the most inclusive and productive politics and the development of new feminist frameworks and critiques of power structure (Paik, 2014, p. 75). Uma Chakravarti posits that to understand the working of caste and gender, we need to draw a historicity along with patriarchy and Brahmanism because they are so closely linked, calling it: Brahmanical patriarchy (Chakravarti, 2018, p. 42). Naseera N M and Moly Kuruvilla write that *Manusmriti* and its law codes have a significant role in creating the Brahminical patriarchy, the caste apartheid, and the heteronormative structures of ancient India (Naseera N M & Kuruvilla, 2022, p. 21). Brahminical patriarchy marginalizes the caste oppressed ritually, socially, economically, psychologically, and psychically through the reproductive control of all genders.

Further, according to Sukumari Bhattacharji, following the law codes of *Manusmriti*, women became more helpless and marginalized than during the *Vedic* period (2007). Prem Chowdhary observed that the caste system had linked the honor of a family with the woman's sexuality due to her reproductive and procreative capacity, which can be polluted by the outsider (2007, p. 16-17). Naseera and Kuruvilla also said that due to the caste system and perpetrators of the caste apartheid, several "sexual and reproductive health rights of women, including the right to bodily integrity, marriage rights, contraception, and divorce, are denied" (Naseera & Kuruvilla, 2022, p. 21). According to Hindu Vedic texts, there are specific roles and duties for women that they must follow, such as a daughter, a wife, a mother, or a widow. Else, women are portrayed as sexually promiscuous, secret, sly, and out to capture men. Their roles and duties, as daughters, wives, mothers, widows or prostitutes, are centered upon the im/purity of sexuality of women, which guarantees the im/purity of caste lineage. We will see in the next sections, how women in the role of daughters are repeatedly taught about the sexuality that is connected to the honor of the

family and hence they should be protected. Then, after marriage wives are controlled financially, through ideologies, or force to ensure the purity of their sexuality. Then a woman's role is fulfilled at the point of reproducing an heir to the family where the caste society ensures her loyalty towards the caste. Then, widows are cornered in the house or asked to *Sathi,* otherwise, they may contaminate their sexuality by going outside the caste or if they remarry within the caste then they are disturbing the ratio of caste men and women in the society. In all the roles of women, their sexuality becomes a necessary part through which the purity and impurity of the caste is decided.

Ketu Katrak (2009) explains that South Asian religion and culture have contributed to the obscuration of female sexuality. Religions and their teachings are essential in various human behaviors, including the economy, marriage, sexuality, fertility, and marital stability of individuals and families. All these factors shape the caste system. Hence protecting women's sexuality and controlling their function is vital in a Brahmanical patriarchal system (Katrak, 2009, xvii). In India, cultural traditions and religious rituals, and caste practices are often quoted to justify violations of the sexual and reproductive health rights of women. For instance, women's function as a reproducer is strongly indicated in the marriage rituals of the Vedic texts such as *Brahmanas*, *Grihya Sutras* (800 BC), and *Manusmriti*. Traditional morality, heavily influenced by religion and caste, controls women's sexuality through faith, dedication, or fear of a conjugal accomplice and sexual activity. Accordingly, marriages within the clan ensure the continuation of the pure caste lineage and establish a vicious cycle of caste and dedication toward it. That is why the sexuality of women in these clans is subject to constraints (Chakravarti, 2018, p. 42).

4.2.2. Caste and marriage

Vedic texts such as *Satapatha Brahmanas* (800-600 BCE) convey fears regarding the sexuality of women not being directly under the control of men, particularly fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons. These texts show concern that women might go to a different or lower caste man if they are not controlled. Hence, a free woman may threaten the caste community and need to be

controlled. In order to maintain control from the beginning, a woman is tamed, groomed, and managed to keep the marriage intact and produce pure caste blood.:

> Marriage is the most important event in a man's life; it is at the forefront of Hindu consciousness and is a focal point of the social system. The status of his parents first decides a man's caste and is subsequently maintained or modified by his marriage and sexual encounters. (Stanley Tambiah, 1973, p. 223)

As a result, women in a caste are the ones that carry the caste lineage in its purest form. However, this necessitates a particular approach when selecting wives. They must come from the same caste and reputable families, indicating a similar social class. Besides, specific characteristics such as auspicious bodily marks and their behavior must be considered. *Manusmriti,* while listing the characteristics of a suitable and marriageable girl, mentions some haves and have-nots. The have-nots which it refers to are that a girl should not: "have a red-head, extra limb, extra body hair, be sick, talk too much/too less, be named after a constellation, a tree, a bird, a snake, or a mountain, have a lower caste name, or a frightening name" (Jois, 2015, pp. 8-9). Whereas the characteristics of a suitable and marriageable girl are: "should not lack any body parts, have a pleasant name, walk like a goose or elephant, have body hair that should be just fine, teeth that are not too big, and delicate limbs" (Jois, 2015, p. 10). Further, a girl who does not have a brother or whose father is unknown is unsuitable as she might be an unlucky daughter (Jois, 2015, p. 11).

Further, the institutionalized caste system within marriage encourages male supremacy and control over women to suppress their sexuality, mobility, and reproductive choices. For instance, women's sexual subordination has been enforced through different institutions. Women's cooperation in the system is secured by various methods such as ideology, economic dependency on the male head of the family, class privileges, and the use of force when required. Given this structure, the honor and respect of upper-caste men are regarded as protected and preserved by women who are closely guarded and whose sexuality is strictly monitored (Grenda Lerner, 1986, p. 9).

Chakravarti describes that the success of the patriarchal system can be seen in the subtle working of its ideology. In that sense, the *Pativrata* concept (duties of wife), the specific *Dharma* (an

individual's duty fulfilled by observance of custom or law) of the Hindu wife, is one of the highly productive norms of Hindu religion which has bonded the cultural values of women. It is one of the most successful concepts developed by Brahmanical patriarchy that women find pride in restricting their sexuality and believe that giving birth to a male child grants them power and respect in society. *Pativrata* is regarded as the ideological *Purdah* (veil) of the Hindu woman, where wifely fidelity and dedication come to be regarded as the means to salvation. Further, women do not have autonomy even when it comes to the performance of domestic rituals. They perform various ceremonies to test their love and dedication toward their husband. Thus, the general subordination of women is the basis of the specific controls that the patriarchal structure placed upon them (Chakravarti, 2018, p. 70).

Kumkum Roy, who has examined the primary Brahmanical texts of BC 800 to BC 400, also shows in her study that *varna* stratification and control over reproduction are legitimized by the rituals outlined in the Brahmanical texts. She says the norms are carried and maintained at different levels by the state and the male householder at home (Roy, 1994). Hence, heteronormative relationships, primarily marriages, are highly prized, for they are the only relationships that produce caste heirs to privileged families; all other family structures and relationships are seen as polluting and violating caste duties.

4.2.3. Caste and motherhood

According to *Manusmriti,* Sukumari Bhattacharji says motherhood has been idealized and ritualized. There are numerous prescribed rituals in the book, starting with marriage, going on to conception, and then to the son's birth, to ensure the safe delivery of the male child. She critically writes that a woman's fate is decided through her reproductivity as women with children, especially sons are worthy of worship, whereas women without children are called infertile and considered a curse in society. Even a husband with an infertile wife can marry another woman for a son (Bhattacharji, 1994, pp. 16-41). A woman's worth extends only when she continues to serve this reproductive function and gives sons to continue the caste system. *Manusmriti* also prescribes that motherhood can be achieved when a man strictly follows a woman's fertile period together with the auspicious days. If it does not coincide with a good

time, a woman is pregnant with a girl child and hence a man should act accordingly (Vashishta, 2015, p. 155).

4.2.4. Marriage outside the caste

According to *Manusmriti,* both partners should be from the same caste, outlining the marriage norms. However, according to the Brahmanical patriarchal system, the upper-caste male imposes his power sexually on both upper and lower-caste women. It implies that a man from a higher caste can establish a relationship with a lower caste woman but with conditions. She can be his mistress or second wife. In that case, a lower caste woman and her son will not inherit the father's lineage. Instead, the woman of the same caste and her children would inherit the father's lineage. Indeed, there are other ways to break endogamy, such as when a woman from a higher caste marries a man from a lower caste. However, this is viewed as repugnant and unnatural, which leads to violent punishment such as "honor killing" (Chakravarti. 2018, p. 51). The *Dharmashastras* recommends severe punishments for violations, including death for the lower caste man and mutilation, physical punishment, and ex-communication for offending women. A lower-caste man is expected to be killed, and the daughter of an upper-caste household is left and cursed whole life for violating marriage codes. She is used to symbolizing the consequence of breaking the caste norms. Accordingly, women of higher caste need to be protected as they are the ones who can bring dishonor to the family (Chakravarti, 1993, p. 579).

However, upper-caste men can have sexual access to lower-caste women, an aspect of the material power over the lower caste. Upper-caste men's casual and continuous use of a lower-caste woman is naturalized as if the lower-caste women were not family women. They are animalized and hypersexualized.

Despite the law which accepts the legality of inter-caste marriage, upper castes adhere to the terrible concept of private justice to deal with couples who violate the norm of endogamy. Parveen Mody writes that even though a civil marriage law was enacted in 1872 by British colonizers that merely intended to legitimate marriages between two partners of various communities, the law was perceived as unnatural. On the contrary, caste was natural. Inter-caste marriage was viewed with hatred, and even the children born out of such marriages were

regarded as “bastards” with no inheritance from their fathers. Dominant caste communities are proud of their rigidness towards caste, and they even celebrate the purity of their caste and community considering lower castes impure and as “animals” (Mody, 2002, pp. 223-56).

4.2.5. Caste and widowhood

In Indian land, widowhood is traditionally seen as “social death,” particularly among the uppermost castes. When a husband dies, the widow is estranged from sexuality and excluded from the social unit of the family. Ideally, according to Brahmanical texts, a chaste woman should give up her body upon the passing of her husband by joining her husband on the funeral pyre as *Sati*. Nevertheless, if she does not become a *Sati,* she will be institutionally marginalized, where she is physically alive but socially dead (Chakravarti, 2018, p. 79). On the contrary, Pauline Kolenda argues that the marital customs of lower castes are a total contrast to the upper caste, where they do not follow such widowhood or perform *Sati.* The lower caste widows do not suffer such social death as they actively work and earn their lives (Kolenda, 1987, pp. 289-354).

Bhim Rao Ambedkar (1946, 2004) discussed the caste system in Indian Hindu society at a conference at Columbia University, New York, USA, in 1916. As an illustration of the gender disparity within the caste, he used discourse to contrast the social status of a widow and a widower. After her husband passes away, a widow needs to be disposed of. Otherwise, her existence may violate the endogamy of the group. In this case, there are two methods: to let her/force her to sacrifice as a *Sati* on her husband’s funeral pyre or to live her whole life deprived of her natural rights of living a life. She is degraded to a condition where she is no longer a source of allurement.

Likewise, a husband may survive his wife and be a surplus man with whom the caste community sympathizes for his loss. However, he must also be disposed of; otherwise, he could marry or have a relationship outside the caste, which could shame the family. Here, the problem of the surplus man is more complicated than that of the surplus woman in a group that desires to make itself into a caste. The project of burning him with his late wife is hazardous for two reasons: first, it cannot be done because he is a man. Secondly, if it is carried out, the caste community will suffer the loss of a stalwart soul. Under these circumstances, he might be forced to remain a

widower throughout his life. Second, it is in the interest of the caste to keep him as a *Grihastha* (Sanskrit word for the one who raises a family), where he can be provided with a wife who is either younger or not potentially beautiful from a lower-income family. Indeed, it is the best of the possible solutions in the case of the surplus man. By this, he is kept within the caste, and at the same time, endogamy is preserved.

Consequently, *Sati*, enforced widowhood, and girl (child) marriage imposed by Brahmanical patriarchy, are some customs that primarily intended to solve the surplus man and surplus woman in a caste and maintain its endogamy and the purity of the caste. In all these cases, women are double marginalized based on gender, caste, and class, and men have a privileged position within the caste. Consequently, the female caste body, either as daughter, wife, mother, or widow, is in a state of exile, outsider-ness, and un-belongingness to itself within the Brahmanical patriarchy.

4.2.6. Caste and gender: Now

Uma Chakravarti talks about urban upper-caste women and their reaction toward the caste system. She points out that their position towards the Mandal Commission showed their ignorance of caste issues[28]. Anti-Mandal agitation (1990) was a response to the government's passing Mandal Commission in the 1980s to implement a quota for the OBCs (Other Backward Classes referred to in picture 15); the castes, which are above Dalits and "untouchables," have faced discrimination and are socially backward. Many women from dominant castes walked out to demonstrate their disapproval of this reservation, which undoubtedly contributed to increased tensions among them. Their participation in the agitation showed that gender and caste were treated as two distinct categories. Uma Chakravarti pointed out that the dominant caste women's slogans supported their potential upper caste men, which said that these girls would be deprived

[28] The Janata Party government of India, led by Prime Minister Morarji Desai, established the Mandal Commission, also known as the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes Commission (SEBC), on January 1, 1979, with the mandate to "identify the socially or educationally backward classes" of India. In 1980, based on its rationale that OBCs (Other backward classes) identified based on caste, economic and social indicators comprised 52% of India's population. The Commission's report recommended that members of Other Backward Classes (OBC) be granted reservations to 27% of jobs under the Central government and public sector undertakings. This would bring the total number of reservations for SC (Schedule Caste), ST (Schedule Tribe), and OBC to 49%.

of upper caste IAS (Indian Administrative Services) husbands if the seats were reserved for OBCs. Hence, they meant that the lower caste in civil service could not be their potential husband. They promulgated a self-regulatory code because of internalizing the idea of obligatory endogamous marriage, a crucial characteristic of the caste system (2018, p. 2). According to Uma Chakravarti, this incident proves that upper caste women have separated the caste issues from the gender.

However, if we look at women today, their lives show the intersection of class, caste, and gender. These structures oppress women, either from higher or lower caste, differently, leading to "multiple subject positions" or "contradictory positions" of oppression or privileges. Through their menfolk, women from the upper caste have access to economic resources and social power. So, while women lose to their menfolk, they derive certain benefits from the system as privileged upper caste and class women. Further, these benefits are available only if they conform to the patriarchal codes of their families and communities where exploitation of women of all castes and men of lower caste continues.

4.2.7. Caste and Dalit women

Brahminism aspires to control the reproduction of all bodies and not only of the dominant caste women but those from lower castes or *avarnas*. Soundararajan exerts that one of the methods to oppress the Dalit community are sexually violating Dalit women's body. Most of the registered sexual violence towards lower caste women explain that caste-based sexual violence is performative violence. Sexual violence against a caste woman is not just about sex or lust; A caste woman is not only raped but also stripped naked; her body is shaved with tar and is sexually mutilated.[29] The act is meant to dishonor, humiliate, and make her feel ashamed. All those things they do to a Dalit woman, they do symbolically to her Dalit family and the Dalit community. It is done publicly as a reminder: "Step out of line; this is what happens to you." It is repeatedly done to instill fear and shame in the Dalit community.

[29] Remembering the case of Phoolan Devi who was gangraped by the upper caste and police officers and later she was forced to walk naked in her village (Isabel Locke, 2021; Shekhar Kapur, 1996).

Further, in most registered cases of sexual violation, the whole judicial system fails a raped Dalit woman by not seeing her as a "human." A Dalit woman is dehumanized by rape and then humiliated repeatedly in all steps. Soundararajan writes that in the name of justice, a Dalit woman is violated at a police station, in a hospital with cruelty during checkups, and in the judiciary by repeatedly questioning her sexuality. Further, rape cases are mostly unrecorded to save the dominant caste community who are already present in all the offices. Structural obstruction to Dalit women getting justice is typical, and there is no healing but somewhat further humiliation. The impacts of caste-based sexual violence are obscured by the silence surrounding these heinous acts; no one is prepared to understand how profoundly it has shaped the psyches and terrorized Dalit women for centuries. Neglecting the body and the costs of sexual violence can diminish what has happened to people experiencing it. This caste-based sexual violence has terrorized Dalit women and has made them silent in most parts of South Asia (2022, pp. 100-103).

4.3. The function of caste and gender in the South Asian diaspora through different examples

> *If Hindus migrate to other regions of the earth, the Indian caste will become a world problem.* (Ambedkar, 2004, p. 132)

Caste denial is a dominant caste diasporic norm–that crossing across seas or oceans results in losing one's caste. However, marriage and politics are still tinged with casteist enthusiasm, even at the diasporic level. Moreover, the dominance of upper castes outside the mainland for centuries has intended to sideline the culture, religion, and practices of caste-oppressed immigrants. Dalits, too, are afraid to be publicly identified and fear being outed hence adopt various strategies to be included in the dominant caste South Asian diaspora.

Besides, an enduring and critical Brahmanical tactic is to avoid confronting Dalit discourse on equity or escape from the counter by forbidding the use of the word caste, Dalit, or even Brahminism in any discussion. In many official documents that caste-oppressed people bring forward to the UN, the term caste is debated because the Indian government forbids it, claiming "caste is an internal matter" (Discrimination based on work and descent, 2015). Similarly, in

most South Asian diaspora academic writing, the term Dalit and caste are reserved to the term "ethnicity," which does not let readers enter the actual caste apartheid. Most South Asian or the South Asian diaspora comment that "they do not have anything to do with caste" because they do not have caste and turn out to be it is only a matter of Dalits. Thus, to rob Dalits and caste-oppressed people of the language to describe and document their discrimination is one of the ongoing harms of caste apartheid. Soundararajan points out that Brahmins and other *savarnas* assert that it was through the British administration that caste became codified as a racist bureaucratic measure. Therefore, they claim that caste is a colonial invention (Soundararajan, 2022, p. 47). However, centuries have passed dominant caste is exploiting Dalit and caste-oppressed peoples. During colonization, Brahmin and other *savarnas* were frequent collaborators with the colonizers, helping to keep down most people who were caste oppressed.

Further, to suppress lower caste South Asians, the dominant caste diaspora from the beginning clearly distinguished between lower caste Hindus and dominant caste South Asian immigrants globally.

> Those perceived as low caste are described as poor class physically as well as mentally, treacherous with brains that do not readily grasp even the elementary problems of the USA. They are a dark mystic race' living in 'tumble-down 'shacks' which a white man, even from southern Europe, would have spurned.' High-caste Hindus are orientalized for their spiritual and intellectual contributions; some are even noted for their exotic genius, and their descriptions frequently name them as 'high caste Brahmins.' (Soundararajan, 2022, p. 24)

As evicted by the passage above, a key part of the casteist mindset is the assertion that upper castes have earned their positions through merit, skill, and hard work, as opposed to those beneath them in the caste hierarchy who are burdens on them. This toxic narrative carries over to the world and impacts immigration debates.

Also, much of the writing on the Indian diaspora, written mainly by the dominant caste, does not unpack the layered labor histories of diaspora from South Asia. Radhika Gajjala writes that the absence of work on the Dalit presence in Indian (digital) diaspora questions the postcolonial studies and current policies with the Hindu dominant caste Indian diaspora (2019, p. 8). Some

scholars have researched the South Asian diaspora's heterogenous presence globally. For instance, Deepika Bahri writes that race and class should be crucial elements to understanding diaspora's cross-border presence, which according to her, are not always culturally glamorous as presented by postcolonial writers (Bahri, 1998, p. 39). Radhika Gajjala argues that the domination of higher caste masculine South Asian diaspora figures in the South Asian diasporic space has marginalized the presence of Dalits, *Bahujans*, and other backward castes (Gajjala, 2019, pp. 6-9). Vivek Kumar also points out that Dalits have an international presence from colonial times and should not be marginalized in diaspora writing (Kumar, 2004, p. 114).

Also, as we have already seen that Sameera Dalwai has delineated the oppression of an Adivasi Christian woman from rural Bihar who traveled as a domestic servant with a dominant caste and bourgeois class Indian diaspora to the UK. She became a victim of caste hierarchy, class division, gender suppression, and regional difference within the Indian diaspora family (2016). At a transnational level, this case study of an Adivasi Christian woman, Permila Tirkey, reflects that South Asian diaspora is not a single entity and cannot be divided on a binary scale of the colonizer and the colonized, the First World and the Third World. Instead, layers of borders should be analyzed as political issues.

We can also cite the case of trafficking young Dalit girls from India to the USA to work in buildings and restaurants and as sex slaves. An Indian-origin, dominant caste landlord in Berkeley, Lakireddy Bali Reddy trafficked Dalit women to work in his buildings and restaurants or as his sex slaves. Dalit women served food in restaurants, cleaned his buildings, and moved silently in his properties. He never hid his heinous exploitation of these girls, partly because of the money he had and partly because he belonged to the upper caste and followed his caste norms. One day a 13-year-old girl was found dead and pregnant, and the case became public. He could not escape then and was convicted and served time. Beyond the crime, "the horrifying aspect was the enormous support mobilized for Reddy from within many in the robust, dominant caste community" (Soundararajan, 2022, p. 27).

These predominantly upper-caste Indians have, through migration to the West, gained access to the possibilities, freedom, and lifestyle that can be found in the center of global capitalism. However, they cannot give up the characteristics and habits of using the labor of others who are

weak and paying them the least. They repeatedly make them learn that the life of Dalits, especially Dalit women, is worth nothing.

In 2016, Equality Labs, reported that 40 percent of the 500 tech workers surveyed reported having experienced some form of caste discrimination, with workers complaining of caste-based slurs, derogatory remarks about affirmative action for caste-oppressed people, discriminatory hiring processes, disparate salaries and benefits, unfair appraisal processes, or identify another's caste background, caste-based workplace sexual harassment, and bullying in the workplace (Soundararajan et al. in Equity Lab, 2016). A Dalit woman who works in the technology industry says, "we want to continue to work in our occupations because we are good at our jobs, and we are sound engineers. We are role models for our community" (Nitasha Tiku, 2020).

Another example shows the strengthening of caste communities beyond the border among South diasporas and, at the same time, the double marginalization of upper caste women. Sanam Roohi (2017), in her research about the migration of a particular dominant caste *Kamma* community from Andhra Pradesh to the USA. She argues that the Kamma community, a high caste community in Andhra Pradesh, India, is well placed in American companies. Such pathways further enable future migrants from the same caste groups to negotiate transnational spaces and become successful high-skilled migrants. *Kamma* students with strong caste networks in the USA find it easier to get a job in small IT firms run by *Kammas* or get hired in software companies where the recruitment managers are *Kammas*. Marriages in such transnational set-ups become an essential mechanism through which transnational migration among high-skilled workers is sustained over time.

After working for a few years in the USA, male professionals return home to look for marriage alliances in their home region and bring their wives to the USA. A consistent pattern is seen in which several young women plan on shifting to the USA through marriage. Their parents make a substantial dowry payment in exchange. Over the past several years, there has been a subtle shift where women migrated to study abroad. This is an excellent opportunity for many parents to find the groom and bride settled in the USA. The search for already employed women has affected the dowry system in the Coastal Andhra region. These developments are new but already point to the role of high-skilled migration in traditional marriage structures. However, Roohi's study questions women's role, which tends to be double burdened as a blend of traditional and modern,

primary caregiver and economically active. Moreover, since these marriages are endogamous, they point to the persistence of caste as a key modality of upper-caste immigrants from Coastal Andhra to the USA (Roohi, 2017).

In many ways, these cases show the proclivity of upper-caste communities that aspire to whiteness and ally with White supremacy, thereby puncturing the tendency to represent the South Asian diaspora as monolithic, homogenous, and casteless. Against this background, this project will enter three texts: literary texts written by Bharati Mukherjee, the matrimonial site-*Jeevansathi.com* managed by the Indian and Indian diaspora, and the blog written by Karunakaran et al. The representation of caste and gender will be the central theme of discussion in my engagement with all three texts.

Chapter 5. Representation of gender, caste, and class: Re-vision of Bharati Mukherjee's works[30]

Earlier, we have seen the diasporic elements which Bharati Mukherjee has beautifully portrayed in her novels from the perspective of South Asian diaspora woman. I have looked at Mukherjee's works from the point of gender, the position of women within diaspora writing, and the socio-political situation of women in the male dominated community of the diaspora. Besides, her novels show "different phases of diaspora women: from expatriate to immigrant women, through different writing styles and psychology behind the narration" (Gupta, 2021). There is a transition from nostalgia, the struggle of un/belongingness, and the rejection of in-betweenness to a balanced, bold, and adaptive migrant narration. Accordingly, various research works have been done on her novels, considering the tremendous shift in the writing style, cultural change, and character building from a feminist perspective. Laura Peco González (2003) has discussed the construction of multicultural feminine identity through her novels. Ana María Crespo Gómez has talked about the significance of "home" in Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Darkness* (1985). Katherine Miller (2004) has talked about diaspora identity construction from a feminist perspective through Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Desirable Daughters*. Bhagabat Nayak (2005) has discussed her struggle between expatriate and migrant identity through her novel *Desirable Daughters*. In the same line, Jopi Nyman (2009) talks about the changing notion of identity, home, and nation through her novel *Desirable Daughters*. Maria Luz González (2015) has researched "Bharati Mukherjee's struggle against cultural balkanization." Further, Mukherjee's novels are one of the most referred works in the appreciation of Third World feminism.

Through her novels, Mukherjee has criticized the teaching of womanhood, which has been taught to South Asian women. The teachings are considered patriarchal, Brahmanical, and imperialist: an obedient daughter, a widow going to be *Sati*, and a loyal wife. *The Tiger's daughter* exemplifies the figure of an obedient daughter as the title itself shows *The Tiger's daughter* connecting her identity with her father's and calling her father "the Tiger" (1971). She

[30] This chapter has been published under the title:
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is always under the shade of her father. However, when she goes abroad, she marries a foreigner, breaking all the norms of an obedient daughter.

Similarly, in the novel *Jasmine* (1989), Jasmine is imposed with the norms of widowhood after becoming a widow. She is cornered in the house with her mother to live her life disconnected from society. However, she does not give up her life and decides to travel to the USA. At that time, she wanted to *Sati* herself for her husband at the place where her husband was supposed to study. Later she gives up the idea of sacrificing herself and chooses to move ahead. In the last novel, Tara, married at 19, leaves her husband and starts living with a boyfriend. All three characters, seen from a feminist perspective, have broken the stereotyped womanhood traits imposed on South Asian women by their patriarchal cultural norms.

Mukherjee has moulded the projected South Asian womanhood and has presented a daughter who breaks the caste, class, religion, and nation's norms and marries a foreigner. A widow who rejects widowhood and *Sati* and moves ahead in new relationships. A divorcee who is in live-in with another man. Many works have been done on breaking the stereotypical role of South Asian diaspora women. A. Aarthi and N Latha (2021) have talked about the "Quest for Female identity in Mukherjee novel Jasmine." Ramesh Babu and Phaniraja Kumar have also focused on the feminist perspectives in Bharati Mukherjee's novels, especially the rejection of suppression of Third World diaspora women and their potentiality of adaptability among the protagonists of her novels. Besides, Mukherjee's novels have also become a site to research the intersection of gender and race. Brinda Bose (1993) has talked about the double marginalization of South Asian diaspora women because of gender and race through Mukherjee's novels.

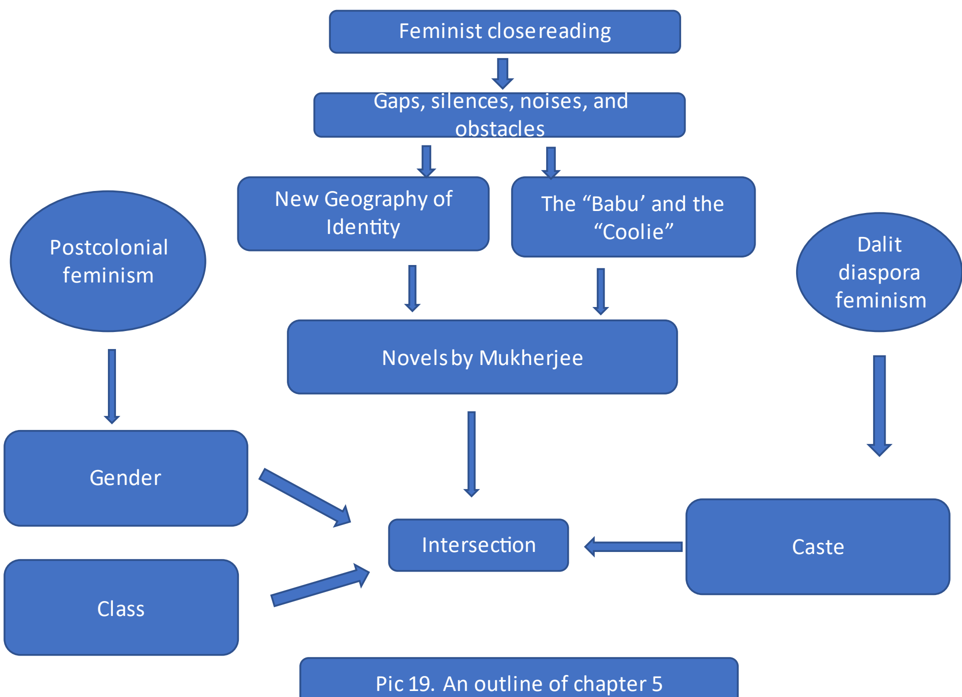
However, Mukherjee's works have rarely become the focus of the intersection of caste, gender, and class reading. Alpana Sharma Knippling (2017) in her book chapter offers a reading of the novels with respect to the presence of the Other and representation. She has questioned how Mukherjee, who carried an upper-middle-class represent the economically and ethically marginalized others in the first person. Debjani Bannerjee (2017) is critical about the presentation of the historical facts with distortion which remains "unifocal, drawing on the hegemonic point of view" (p. 162)

In one of her interviews with María Elena Martos Hueso and Paula García Ramírez (2010), she was questioned regarding the subjects to whom her writing emphasized in the novel *Desirable Daughters*. Mukherjee replied that her upbringing was from a particular caste and class where she was taught to behave in a certain way, speak the same politics, and have the same accent (Martos Hueso & García Ramírez with Bharati Mukherjee, 2010, p. 134). Following her life, she chose to write about high class because, according to Marta Hueso and García Ramírez, "she wanted to write about a particular lifestyle from where she comes. She feels it was her sense of vanishing class that did not have the right to exist anymore" (ibid). This is an interesting point, as the writer is aware of her privileges and wants to break them. This could be the reason why the writer has always lucidly mentioned the socio-economic background of the protagonists of the novels and the consequences of the privileges and marginalization of being a high-caste woman from the upper-middle class. It is also true that in some of her novels such as *Wife, Jasmine,* and *Darkness*, she brings characters from middle or lower middle class.

With this background, this chapter will examine Mukherjee's fiction beyond the question of gender and consider other significant issues (that can be) encountered among the diaspora, such as caste and class hierarchy. Starting from the writer herself, several questions will be discussed, such as: How are gender, class, and caste intersect in the marginalization of South Asian diaspora women? How are the lower caste and lower-class women represented in Mukherjee's writing? In concrete, who is writing and about whom are the novels written?

A feminist close reading (Lukic & Sánchez Espinosa, 2011) of the novels will help analyze them. As shown in the picture below, the chapter will use feminist close reading to understand the "gaps," "silences," "noises" and "obstacles" in the novel. "Gaps, silences, noises, and obstacles here refer to the space between metaphorical and literal meanings of literature. They push the limits of language to non-language, the other side of the literature and narrative, which is hidden" (Khair, 2011, pp. 6-11). These "gaps," "silences," "noises," and "obstacles" are vital because they help decipher the meaning historical and cultural aspects hidden in the background and between the lines. In this study, "gaps," "silences," "noises," and "obstacles" will be deciphered through two theories. First, I will use the discussion by Susan Stanford Friedman, "the new geography of identity," which she has widely discussed in her book *Mappings: Feminism and the cultural geographies of encounter* to underline the complexity of the

multiplicity of identities that go beyond gender and at the same time prioritizes the gender (1998, pp. 20-26). In this study, the "new geography of identity" will help examine the debate on gender, class, and caste, which keeps changing relatively and spatially. This movement from gender, class and then caste covers a panorama from postcolonial to Dalit diaspora feminism. Second, an analysis of the writer's and her characters' socio-economic positions will be carried out based on the discourse of the "Babu" classes and "Coolie" (Subaltern) by Tabish Khair (2001). Khair describes the socio-economic position of Indian or Indian diaspora English writers. In those instances, his focus is caste and class, which overlap with gender. In this chapter, the novels *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971), *Jasmine* (1989), and *Desirable Daughters* (2002) will be read closely to underline the aspects that can answer questions such as Who is crossing the border? What is the process of crossing the border like? How does the migration process change based on gender, class, and caste? Besides, the novels are used to raise questions on the representation of caste, gender, and class cross border. All these aspects and questions will be examined in the final discussion. Below, I have given a chart of methods and methodologies used in this chapter.



Pic 19. An outline of chapter 5

Indeed, Mukherjee's novels cannot be studied individually to understand the caste system within India or outside India. A reader must thoroughly understand the complexity of caste, class, and gender, which may or may not be directly discussed in Mukherjee's novels.

5.1. Susan Friedman's "New Geography of Identity"[31]

Before starting the discussion, I want to start with Susan Stanford Friedman's "six interrelated but distinct discourses within the "new geography of identity, which has undermined or complicated the understanding beyond gender" (Friedman, 1998, p. 20). In this case study, I have chosen Friedman's "new geography of identity" instead of "politics of location" for some reason. "Politics of location" was first proposed by Adrienne Rich to examine the limits of feminism in the United States in the 1980s. Later the term was expanded by feminists from different parts of the world. Especially in the case of South Asian diaspora feminism, Chandra Talpade Mohanty has discussed about the "politics of location" with race and imperialism (1995). "Experience must be historically interpreted and theorized if it is to become the basis of feminist solidarity and struggle, and it is at this moment that an understanding of the politics of location proves crucial" (Mohanty, 1995, p. 82). In her article "Multiple Mediation," Lata Mani argues for a revised "politics of location" that demonstrates that the "relation between experience and knowledge is now seen to be not one of correspondence but one fraught with history, contingency, and struggle" (Mani, 1990, 26).

Avtar Brah defines "politics of location" to mean the gendered spaces of class, race, ethnicity, religion, region, and age, shifting cultural, religious, and linguistic boundaries of journeys across geographical and psychic borders (Brah, 1996, p. 204). The South Asian diaspora feminists have opened broader aspects to discuss the "politics of location." In my GEMMA master's thesis, I widely worked with politics of location when I was talking about the South Asian diaspora women in terms of their diasporic positions in search of their identities: as sites of

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[31] This section of the chapter is the part of my master's thesis:
Gupta, Shilpi. (2018). *(Dis) locating Homeland:" In-betweenness" in Monica Ali's* 'Brick Lane' *and Taslima Nasreen's* 'French Lover', GEMMA TFM Submitted to the Instituto de las Mujeres y de género, University of Granada, Spain.

un/belongingness. However, as caste is a critical part in this study, I do not see any discussion by the writers mentioned above which leads to the caste issue. Certainly, they have initiated the discussion beyond gender and argued that history, culture, experiences, class, race, ethnicity, religion, region, and age, shifting cultural, religious, and linguistic bounds are necessary aspects to discuss in the politics of location. However, they have not opened a discussion platform for gendered caste hierarchy. Indeed, some scholars have considered caste as part of the above discussion within culture, history, ethnicity and many more but have not touched caste specifically or, if discussed, with limitations. I appreciate the writers mentioned above and their contribution, but I want to emphasize caste and not get into the above debate, which they have already done. I decided to start with the theory provided by Friedman, which covers broader aspects and helps in the understanding of gender, class, and caste in a different spectrum. These are the discourses of "multiple oppression, multiple subject positions, contradictory subject positions, relationality, situationality, and hybridity" (Friedman, 1998, p. 19). As far as the three novels by Mukherjee are concerned, these discourses help in understanding the position of women with regard to their caste and class.

Friedman uses geography "to crystallize momentarily a new, rapidly moving, magnetic field of identity studies which is polyvocal and often contradictory" (1998, pp. 18-19). With her six discourses on the "new geography of identity," she covers the changing paradigm of feminism from the 1970s to the 1990s. Friedman uses "multiple oppression" or "double jeopardy" which delineates "the difference among women where gender is double marginalized because of other factors, maybe, class, race, religion," or 'caste' in this case study (p. 20). Then she emphasizes "multiple subject positions" which is different from the first discourse in the sense that "a subject might have multiple identities but is not suffering or marginalized because of all of them. The subjects have multiple identities and may or may not be suppressed because of them" (ibid). And then she talks about the "contradictory subject position," which is like the "multiple subject positions," however, it reminds the readers that "some of the identities might give privileges as others could be the reason for marginalization" (p. 21). For instance, a lower caste man and an upper caste woman have "contradictory subject positions." Then comes "relationality" and situationality which emphasize "the fluidity of identity that is not a fixed or static essence" and "fluidity of identity from setting to setting" (p. 22). Then the last two approaches cover the recent phenomenon of postcoloniality, traveling, migrating, constructing new identities through

diasporas, migrants, exiles, expatriates etc.. The last one is "hybridity," which has "emerged from ethnic, postcolonial, and diasporic studies and touched the production of new identities because of movement" (p. 24). Together, these six discourses have framed the theory to go deeper in understanding gender, covering different perspectives.

Mukherjee and her characters are on the path of "hybridity" as they have created a "third space" from the standpoint of the multiplicity of their diasporic identity. Together with that, there are other factors, such as gender, race, class, and caste which challenge us to think from various discourses discussed by Friedman. As we are going to see further how Mukherjee presents her protagonists in urban and rural transnational spaces and then she complicates their identities with gender, caste, and class, which challenges the reader to understand the "multiple subject positions" of the characters and equally understand the "multiple jeopardies" and "contradictory positions" of the characters. Hence, the "silences," "gaps," "noises," and "obstacles" will be deciphered in this chapter, ensuring that this research focuses on other cultural aspects beyond gender. Indeed, other factors need to be analyzed, such as the characters' caste, class, national identity, educational background, and race. To start the discussion, the chapter will commence with the socio-economic condition of the writer based on the "Babu" and "Coolie" distinction (Khair, 2001).

5.2. Bharati Mukherjee and the distinction based on Khair's the "Babu" and the "Coolie" dichotomy

Mukherjee lived in a cosmopolitan city, Calcutta (nowadays known as Kolkata)[32], where her family maintains a high caste and upper-middle-class conservative culture during colonial times, which she also called *Bhadralok* society. She studied in an anglicized Bengali school run by nuns in the recently become independent India. She then moved outside India to the First World to study, married a foreigner, settled in Canada, and finally moved to the USA as a South Asian

[32] "The city was renamed from Calcutta to Kolkata in 2001 because Calcutta was the anglicized version of its original name. The native Bengali speakers of the city have always pronounced Kolkata in place of Calcutta. The change of cities's name was a political attempt to move away from the colonial naming and reclaiming the the significance of the original names" (Culture Trip, https://theculturetrip.com/asia/india/articles/the-reasons-why-calcutta-was-renamed-kolkata/).

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woman diaspora writer. Mukherjee's social, familial, educational, and economic background reminds me of Tabish Khair's distinction about the Indian origin diaspora writers in his *Babu Fictions* (2001). He has described the "socio-economic" and "discursive position" of Indian English writers, where his primary focal points are gender, class, and caste. He has studied Indian and Indian diaspora fiction and non-fiction writers in his analytical study, where the socio-economic line of division of Indian society (especially emphasizing the Indian-origin English writers) has been conceptualized between the "Babu" and "Coolie" (Subaltern) classes. He differentiates between the "Babu" and "Coolie" by saying that:

> The Babus are middle or upper-middle-class, mostly urban (cosmopolitan), Brahmanized and/or "westernized," and fluent in English. The coolie classes, on the other hand, are non-English speaking, not or less significantly "westernized," not or less Brahmanized, economically deprived, culturally marginalized, and, often, rural or migrant-urban population. (Khair, 2001, pp. 9-10)

Although Mukherjee unhouses herself from her Indian social and economic status and follows the re-housement in American culture, she introduces most of her protagonists especially *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Desirable Daughter*s as members of the dominant caste and upper-middle class. This fact reflects her *Bhadralok* social and economic status, which she carried throughout her life in India.

Besides, Mukherjee's family's socio-economic position delineates the colonial social stratification that the countries like India have witnessed, as discussed by Gayatri Spivak (1988). She affirms that "dominant indigenous groups on all India level are a class of Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, opinions, morals, and intellect. They are the colonial administrators and organizers of the colonial land" (Spivak, 1988, p. 77). Tabish Khair also comments on the heterogeneity of Indians explaining that:

> [W]ith the withdrawal of the Englishman and growing class differences and cosmopolitanism in India, the postcolonial triangle was constructed between Coolie India, the upstart Babu/cultural Coolie (that is middle class and literate but in a vernacular language) and varieties of the cosmopolitan and accomplished colonial Babu. (2001, p. 12)

According to Khair, the "colonial Babu" did not only stand against the non-babu Indians (Coolie class), but they became the copy of the English men. A similar connection can be perceived in *Tiger's Daughter* and *Desirable Daughters,* where the protagonists show the family's connection with its bourgeois and *Badhralok* social status. Mukherjee does not deny the privileges which an upper caste and upper-middle class woman gets being in Brahminical society that she shows through the protagonists of the two mentioned novels. However, simultaneously, such privileges because of caste and class demand the readers to read the "gaps," "silences," and "obstacles" present in the novel to understand the complexity of being a woman in a dominant caste and upper-middle-class. Then going further, one should also question the relative position of women of lower caste in relation to the position of dominant caste and upper middle class.

5.3. Mukherjee's novels from the perspective of caste, class, and gender

5.3.1. *The Tiger's Daughter*

Bharati Mukherjee's first novel, *The Tiger's Daughter,* was published in 1971 in the USA. The novel begins with the background of a colonized India where upper-middle-class and high-caste "colonial Babu" Indians are allied with the colonizer. The protagonist describes her link with the colonizers: "her father used to be invited to a British club by a liberal young Englishman" (*Tiger's Daughter*, 1971, p. 10). Further, the protagonist, named Tara, mentions that "she studied in an anglicized school" where she learned how "British colonizers were the savior of the Indian people" (ibid). In a colonial India or recently independent India, upper-middle-class and high-caste Indians borrowed colonial attitudes which were influenced by the 19th-century Victorian patriarchal norms. The colonial attitude and Victorian patriarchy doubled with the local patriarchal and Brahminical caste apartheid, creating a complex package. The system created divisions and subdivisions based on gender, caste, class, and region. The "colonial Babu" on the top is the one Spivak calls "the copy of the colonizers" (Spivak, 1984, p. 77). They are the "Indians in blood and color but English in taste, opinions, morals, and intellect" (ibid). They were the colonial administrators and organizers of the colonial land.

The Tiger's Daughter moves on with the independent story of Tara Banerjee, the great-granddaughter of Harilal Banerjee and the daughter of the Bengal Tiger, the owner of the famous Banerjee & Thomas. The protagonist is sent to the USA, where she falls in love and marries an American. Tara crosses the border as an upper-middle-class and higher-caste Indian to study in the USA. She travels back to India after seven years as an American wife. The novel's main plot is in independent India, where the focus is to show the protagonist's struggle of being in-between: Indian *beti* (Indian daughter) or *Americawali* (American wife), which is how the protagonist is referred to.

Since the protagonist herself belongs to an upper-middle business-class family, a Brahmin Bengali, the novel also centers itself in Calcutta's middle and upper-middle-class society. However, other stories go on in the background. The novel's background is the glimpses of the labor class protests in urban Calcutta. Of course, these incidents are shown in a background that a regular reader will not emphasize or are the "noises" that may go unheard by the readers. However, the labor protest is a significant step in the city to break the high-class authority, for instance, by opening schools for the lower caste (here the discussion goes on the caste) restricted to the dominant caste Bengalis. This incident connects to the historical moments when communism was taking birth in West Bengal, India. The narrator is not mentioning the caste differences but shows the concern toward existing class distinction among the people of Calcutta.

Moreover, when describing the labor movements or their presence, the narrator talks from a privileged vantage point, for example, while sitting in a luxurious car, living in a grand secured home, or looking at the laborers from the top of the hotel where she used to spend time with her friends, surrounded by the people who served them. At the novel's beginning, she writes, "while buses were burning and workers surrounding the warehouses, few come to Catelli, a five-star hotel for their daily ritual of espresso or tea" (*The Tiger's Daughter*, 1971, p. 4). The anger among the upper-middle-class people can be seen against the workers demanding salary hikes, where the protagonist is sitting with them and showing us the class distinction. The narrator narrates, "these English-speaking people were locked in a private world of what should have been, and they relished every twinge of resentment and defeated that time reserved for them" (ibid). The protagonist refers to this situation as a pre-colonial and colonial hangover of the dominant caste and upper-middle-class who feared losing their power in an independent India.

At the same time, lower-caste and lower-class people struggle for their daily wages. Such protests are presented as the chaos of the city. Such changes were marked unaccepted by the protagonist's friends; one among them said, "talking of schools, Tara should see how St. Blaise's has changed! Those nuns are taking *Marwaris*[33] by the dozens!" (p. 54).

Further, in order to understand the "silent" presence of imperial, Brahmanical patriarchy, which a woman of upper-middle-class and dominant caste goes through, without noticing the marginalization hidden in the privileges, we will closely go through the novel. Tara belongs to a dominant caste and upper-middle-class society with a privileged social position; she is untouched by the riot and only sees the mob as an outsider from the "above." Mukherjee challenges the Brahmanical patriarchal system in the first stage by introducing Tara, who is married to a foreigner outside her nation, religion, and caste. At the same time, there are many "obstacles" that Mukherjee wants her readers to notice about an upper-middle-class and dominant caste woman.

Tara's marriage and her husband are accepted by the family and friends of Tara, who belongs to a conservative upper caste upper-middle-class society. This is possible because she married a White man from a First World country. This situation brings us to notice the difference between the White/rest, and the colonizer/colonized, the discourse carried with the difference. In Tara's case, her marriage outside caste, nation, and religion is accepted only because she married someone who comes from the top in the hierarchy of the colonizers and colonized as discussed by Spivak (1988) and Khair (2001). Otherwise, the results could have been violent for breaking the caste norms and marrying someone outside the caste, especially a lower caste member[34]. The protagonist might have left the *Bhadralok* caste and class system, but the system never truly let her go. Even after marrying a foreigner and living for seven years with him in a foreign land, she is not able to isolate herself from her caste and class, which she had before marriage. When she returns to India, she is conditioned with the same caste and class norms she learned from the beginning.

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[33] Marwari refes to a caste group which comes in OBCs (Other backward classes) and not part of dominant caste. One can refer to the chapter 4.

[34] One can refer to this situation in a novel written by Arundhati Roy: *The God of small things* (1997)

Tara went to a British school, St. Blaise, it was a privilege in a recently independent India, but at the same time, the school was a medium to impose its Victorian patriarchal norms. Tara was trained to be a good daughter, a fragile woman, learned to suppress her desires, to become an obedient wife of a higher caste and middle-class family and needs to be protected. The subjects she was taught were only aimed at making her a good wife and not an independent woman. For instance, the protagonist seeks her father's protection as the title says, *The Tiger's Daughter,* where she demonstrates herself as a daughter–protected. In the novel, Tara's relationships with P K Tuntunwala suggest her such passive dependence on males and an acute sensitivity towards her incompleteness (1971, p. 22). The characterization of Tara displays conventional patriarchal mindsets where a man controls power hierarchies in different societal relationships while a woman is encouraged to live mother/wife/daughter roles in a non-agentic and non-autonomous manner.

Many incidents are registered where Tara has opted to submit herself passively. For instance, Joyonto Roy Chowdhury, one of the business partners of Tara's father, wants to take her out for "a breath of fresh air first to the riverbank and then to view the squatters, but she is unwilling to put across a rational protest" (1971, p. 80; p. 113). Similarly, when she meets Tuntunwala in the annual charity carnival of the Calcutta Chambers of Commerce, she is unable to resist his peremptory gestures. She obeys him when he asks Tara to join him for a snap. Even though she does not like the peremptoriness of his gestures, she knows that she is going to "obey without much questioning" (1971, p. 77). The weekend trip to Nayapur also allows Mr Tuntunwala to take her sightseeing and escort her to his air-conditioned room without protest. She does not show any protest rather shows that she is glad of his sympathy (p. 196).

When he authoritatively sends the maid away, she is unable to protest (1975, p. 196). She coquettishly converses with him as such behavior is traditionally linked with passive feminine charms. Her training at St. Blaise (her school) had prepared her for genteel and discreet submission; it had not equipped her with strong survival skills. Also, as a Brahmin woman, she has been trained to be a submissive woman where her will is not asked. Her British school shapes her feminine characteristics such as obedience, discipline, homemaking, and courteousness. Tara is distressed by the incident and wants to return to America, but she never tries to tell the misbehavior of Tuntunwala to her parents and friends. A confused and feared

Tara is never taught to stand up for herself; she depends on her father or husband for her protection. Also, if she is violated, the blame will ultimately come on her. These are the teachings she has always received. Ultimately, she has no control over her body and her desires.

In *The Tiger's Daughter*, Mukherjee has created a clear distinction between the upper-middle-class and lower-class Calcutta society. However, Mukherjee has indistinctively used the terms caste and class, which has questioned the significance of caste. Tara's stories and the riot are going on parallel, where she often finds herself at the crossroads where her class and caste meet the other's class and not the caste (as the writer has not mentioned). She feels privileged being on the other side, seeing the others struggling because of their class. Nevertheless, delineating the "silences" present in the novel reveals that the suppression of Tara is not only based on her gender inferiority but instead linked to her upper-middle-class and high caste. Her colonial and bourgeois status teaches her to be docile. These high caste privileges are the reason for her double suppression.

5.3.2. *Jasmine*

The next novel, *Jasmine* (1989) is a new genre of diaspora woman writing where the writer, unlike her earlier novels, has applied the notion of "re-incarnation" to the protagonist (Mukherjee, 1990, p. 18). In one of her interviews, Mukherjee connects herself to the same theory of re-incarnation about immigration as on which her novel is based on–

> [B]eing murdered and reborn at least three times from the correct young woman I was trained to be and was very happy, is very different from the politicized, shrill, civil rights activist I was in Canada, and from the urgent writer that I have become in the last few years in the United States. I can't stop. (Mukherjee, 1990, p. 18)

Similarly, one can see in the novel (1989) the evolution of the central character when she enters the unfamiliar American land and culture and goes through an oscillating series of painful and joyful experiences. The character believes in moving towards the future, a genetic transformation (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 222). The change in her name from Jyoti, Jasmine, Jane, and Jase signifies her movement from in her life which has affected not only her name but her personality. As she

calls herself "genetic" (122). The novel's theme coincides with the writer's life, but the protagonist, Jasmine, has a different socio-economic background from Mukherjee's, making the two lives different. Besides, through Jasmine, Mukherjee has portrayed a widow who rejects to accept widowhood imposed on her in India and finally forbids to exemplify herself as a *Sati*, a Brahmanical imposition on women of India. She chooses herself, the woman inside her, to live over imposed widowhood or *Sati* on her.

Jasmine crosses the border as a lower-class woman who buys her the ticket to the USA from the money she borrowed from her brothers. She travels with fake documents as a widow who wants to *Sati* herself at the university where her husband was supposed to study, but she turns down the idea. The caste she belongs to is not discussed or mentioned in the novel. Nevertheless, she travels to the USA as an economically lower-class widow without having any place to reach or return. She is one among many:

> Refugees and mercenaries and guest workers, you see, sleeping in airport lounges. You watch (them) unwrapping the last of (their) native foods, unrolling (their) prayer rugs, reading (their) holy books…(they) are the outcasts and deportees, strange pilgrims visiting outlandish shrines, landing at the end of tarmacs, ferried in old army trucks… dressed in shreds of national costumes, out of season, the wilted plumage of international vagabondage. (They) ask only one thing: to be allowed to land, to pass through, to continue. (*Jasmine*, 1989, pp. 100-101)

This character portrayal is a challenge to Mukherjee's characters in other novels, for whom crossing border was as easy as traveling to another city within the country. On the contrary, Jasmine symbolizes a mass of such immigrants who spend years hoping to cross the border for a better life or a job. Jasmine, who belongs to the other side of Mukherjee's earlier characters, has already lived through poverty and widowhood– "which is just better than the lower castes" (she compares widowhood with lower caste) –is more robust, determined, courageous, and looking forward (1989, p. 97). She does not complain about the life around her because she does not have many options. Instead, she finds ways to move ahead. She decides to travel alone after being widowed. Jasmine keeps moving and changing herself; she does not remain a widow crying for her husband in India, violated by an American, or as somebody's lover or wife in the USA. She takes control of her body and her sexuality to live her life. Laura Peco González (2004) has

delineated the South Asian female migrant survival skills in her article and also presented the characterization of Jasmine as a counter writing of passivity in women. Jasmine, according to her, is a character who stands strongly in front of the violence.

Mukherjee has successfully brought the "other" into the novel after 18 years of her first novel published in 1971. Like other protagonists, she is a woman, but her class doubly marginalizes her. She has to fake her identity and enter America as an illegal immigrant. Her class, gender, and unlawful entrance into a new land made her vulnerable to violation. Jasmine is raped on the day of her arrival in the USA and, unlike Tara in the earlier novel, becomes the murderer of her rapist. She knows she has to fight because she has no protector; she is not a mighty man's daughter or a renowned businessman's wife. She stands to challenge the cruelty against her.

There are two incidents of "multiple suppression" of Jasmine within American society and her diaspora Indian community. First is the rape of an Indian woman (non-American) by an American who knows the status of her immigration: an illegal lower-class Indian migrant woman. Second, her Indian community, the family of Devinder Vadhera, where she entered and lived as an Indian widow. She served them and worked in the kitchen. She is, to them (the Indian community), "a widow who should show a proper modesty of appearance and attitude; if not, it appeared she was competing with Namrata (a married woman)" (*Jasmine,* 1989, p. 145). Besides, her status as a widow becomes vital as a woman who does not deserve attention among Indian Diasporas.

Hence in the novel, the writer shows the plight of a woman crossing the border, especially when she is crossing with illegal documents from the Third World. Interestingly, Mukherjee has brought the protagonist into encounters with Americans (the natives) and Indian diasporas to show the racialization and sexualization of a Third World widow in the host land. However, mentioning only Jasmine's class and inability to decide her caste in the novel left the reader–who is closely reading the novel from Dalit diaspora feminism where gender and class intersect caste–with many questions and assumptions. The linking of caste with class and widowhood has answered that both have been poorly treated in India. "Mataji and I were alone in the widow's dark hut, little better than *Mazbis* (lowest Shikh caste) and Untouchables" (p. 97). However, this comparison and juxtaposition of caste with class and with widowhood leaves the caste apartheid as a superficial symbol without any discussion of it.

5.3.3. *Desirable Daughters*

Tara Lata is barely five when her groom dies from a snakebite on her wedding day. Her father decides to marry her to a tree so that at least she will remain a wife for her whole life. Harilal Banerjee organized a grand wedding ceremony for her daughter in 1879. Tara Chatterjee, the narrator and the protagonist of the novel is linked to Tara Lata, the Tree-bride, who becomes curious to know more about the trauma of the Tree-bride after her divorce from her husband Bishwapriya Chatterjee (p. 17). Hence, the novel's theme is a continuous shift between the "past" and "present," the "root" and "route" (Gilroy, 1933, p. 133) of Tara Chatterjee.

Desirable Daughters (2002) presents similar traditional gender roles to those, which Mukherjee portrayed in her first novel, *The Tiger's Daughter*. Analogously, the protagonist and her sisters have spent their adolescence in a much more affluent *Bhadralok* background. This society has guaranteed a privileged lifestyle to Tara and her sisters. The female characters are schooled in an anglicized environment with a conservative Brahmanical setup. Their traditional upbringing within a patriarchal design negates the possibility of assertive independence. The three daughters of the Bhattacharjee family, Padma, Parvati, and Tara, are desired because they are trained to fulfil daughterhood politely, serve wifely duties and are protected by their father. "Our father could not let either of my sisters out on the street; our car was equipped with window shades" (2002, p. 29).

The elder sister Padma is not allowed to follow her passion of becoming an actor as it does not suit a high-caste woman. She is not allowed to marry out of her caste to a Christian boy she loves and is pregnant with. The historical and cultural "gap" introduces us to an interesting point that a Christian boy symbolizes the lower caste in the Indian stratification of caste. It takes us to the history of the conversion of Dalits to Christians as an escape from the lower caste and suppression from the caste apartheid (Swaminathan Natarajan, 2010).

"Any violation of the codes, any breath of scandal, was unthinkable" (*Desirable Daughter*, 2002, p. 32). Padma is trained to be a silent and submissive wife and she even starts preaching the same to her sister. Padma reminds Tara of the models of mythical wives *Sita* and *Savitri,* who sacrificed their lives for their husbands. "Things are never perfect in marriage; a woman must be

prepared to accept less than perfection in this lifetime and model herself on *Sita*, *Savitri*, and *Behula*, the virtues wives of Hindu myths" (ibid, p. 134).

Parvati, her middle sister, married her choice, which was possible only because the boy was from the same caste. However, love marriage, even within the caste, is not preferred. Alarmed by Tara's elder sister Parvati's love marriage, Tara is married at nineteen. "My life was one long childhood until I was thrown into marriage" (Mukherjee, 2002, pp. 27-28). She is sent to Atherton, California, where her husband Bishwapriya tries to carve out an assemblance of Indian tradition in all respect. However, through Tara, Mukherjee has tried to portray a challenging female character who leaves her husband later, is divorced, and is a mother of a gay.

Indeed, Mukherjee delineates the atrocities inflicted by gender oppression in the novel, that is, women in child marriage, forced marriage, the limited prospect of career, carried the big name of their husbands and the burden of upper-middle-class and high caste womanhood. They should take care of the home and not go out to work as their husbands are enough for that. Only outside her marriage can Tara work to meet the needs of her and her son after the divorce. Once outside her marriage and her Indian community, Tara is able to adapt to the life of the host land. After getting out of her unsatisfied marriage, she has been on her path of consciousness of gender roles and chooses her freedom over her discontent marriage. She accepts the homosexual orientation of her son. Tara breaks the myth and chooses another man who suits her temperament and satisfies her sexual desires. Behind such love, one can also feel that Tara seeks love from Andy, her boyfriend, to be protected, and when he leaves her, she falls again for her ex-husband.

Again, the novel presents Tara as an individual from a high caste and upper-middle-class family who has crossed the border as a middle-class woman with a catholic education and is married to a reputed man living outside the country. She lives with all the privileges of a middle-class woman and a high-caste citizen, but she is oppressed in her gender role. The patriarchal system plays a very tough role for women with other privileges. They are educated and trained to be serene and passive in their catholic school, the wifely conduct within the conservative, orthodox family.

Further, Tara also becomes a point from where we can closely read the meetings of the Indian diaspora–a closed group of members of the upper-middle-class, high-caste Indian diaspora

society. They follow the same Indian patriarchal cultural norms of marriage and the role of women in marriage. They keep vigilance on each other. Tara was continuously under vigilance by her Indian community. She was even approached by Indian diaspora men for sexual pleasure and exploited by some. She leaves the marriage and Indian diaspora community to live as an outsider, which is not accepted by her family living in India and the USA. In this case, leaving a husband is treated as leaving the community.

5.4. The intersection of gender, caste, and class

In all her novels, Mukherjee has touched on the theme of gender widely. It is true that within the restricted area of Indian diaspora English fiction, the central female protagonists, especially Tara of both the novels, depicted by Mukherjee and the writer herself, share a "Babu" standard of life. Nevertheless, very often, there is a feeling of dissatisfaction with life. Such dissatisfaction relates to the gender issue they face at home or around. The writer has artistically presented the gender issues while narrating the encounter of Indian diaspora women within their Indian diaspora community, with non-Indians in the host land, and when diaspora women visit India to look back to their roots. The transnational presence of protagonists has produced the intersection of gender in multiple and complex ways.

In *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Desirable Daughters,* Mukherjee keeps reminding her readers about the class and caste of the protagonist. Being an upper-caste and upper-middle-class woman, Tara stands in a "contradictory position"; her socio-economic status is privileged, but at the same time, it is marginalized in multiple ways. Caste comes subtly into play when it refers to the upper-middle-class and upper-caste women within the Indian community. Class and caste intersect gender in the cases of both the Taras. The novels highlight the plight of a woman trained to be fragile, genteel, protected, and submissive to men. This widespread perception is that upper-middle-class and high-caste women are trained to be chaste. Hence patriarchy goes hand in hand with class and caste. Other factors that interfere with their caste and class are their marriage to an American, a White man, or an Indian diaspora businessman, and their education, which gives them a privileged position. Tara, in both novels, exemplifies the women who are moulded through the colonial discourse and high caste and upper-middle-class hierarchy. These

women are English educated, decent, trained in the British language, taste, thoughts, and conservative Brahmanical setup. They are taught to be well-behaved wives protected by their fathers/husbands. In two novels, the writer has shown the intersectionality of gender with the upper-middle class, high caste, and other factors such as university qualification and migration. She demonstrates the suppression of a woman from the position where she comes from upper caste and upper-middle-class.

Further, both cases are different when Jasmine comes into the picture. In the case of Jasmine, Mukherjee does not declare her caste identity and talks only about the lower economic class and her daily life financial struggle. Although the character of Jasmine is the result of the psychological status of the writer, she does not represent the socio-economic status of the writer. Jasmine symbolizes migrant women who risk their lives while crossing the border. The novel differentiates between documented and undocumented migrants, between classes, and between crossing with husband/father and without husband/father.

Mukherjee's writing about caste in all the cases is minimal. In *The Tiger's Daughter,* her reference is mainly based on class, where differences can be noticed between the narrator and her friend's class and the others protesting. Caste is superficially presented in the novel as a name that can be felt in the novel. At the same time, the narrator compares class with caste, interchanging the terms. Caste names are symbolically used to compare the downgrading plight of high-caste and upper-middle-class people. For example, when the protagonist's friends remind her about the entry of low caste in their Anglicized school. Also, in *Desirable Daughters,* the marriage of Padma is forbidden even when she is pregnant because the boy is a Dalit Christian. Again, the writer does not mention the link between Christianity and the lower caste. Further, in *Jasmine*, widows are compared with lower castes to showcase widows' oppressiveness metaphorically.

5.5. Conclusions

This chapter applauds the South Asian diaspora writers like Bharati Mukherjee for their feminist "hybrid" diaspora writings and for breaking the quintessential theme of male diaspora. The novel is about women bringing them to the forefront and questioning the teaching of womanhood. The

teaching is patriarchal, Brahmanical, and imperialist: an obedient daughter, a widow going to be *Sati*, a loyal wife. The writer has broken these stereotyped womanhood traits by moulding them and presenting a daughter who breaks the caste, class, religion, and nation's norms and marries a foreigner. A widow who rejects widowhood and *Sati* and moves ahead in new relationships. A divorcee who is in live-in with another man. Further, the diasporic situation of Tara from *Desirable Daughters* and Tara of *The Tiger's Daughter* follows a hybridized culture where her training in womanhood collides with the American culture.

The novels written by a high-caste and upper-middle-class woman are based chiefly on the characters in such a community. As Mukherjee said that she has chosen to write from her perspective: upper-middle-class and dominant caste woman (Martos Hueso & García Ramírez with Bharati Mukherjee, 2010, p. 134). One cannot neglect that gender, in these case studies, is shaped by high caste and upper-middle-class. It cannot be avoided that the widespread perception of Indian women as chaste and economically dependent on husbands and father is a high-caste issue. Also, one cannot compare the situation of these women with the ones who belong to a lower caste and class. There are many other factors that crossover and intersect which each other. Some are at the top of the hierarchy, and some are at the lower position. However, between these two binary positions, multiple positions keep shifting relatively and situationally; they contradict and multiply in their suppression, resulting in multiple or contradictory suppressive positions. Remembering the example of Tara, the privilege of belonging to the upper caste as a woman too sometimes causes double suppression. Compared to the earlier novel, in *Jasmine,* the class difference shows a different woman and different ways of marginalization. Higher and lower classes have different ways of suppressing women, and geographical change also influences their identities.

It is crucial to mention that the writer has shown the class difference in the mentioned novels. The writer uses the term caste in her conversations, but it never becomes a topic of embarrassment or exploration in the novel. Alternatively, if it is done, then in a subtle way or a "gap" that goes unrecognized by most foreign readers, non-Indian, non-caste, or privileged Indians. For example, in the case of *Jasmine*, the writer is not able to give any caste to the protagonist, whereas, in the other two novels, from the beginning, she has cleared the social and economic status of the protagonists, which demonstrates their dominant caste and upper-middle-

class. In *Jasmine*, the writer has overlooked the topic of caste by the class, as if her "lower class is her lower caste." This shows that Mukherjee has ignored the caste and existing complexity between caste and class hierarchy, especially from the "below" of the caste hierarchy. She introduced Jasmine from the other side, mentioning her lower class, but she did not refer to her caste. The reason could justify the writer's upper caste and class positioning where the caste issue is irrelevant. The writer fails to discuss the caste issue mainly when she readily introduces a lower-class woman. This results in sidelining of the women who carry their lower caste together with her class and are not represented in the writing of a diaspora woman of dominant caste and upper-middle class in her novels, even if she readily introduces the lower-class women.

Because of the negligence of intersectionality, there is a strong feeling of othering women who cross the border with their class and caste. It can be seen as a colonial Brahmanical strategy of dividing the diaspora population based on caste, where the privileged half is talked and is talking (here, the gender within the privileged caste and class is also referred to). At the same time, the other side is ghettoized and under-represented or not represented in the novels.

Also, the term caste is presented in all three novels. In *The Tiger's Daughter*, when the debate of the lower-class labor movement happens, the protagonist's friend criticizes the opening of schools to the lower caste. In *Jasmine*, widowhood is compared to the lower caste. In *Desirable Daughters,* the elder sister is prevented from marrying a Christian/ lower caste boy. This way, not that the caste-d gender or gendered caste "other" is completely ignored in her writing, but their presence is subsumed and marginalized. They are used as filler, maybe, a symbol but seldom as a character more than a metaphor, who might see reality differently from his/her narrator/writer.

As we have discussed in the pertinent chapter, the hierarchy of caste and othering caste-d gender and gendered caste is a pre-colonial phenomenon in India and the Indian subcontinent which was institutionalized for servitude and economic benefits during colonial times. We have also seen in post-independent India, Indians living on the mainland or beyond the border continues to practice the outcasting of a section of people based on caste. Intriguingly, the absence of caste among diaspora in the Mukherjee's novels or its subtle presence neglects the representation of the South Asian Diaspora who are coming lower castes among its readers. This could result in

misinformation or blinding the readers especially who are new to Indian diaspora issues such as non-South Asian and the new generation of the South Asian diaspora.

Chapter 6. Jeevansathi.com: Caste and gender difference in the South Asian diaspora matrimonial site[35]

Online life is real–we do not leave behind the body when we use computers to immerse ourselves online. (Radhika Gajjala, 2010, p. 521)

This chapter will highlight the presence of matrimonial sites in the life of the South Asian diaspora. Matrimonial sites have made their space among the South Asian diaspora as a forum for connecting them with their culture, marriage system, community, and homeland. Matrimonial sites started in the 1990s with the internet boom in South Asia and slowly spread all over the world. Recently, an analysis by similarweb.com (2023) shows the traffic on matrimonial sites https://www.similarweb.com/website/shaadi.com/competitors/. The site shows the current market (Feb 2023) of South Asian matrimonial sites in South Asia and other countries. According to its study, the table below lists the top ten matrimonial sites, along with number of visits in Feb 2023, and tag lines as seen on their home pages:

Table 1.		
Matrimonial sites	Total visits[36]	Tag lines
Shaadi.com	12.4 million	"Trusted matrimony & matchmaking service with over 35 million verified users. register free. Create matrimonial profile with shaadi.com & start your

[35] The chapter is published under the title:
Gupta, Shilpi. (2020). Do caste travel with the gendered body?: Reading Indian (diaspora) online matrimonial advertisements. *Investigacion joven con perspective de género V.* Madrid.

The chapter has been presented in a conference ECREADMM (European Communication Research and Education Association). https://mobile.twitter.com/ecreadmm/status/1385134264480587778

[36] Sum of all visits on desktop and mobile from the last month (Feb 2023)

		matrimony search now!”
Jeevansathi.com	4.3 million	“Most trusted Indian matrimony site. 10lac+ profiles, 3-level profile check, search by caste and community, privacy control & register free! ‘Be found’ now”
Bharatmatrimony.com	1.7 million visits	“Bharatmatrimony- the no. 1 & most trusted matrimony service for Indians. millions of success stories. Register free to find your perfect match.”
Shadi.com	235.2 thousand visits	“shadi.com | best online matrimonial site for singles. meet educated single men and women near your city. Join today register for free.”
Matrimonialsindia.com	203.6 thousand visits	“One of the best-trusted online matrimony sites with secure matchmaking service providers with 10 lakhs+ active marriage profiles. Register free! get the perfect”
Tamilmatrimony.com	1.6 million visits	“Tamilmatrimony - the no. 1 & most successful Tamil matrimonial site from bharatmatrimony. Trusted by lakhs of Tamil brides & grooms globally. register free!”

Telugumatrimony.com	2.0 million visits	"Telugumatrimony - the no. 1 & most successful Telugu matrimonial site from Bharatmatrimony. trusted by lakhs of Telugu brides & grooms globally. Register free!"
Community matrimony	300.2 thousand visits	"Communitymatrimony - the no. 1 & most successful community matrimony site from matrimony.com. Trusted by millions of community brides & grooms world"
Bandhan.com	139.0 thousand visits	"Meet your perfect match on mobile. bandhan.com provides simple, fast, and easy search for 1 crore matrimony profiles from top matrimony sites in India."
Divorceematrimony.com	1.4 million visits	"Divorceematrimony - the no. 1 & most successful divorcee matrimony site from communitymatrimony.com. trusted by millions of divorcee brides & grooms world over. register free!"
Sangam.com	3.8 million visits	"Find matches within your community. trusted by over 5 million people. Sangam.com is India's fastest growing

		matrimonial & matchmaking service.”

Many scholars have affirmed in their works that matrimonial sites have replaced the traditional style of matchmaking and newspaper matrimonial advertisements. For instance, Sandeep Shako (2004) has discussed that “relocation” and “reorientation” of South Asians have been the primary reason for embracing the digital matrimonial sites, especially among the South Asian diaspora who thought that “mass media constitute a society’s meeting ground” (p. 58). Anupam Mittal, the owner of Shaadi.com, remarks in one of his interviews that the South Asian diaspora has been the first client group to use matrimonial sites to search for life partners (Satrajit Sen, 2011). Sucharita Sen (2020) observes that the modernization in the arrangement of marriages has affected the traditional modes of looking for the bride and groom. Shako (2004) states that “because of global spread of South Asians, the traditional societies and cultural practices experiences a breakdown especially in traditional marriage and partner selection” (p. 57). He further writes that, “there was the need for modern developments to merge with the old traditional culture” (p. 58). Shako affirms that matrimonial sites, with their delicate combination of traditional and modern, has attracted South Asian diasporas to search for compatible life partners within and beyond national borders.

These matrimonial sites bring people together based on their national identity and, at the same time, filter the bride or groom according to the user's criteria based on caste, religion, class, region, and language, among many other parameters. This case study will examine how matrimonial sites, which boomed in the new liberal market in the 1990s, perpetuate the endogamic marriage system based on caste and socioeconomic class status. As we have seen in the Brahminic texts, the endogamic marriage system has been highly valued in South Asian Hindu marriage culture. In this sense, B. R. Ambedkar also underlines, “arranged weddings are typically endogamous, with the bride and husband being members of the same caste to strengthen caste lines” (1946, 2004, p. 136). So, we will investigate matrimonial sites as a space which divide the South Asian population (including also those living outside the country) based on caste and class and creating “imagined communities” based on these factors among South

Asian diaspora. In this research work, matrimonial sites help delineate the function of marriage, as organized by matrimonial sites, in (re)producing caste, perpetuating normative heterosexuality, and suppressing upper caste and lower caste women globally.

In order to move ahead with the proposed question, I will use Jeevansathi.com, a matrimonial site, as a case study from where I have collected 50 matrimonial profiles (25 male and 25 female profiles). In this research study, I will use two research methods, digital ethnography and digital autoethnography, to discuss how the internet has been involved in the research. For instance, I am creating profiles, choosing specific options while filling out the form, collecting data from the matrimonial site, and taking ethical precautions during the research. Further, I will use postcolonial and Dalit diaspora feminist close reading of the data collected. Finally, this case study is significant to understand the definition of marriage, diaspora, women, and men according to the dominant South Asian upper-caste diaspora perspectives and tropes.

6.1. Matrimonial advertising websites

Matrimonial sites are online advertising platforms encouraging South Asians to look for spouses in South Asia and among the diasporas. Sarbeswar Sahoo (2017) explains that matrimonial in *Oxford Dictionaries Online* is defined as "relating to marriage or married people" (p. 354). She says that the word "matrimonial" is commonly used in South Asia to refer to matchmaking processes, specifically through print or online media. South Asians who have traveled outside their country or community have embraced digital media quickly as they found matrimonial sites as a medium to being attached to the marriage process and one of them is finding a spouse. Sandeep Shako (2004) expresses that the reason for the boom of matrimonial sites could be the long-standing Indian marital values which can be re-lived with the digital connection among South Asian diaspora. He also affirms that the South Asian diaspora who migrated to different parts of the world found matrimonial sites as a medium to find spouses and continue the South Asian marriage process. Finding a spouse from the same community has been important for families as it connects them to their homeland and its culture.

The *Associated Chambers of Business and Industry* in India predicted in 2014 that by 2017, the internet matrimonial market would be worth $250 million (Bhatia, 2014). The *New York*

Times said India would have over 1500 matrimonial websites in 2017 (Sinha, 2015). In 2022, P V Vyshnavi (2022), in her analytical reading of matrimonial sites has showed that 1500 matrimonial sites work in India and are attracting non-resident Indians (Vyshnavi, 2022). Then, during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was another boom in the online matrimonial market. Jeevansathi.com, according to Vyshnavi, generated 10 million U.S. dollars, and Shaadi.com made a market of 40 million U.S. dollars in 2020 (2022). Tanushree Basuroy (2022) also published a statistic showing that in India, matrimonial sites in 2017 made a market of 0.11 billion U.S. dollars. In 2022, the market was expected to rise to 0.26 billion U.S. dollars.

Sabeswar Sahoo (2017) states that Indian origin people, whether living in India or outside the country, frequently inquire, “Have you tried the matrimonials?” or suggest “, you should create a profile on one of the matrimonial sites,” when a man or woman of marriageable age finds it difficult to find a suitable match. According to her, this is because matrimonial sites offer a variety of possibilities for people to find a compatible spouse globally. She also says matrimonial sites are becoming more popular and fashionable as they combine modern tools with traditional methods of finding a spouse. Hence, according to her, the increase in online matrimonial advertisements is a sign of the shifting social structures, identities, and ideas about love, marriage, and gender roles in modern India and among the diasporas outside India.

Then, though love marriages have always existed in Indian and Indian diaspora society, the preferred method for finding a spouse was to circulate relevant information in the extended family and community. A match would be arranged after a series of conversations and meetings between the aspiring bride and groom’s families, friends of the family and acquaintances. The three seasons of the Netflix series *Indian Matchmaking* (2020) directed by Smriti Mundhara, bring out the continued prevalence of parents’ active involvement in arranging marriages for their offspring. This internationally well-received program has attracted audiences towards the culture of arranged marriage in India. However, the series has been criticized for the underlying endorsement of caste and class as valid criteria for arranged marriages among the South Asian diaspora society. Meehika Barua’s (2022) article “TV that treats women as baby factories: how Indian Matchmaking glorifies toxic stereotypes” and another BBC article, “Indian Matchmaking on Netflix: ‘Sima aunty’ raises eyebrows – again” (2022), have demonstrated such casteist and classist concepts of this Netflix programme.

> [Indian matchmaking] represents only one kind of people. They are all rich, upper-caste and fair-skinned people. There are no lower castes or religious minorities, except for one Sikh, and I can't remember seeing anyone who has darker skin colour. (Indian Matchmaking on Netflix: ‘Sima aunty’ raises eyebrows – again, BBC, 2022)

Nevertheless, I will first talk about traditionally arranged marriages when the internet was not popularly involved in this process, and there was the culture of a “mediator” for arranging the marriages. Parveen Mody (2002) explains that mediators were the people who used to negotiate between the bride and groom’s family. The mediators used to take the marriage proposal to the groom’s family and initiate the marriage process. S/he would be the most crucial in discussing how the marriage ceremonies should be carried out. S/he would also have the role of negotiator between two parties about the dowry to be given to the family of the groom (Mody, 2002, p. 223). I will discuss the marital arrangement system according to my experiences of marriages in my family and the closest social environment. Typically, parents look for a spouse of the same caste within their family networks, ensuring compatibility based on affluence, horoscope, physical traits, and education. Hence, marriage symbolizes and affirms the collective nature of the family and larger kinship units in which the families are embedded. Besides, children are prepared for this marriage setup from a very young age. They are taught to place the family’s interests ahead of their own. There are characteristics related to boys and girls for marriage which are groomed in them from their childhood.

Girls are taught to take care of the house, not to get out of the house unattended, to participate in domestic tasks, to take care of their bodies so that they are neither too skinny nor too fat, should keep their faces lighter in color, to talk as little as possible. They are asked to behave appropriately because they must go to another home and should please others in the family. Conversely, boys are taught not to stay at home, to have a social life because staying home is considered feminine characteristics, to conduct studies according to the job or the family business, not to enter the kitchen, to be bold, and so on. While meeting the boy and the girl, family members ensure these teachings remain in place. The girl’s characteristics are more important in this case because she is the one who will be going to the new family, whereas the boy’s behavior can be adjusted. Family and mediators take control of arranging the marriage, and if they do not feel the girl or the arrangements meet their suitability criteria, they can cancel the

wedding. The boy and girl have no say before or after the marriage. Hence, the selection of bride or groom is layered and nuanced, involving many proxy indicators of compatibility such as caste, profession, economic background, and the family of the prospective match.

However, there are some secondary aspects, such as daily life habits–alcohol consumption, smoking, and eating habits (vegetarian or non-vegetarian), which can be negotiated. The screening process also involves astrologers who evaluate the horoscopes of the prospective bride and groom for compatibility. Once suitable matches are screened, the future groom and his family visit the bride's family for a face-to-face meeting to assess the compatibility of both families and the prospective partners. Typically, the partners are permitted to speak briefly with each other in the presence of their parents. Then the marriage agreement is followed by intricate negotiations over the marriage's financial arrangements, which include the discussion on place and time according to the astrologers, how many guests will attend the wedding ceremony and celebrations or the dowry. In most cases, the bride and groom are excluded from these negotiations. Then the agreement is secured with a small ceremony where parents exchange gifts.

Finding marriage proposals online is a new phenomenon that started with the rapid spread of the internet in South Asian countries. Sandeep Shako (2004) explains that globalization, urbanization, and digitalization have transformed South Asian society, the structure of the family, and matrimony. Due to the increasing nuclearization of families in urban South Asia, it seemed like it took a lot of work to keep in touch with their kinship. This led to a new market concerning matrimony (2004, pp. 57-58). However, for South Asians, adapting to online services was difficult because of the limited availability and confidentiality in matrimonial sites. While breaking the traditional method of arranging marriages, the matrimonial sites also faced the challenge of creating their image among their clients. In one of his interviews with Satrajit Sen, Anupam Mittal, owner of Shaadi.com, stated that the significant problems for matrimonial sites were poor internet connectivity, low bandwidth, and a lack of credit card penetration, especially in South Asian countries, which were still exploring the Internet in the 1990s (Sen, 2011). Then, he said that in the beginning matrimonial sites were seen as a "laughable idea" because, in the early internet phase mindset of South Asian parents was still "conservative and technology shy." Hence, matrimonial sites' priority was to create good public relations for which they used the

media to convey their matrimonial services. Mittal also talked about how matrimonial sites offered free services where employees used to go home and help clients create profiles and look for an appropriate partner. He said that hiring employees was another question, as they needed people to understand their ideas in order to work on them. Nainika Seth and Ravi Patnayakuni (2008) have affirmed that matrimonial sites had to negotiate between some context-specific technical characteristics associated with arranged marriages in India, such as caste, sub-caste, and the dowry, which play an essential role in Indian weddings (p. 338). However, as Mittal stated that NRIs were the first clients in registering online on their websites whereas, in their homeland they progressed slowly with the recommendations of the families.

Faster than any conventional matchmaker, matrimonial websites sift profiles based on the preferences of the person looking for a marriage. In contrast to marriage advertisements in the print media, online matrimonial profiles offer much more comprehensive details about a candidate. Picture, age, caste, religion, education, career, family background, complexion, lifestyle, attributes, and expectations are some questions asked during form filling. The Jeevansathi.com form is given, for example, in the appendix. Whereas newspaper advertisements were limited in number of words as we can see below, in pictures 20 and 21 the two-liner advertisements. Although most of the newspapers dedicated a section for the matrimonial advertisement, the information available is comparatively less than the one provided by matrimonial sites. Besides, in the online world, getting in touch with potential brides or grooms and expressing affinities happens much faster and with greater ease; having access to phone numbers, emails, and online chat rooms offers chances to get to know one another which was not available in the newspaper advertisements. Matrimonial sites allow the bride or groom to search

for partners for themselves while sitting behind their laptop screen.

SUNDAY TIMES

PAGE 4-5 : WANTED BRIDES

PAGE 5-8 : WANTED GROOMS

for the **better half** of your life

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 1,

SM4 Gaur Br. Delhi Based Boy Engr. Wkg MNC Noida 10+LPA Teatotller 1985/5'8" seeks Qlfd, B'Ful, Cultd, Pure Veg., Religious girl 09810584387, nikhil1985b@gmail.com

TALL fair working girl MBA or professional for fair 5'11" MBA Delhi based Senior Process Analyst MNC Antya Contact 09415612052 or ravisp.4158@gmail.com

PQM4 Pareek boy 28/5'9" B.Tech(NIT)MBA XLRI Jamshedpur Sr. Consultant US Consultancy Pkg above 20L fmly JPR bsd. Em: rajendra.prk@rediffmail.com 09414869289

MANGLIK SP BR 5'10" Antya 4/4/88 Agra 8:05PM wkg in top MNC Gurgoan 8.25 LPA B.Tech MBA Pref wkg girl in NCR 9536647134 E-tripathi60laxmikant@gmail.com

GOSWAMI Bramhin Boy 28/5'9" B.tech, PO in BOB,Seeks Beautiful , Edu. Working Girl, Mobile:- 9598434954, Email -: dky170590@gmail.com

TYAGI fmly boy,Smart, H'some, 6'0",MBA,Wrking in MNC DL,Prefd PQM4 reputed, w'stld,veg fmly girl,Em:tyagipt22@gmail.com #7838140581

BHRIGUVANSHI joshi MP 31 5.5", S/W Eng Working in pune. 12 LPA. Need Equally Qualified Girl, All Brahmin Accepted 9406505549/8308391285

GARHWALI

SQLFD, tall, smart, b'ful pref. Garh/Kum Rajput, Conv Edu./Public schooled M4 an IITian Garh. Rajput US based 34/5'10" Comp. Engr. Ph.D (Sweden). Mob:9997511517, ksnegi.doon@gmail.com

QLFD M4 SMRT Gadhwali BOY 34/5'4" Looks much younger WRKG as Senior Eng(IT) in MNC 8LPA cont:9540391701 rawat81.vikas@gmail.com

MANGLIK Garhwali Shilpkar,28 Yrs, 5.11" ,BBA, own Buissness,own house in Noida & Bijnore +91-9457610922 E: diwakar_prasad@hotmail.com

H'SOME Grh Brh. Boy 5'8"/22 Aug85, MBA, Exec. Admin-I. Govt. Joint Venture Co. 6Lpa. seeks Qld wkg Girl. 9717969978 Send BHP: vjuyal7@gmail.com

GUJAR

PQM4 jan 88/5'10" B.Tech. MBA, wkg Del 11Lpa ggn bsd fmly Avoid Lohiya, Bainsala, pref. wkg Del/ncr girl.9910255644,dpverma216@gmail.com

JAIN

USA based shvetamber oswal jain parents invite for 28/5'9" handsome MBBS/MD doctor boy practicing in USA .e_mail: jainfamily27@yahoo.com

AMBASTHA very handsome 29/175/8LPA , BTech, PhD(Paris)Asst Prof in ECE (at a v.famous inst of tech/ Univ in India) seeks b'ful bride professionally qlfd/ transferable job. Family highly reputed intellectuals. No dowry. Contact:08084514979/verma25gaya@gmail.com

HANDSOME Kayastha boy 28/5'8" BTech IIT,MBA wkg reputed bank @ Mumbai seeks convent edu Prof Qualified wkg girl based or willing to relocate to Mumbai.Prefer UP based family.Send Detail-mail.shekharsriv@gmail.com,Mobile:09936448257

SM4 NM H'some Boy 28/5'9"/ B.Tech working in Reputed Company at Mumbai seeks B'ful NM workg. girl B.Tech/ MBA Preferably Bihar/Sri Family. M:9899473354 Email: ajit.kumaar@gmail.com

BEAUTIFUL Match Resp. & Renowned Fmly, Well Estd. H'Some Saxena Boy 28/5'7" B.Tech, Asst Mngr,CITI Bank Pune. Caste No Bar Ph:+91-9768880992 citi.rohan@gmail.com

PQ gori,slim,b'ful girl for h'some,fair,Sinha boy july 84 /5'7"BTech,IIT,MS (Finance) Columbia Uni.wkg Newyork. Elite Family.UP.#09415289981 E:krishnashri11@gmail.com Caste No Bar.

SRIV NM 32/5'7" B.Tech 16 LPA Tech. Lead Engg wrkg MNC Noida seek NM B'ful fair wrkg girl.Pref.B.Tech/-MCA/MBA/PO. Caste no bar. Send BHP.Em:ramsrivastava3@gmail.com M:09450121451.

SRIV 35/5'11" PGDBJ Social Media Head Ruling Political Party Delhi. Seeks PQ Wkg girl Pref. Delhi Ncr. # 8447731587 E: luckydhiraj@hotmail.com

PQM for Sept 1983/5'1",B.Tech boy,wkg USA based MNC in Ohio,USA. Status reputed family. Em: meenakshijauhari233@gmail.com M: 09760601843

WANTED Cultured Beautiful Bride for tall Handsome Engineer MBA currently working USA. Contact: 09810037268 or mail ajit120@hotmail.com

B'FUL, fair, slim wkg./Non - Wkg girl for handsome Khare Boy 04/87, 5'9" PO in BOI. Sub Caste No Bar. # 9810036614 kharerajeshkumar@yahoo.com

SM4 V'h'some, 6", fair, May86 CDAC&BE, NM, Sriv boy wkg MNC, Bangl 9Lpa, Fathr rtd cll off. # 9999964966, 011-42385048, Em: jaiganesha6@gmail.com

PQ/ Working match for Saxena 10-07-1988 at 3 AM Delhi 5'.11" / fair / Asst. Manager Nationalised bank. EM:- johrism@gmail.com # 09718222073

PQ NM B'ful match for Kulshrestha,Nov'87,5'8",S/w Engg,Infosys Pune.Mob 8954780260,mail krb7891@gmail.com

PQM 4 Smart Srivastava 29/ 5'11" /16 LPA LLB, GNLU, LLM (Oxford) London. Asst. Prof. Law. M: 7235857407, 9670675919. drsatishchandra02@gmail.com

Pay for 2 Ads Get 2 Free

Pic 20. Matrimonial advertisement in the newspaper

WANTED GROOM

ANSHIK Manglik, Handsome Mathur 28 yrs/ 6'3" Boy, Family Business, Seeks Edu Non Wkg Only Mathur Girl.# 98xxxxxxxx E-mail: xyx@gmail.com

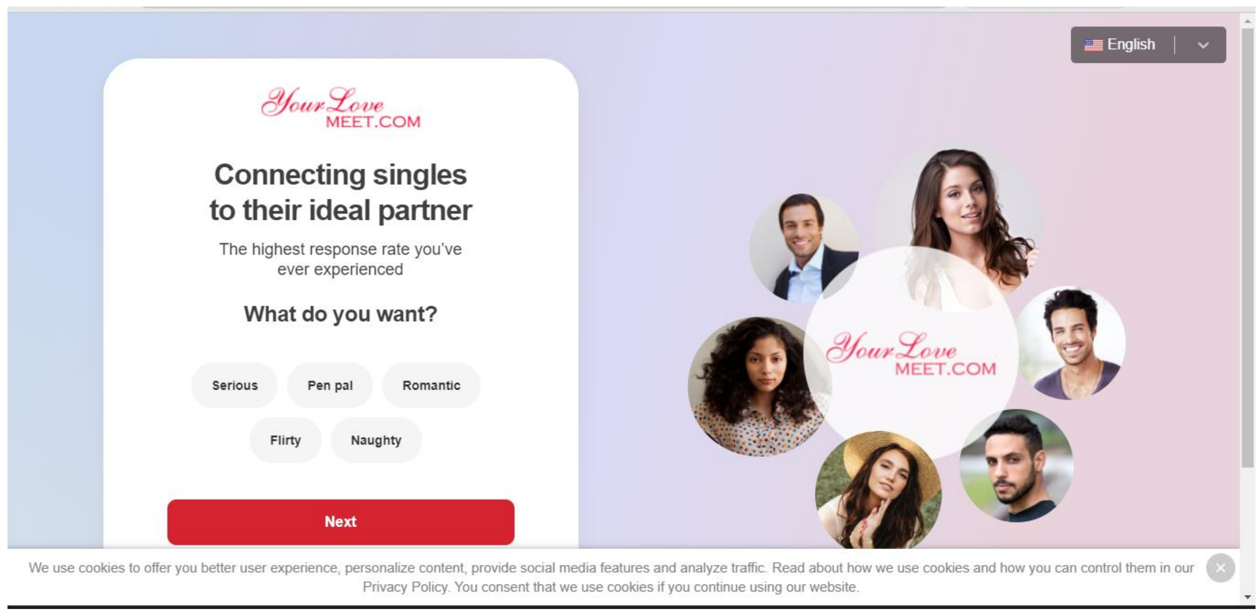
M4 Gaur Mglk M.Nadi 23 Nov 85, 2:30 AM, 5'8" Del Bsd Fair Boy Wkg TATA 11 Lpa Buns. Fmly Invtd Smart/Sci./Comm./Wkg N.Wkg Girl. Call: 9810xxxxxx, 9811xxxxxx

WANTED BRIDE

WANTED a beautiful, homely girl for fair, smart, handsome boy, Gupta Singhal, Manglik, march 1989 born/5'7", Lawyer, LL.B(H) (Delhi)/ LL.M (US), from a reputed family of Jaipur. Cont: 98xxxxxxxx, 93xxxxxxxx E-mail: groom123@gmail.com

Pic 21. Example of matrimonial advertisement in the newspaper

Matrimonial sites are also different from dating apps, as KMmatrimony (2013) states that matrimonial sites differ from online dating platforms like Tinder, Hinge, and OkCupid, where one can find dates typically to build personal, romantic, or sexual relationships. Whereas people join matrimonial sites primarily to locate spouses. In picture 22, taken from a dating app meet.com, one can see that a dating app gives a space to know a person and have a sexual or romantic relationship but does not promise any matrimonial relationship.



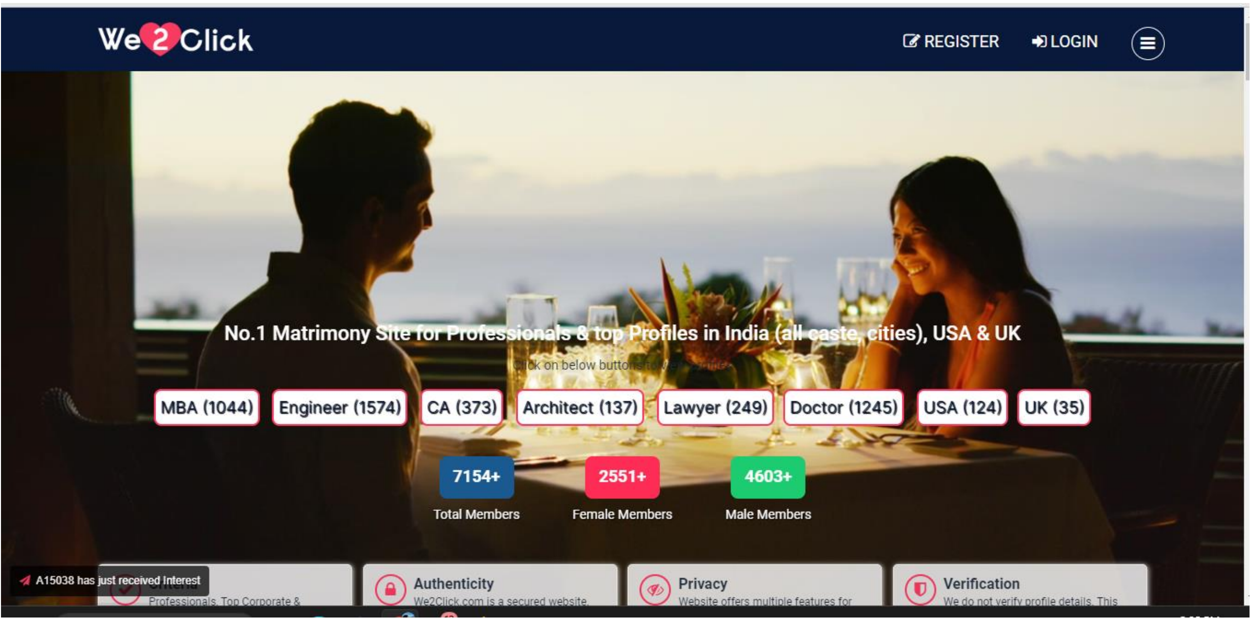
Pic 22. A dating app (meet.com)

Matrimonial sites appeal to the South Asian diaspora because they combine the tradition of arrange marriage in South Asia with the modern Western concept of passion and love. They have provided the freedom to the bride and groom to search according to their wish and chat before entering the marriage, which is different from the traditional style of arranging marriages. Nainika Seth (2011) also states that matrimonial sites have been helpful "for family disintermediation, cultural convergence, continuous information flows, ease of disengagement, virtual dating and reduced stigma in arranged marriages in India" (p. 951).

Online matrimonial services eliminate regional barriers and give candidates independence in arranging marriages. In addition, because they reside outside their homeland, the diaspora no longer has access to traditional South Asian matchmaking agencies in their host country. Online matrimony services provide excellent opportunities to the diasporas for arranging marriages. As a result, they have strengthened marriage ties between the Indian diasporas with their culture and origin.

6.2. The booming matrimonial sites market

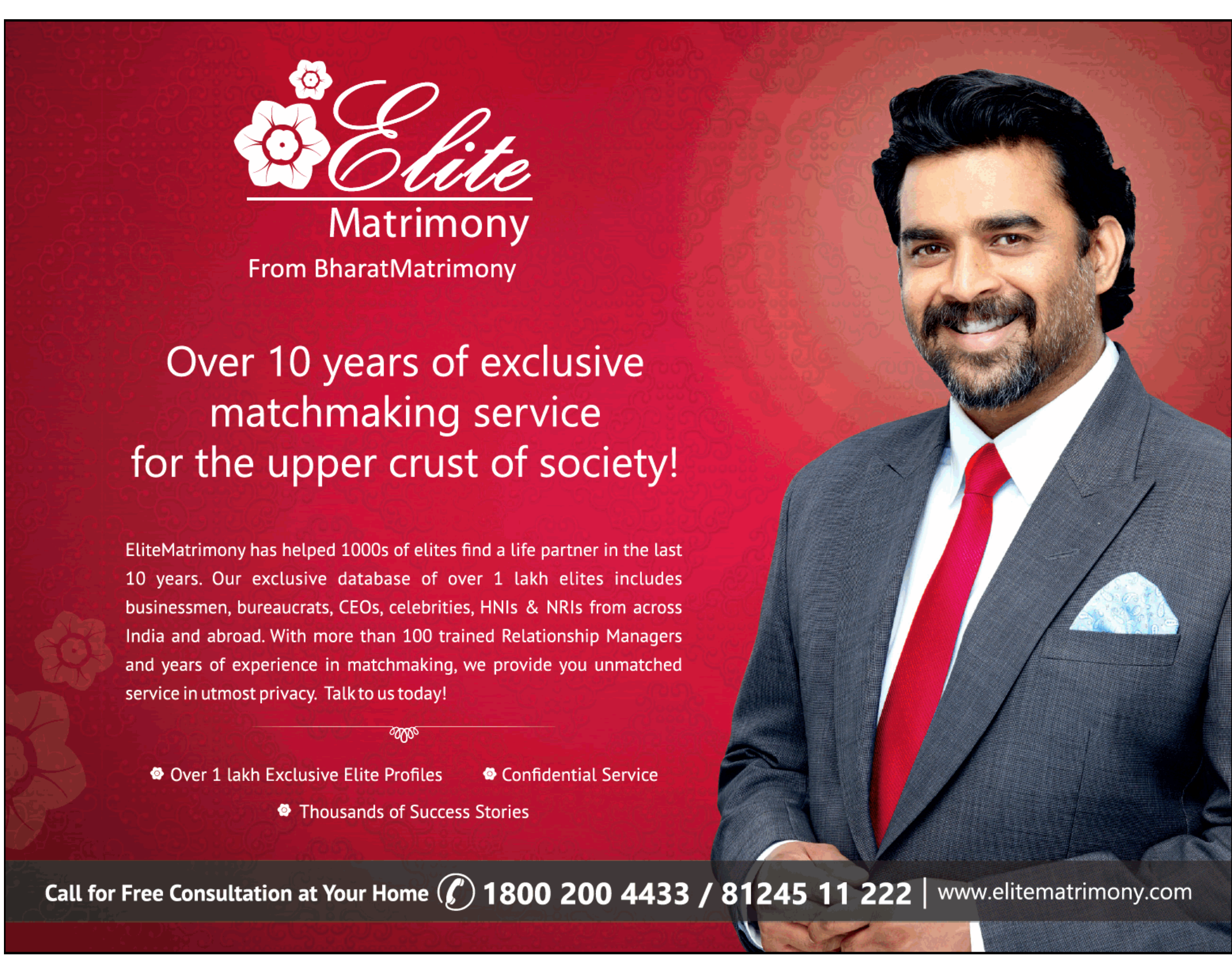
Online matrimonial sites increased globally due to the integration of South Asia into the world market economy and a rise in the media environment in the 1990s. The increasing matrimonial sites market has connected all South Asians inside or outside South Asia. Nowadays, matrimonial sites all over the world are working regionally, nationally, and globally. The South Asian diasporas have also created matrimonial sites for diasporas, which can be seen in the USA, Canada, and the UK, where most of the South Asian diasporas are living. For example, Shaadi.com, Jeevansathi.com and BharatMatrimony.com already have their sites working for South Asian-American, South Asian-Canadian, and South Asian-English diasporas.[37] For instance, there are others such as lovevivah.com, desijodi.com, lifepartners.com dedicated to only NRIs living in the USA. One of the matrimonial sites' pictures is given below (pic. 23), which works in India, the USA, and the UK and helping South Asian diaspora find spouse.



Pic 23. Matrimonial website working cross border (we 2 click)

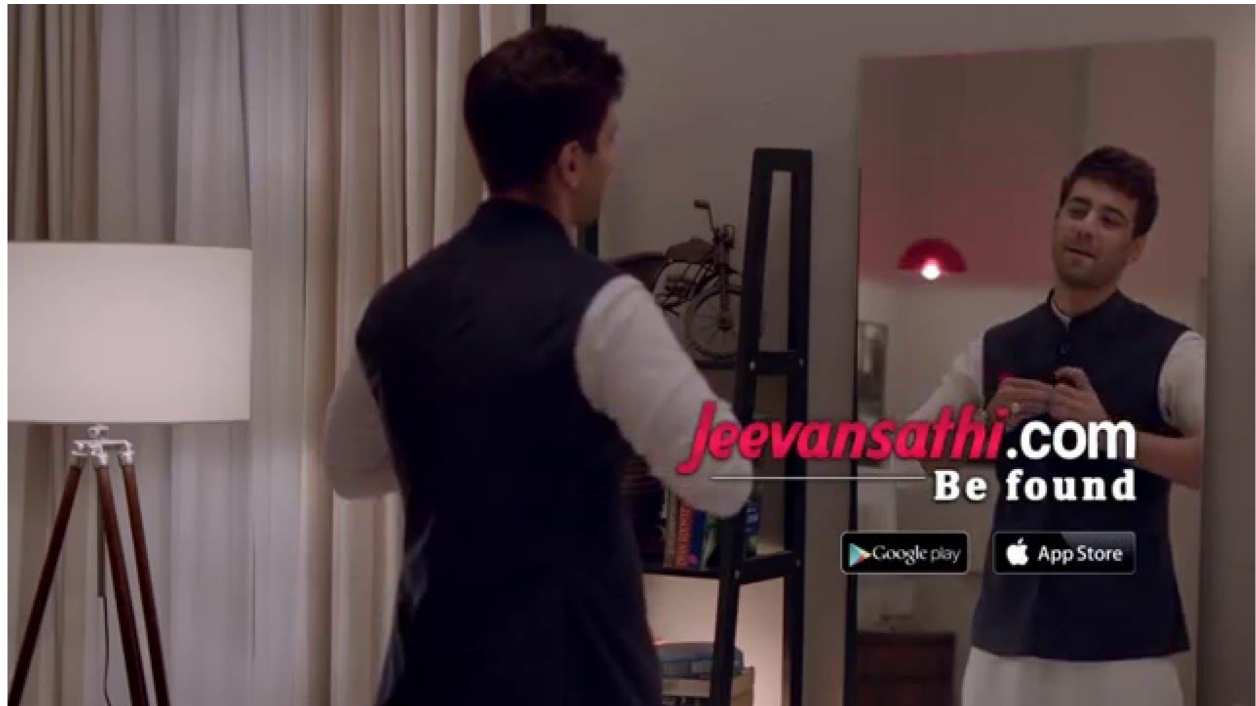
[37] I have given pictures of Jeevansathi.com working in Spain in the case study.

Attractive images, video advertisements, and slogans enhance the aesthetic appeal of matrimonial websites such as "Jeevansathi: Bringing People Together" and "Love is looking for you... Be found" (jeevansathi.com). Shaadi.com uses a slogan such as "Stop swiping, start live-ing" and "your story is waiting to happen, get started!" (shaadi.com). Bharatmatrimony.com uses "Your search for the perfect match ends here! #BeChoosy with India's biggest matrimony service" (bharatmatrimony.com). Shadi.com says "Shadi.com dreams into reality." Matrimonial sites also use visual and video advertisements, given below:



Pic 24. Advertisement picture of Elite matrimony (Bharatmatrimony)

Pic 25. Advertisement picture of simplymarry.com



Pic 26. Advertisement picture of jeevansathi.com

In addition, numerous television advertisements repeatedly run to entice viewers into the alluring realm of marriage (https://youtu.be/hhxFaXaidvA, https://youtu.be/6pdExjDcwFM)[38]. In the videos, one can also see how matrimonial sites have glorified arranged marriages.

[38]There are some more videolinks of Jeevansathi.com:

Ladka Acha hai (The boy is good)- Jeevansathi.com. (2019) No. of views. 1,491,312. https://youtu.be/CGEnJvj2h7o

Ladki Achi Hai (The girl is good)- Jeevansathi.com. (2019). No. of view.2,965,583 https://youtu.be/ROWkFc8ZhrM

The names of the matrimonial sites also have cultural and social importance. The term *Jeevansathi,* for instance, has a powerful connotation for South Asians and those of South Asian descent. *Jeevansathi* is a Hindi word, but Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam speakers are also familiar with it due to its significance. *Jeevan,* in the word *Jeevansathi*, means life, and *sathi* means partner; hence, *Jeevansathi,* as a collective word, stands for a life partner. Other well-known matrimonial advertising sites include Bharatmatrimony.com[39] and Shaadi.com[40]. These websites also carry Hindi names where *Bharat* signifies an old traditional India of *Hindutva* to connect the people with traditional India and its marriage system. *Shaadi* is a *Hindustani* [41]term that stands for marriage. Earlier, Shaadi.com had another name sagaai.com from 1997-99 and to have more impact on the client, the owner changed its name to Shaadi.com. The meaning of *sagaai* is engagement which seems to be less impactful in comparison to marriage. In one of the interviews, Anupam Mittal, owner of Shaadi.com said that "I was certain that sagaai.com as a name would not work. We needed something which could strike a chord and be easily remembered. Sagaai.com did not have that ring to it" (Satrajit Sen, 2011). The Hindi name of the websites emotionally binds them and ensures the South Asians and South Asian diaspora the traditional marriage system.

According to the matrimonial site market (Wmmatrimonials, 2016; Top 10 shaadi.com Competitors, Similarweb, 2023), there are three matrimonial sites Shaadi.com, Jeevansathi.com, and Bharatmatrimony.com which are the three most popular matrimonial sites known among South Asians. After the internet boom, they started their companies. Within a few years, they expanded their market worldwide and now, these sites are also having their offices in different parts of the world. The website is also listed on the Bombay Stock Exchange. Nainika Seth writes that many "U.S. companies in Internet-related businesses view matrimonial sites as a potential market and have tied up with Indian firms. For example, Yahoo! has taken up a stake in BharatMatrimony.com, and Microsoft has ties with Shaadi.com" (Seth, 2011, p. 338).

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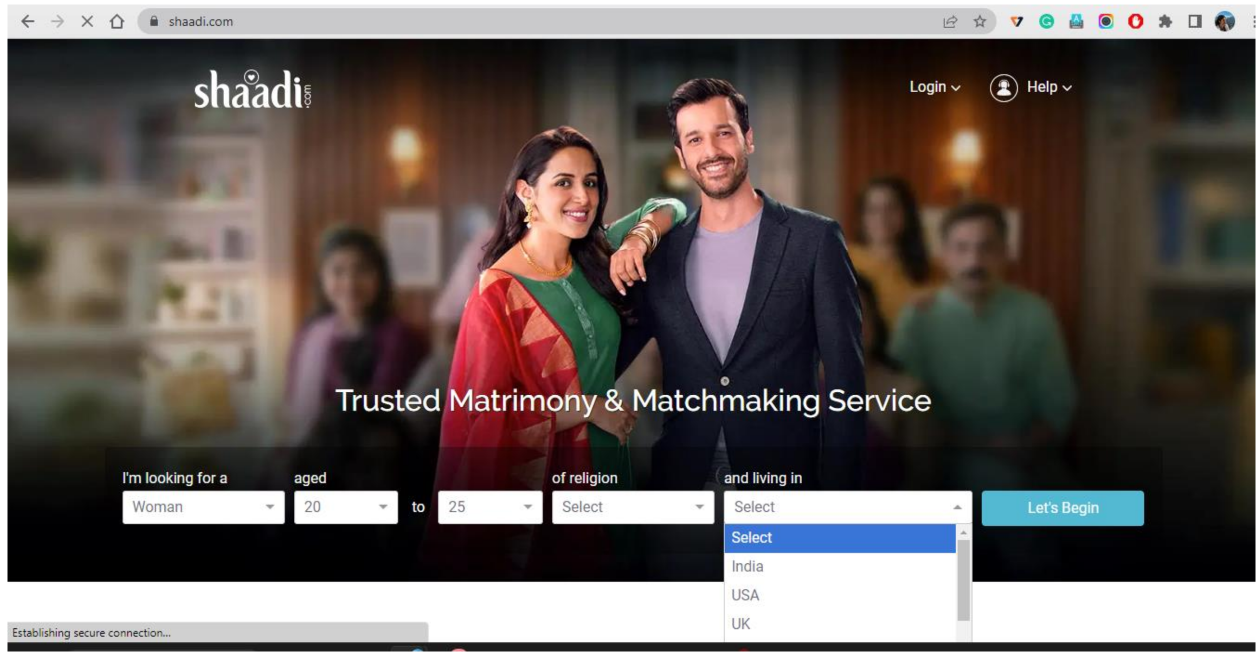
[39] Bharat Matrimony.com as a company was started in 1997 by a Tamilian businessman Murugavel Janakiraman, who initiated this matrimonial site to help his Tamil community find life partners. Now, it has spread all over the country and outside the country. However, its main clients are Tamilians living all over the world.

[40] Shaadi.com was started in 1997 by Anupam Mittal which has its centres in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh and serves Indians worldwide.

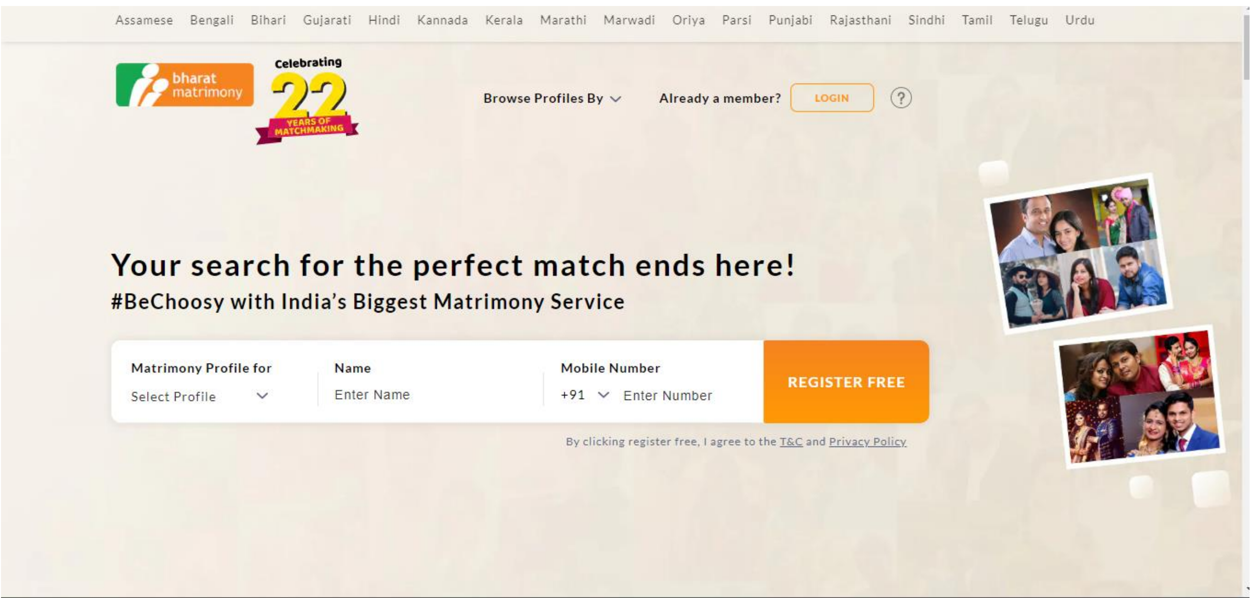
[41] Hindustani is basically spoken in northern parts of India and southern parts of Pakistan. This language can also be understood as mixture of Hindi and Urdu language.

Shaadi.com is an online matrimonial site started in 1997 by Anupam Mittal. It has markets in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. It has spread its market in European and North American countries. Shaadi.com also did a reality show with an Indian channel (Star Plus) in 2009. Later in 2012, it launched a programme called Angry Brides to bring awareness against dowry abuses (Angry Brides, 2012). In 2023, it has 12.4 million visits in Feb 2023 (Top 10 shaadi.com Competitors, Similarweb, 2023).



Pic 27. Matrimonial website Shaadi.com

Bharat Matrimony was started by Murugavel Janakiraman in 2000. BharatMatrimony began for the Tamilian community living in the USA. Later the company spread its branches in Dubai, Sri Lanka, the United States and Malaysia (Venkat, 2014). The matrimonial site in 2006 earned the Limca Book of World Records for documenting the highest number of weddings in India (Meenakshi Kumar, 2014).



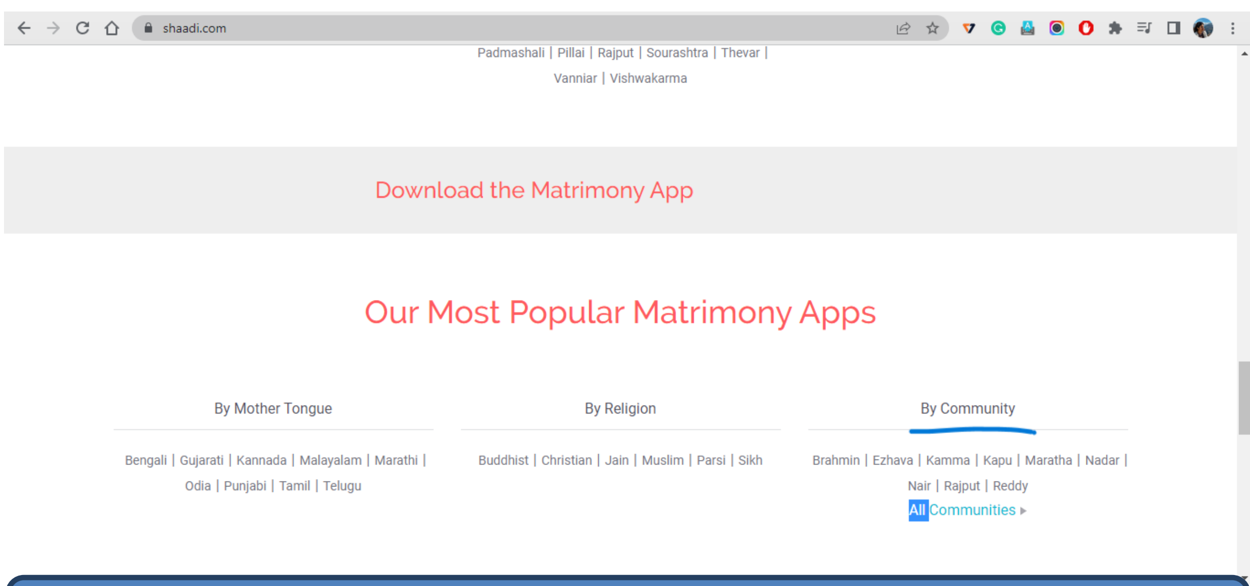
Pic 28. Matrimonial website Bharatmatrimony.com

Sanjeev Bikhchandani, executive vice chairman of *Info Edge India*, founded Jeevansathi.com (picture of this website is shared in the case study, pic. 32) in 1998 (Info Edge's Sanjeev Bikhchandani shares his slip-ups on the path to success, 2014). In 2016, The *Advertising Club's EFFIE* awarded its logo "Be Found" campaign a bronze medal in the "Services: Other" category (The Advertising Club, 2017).

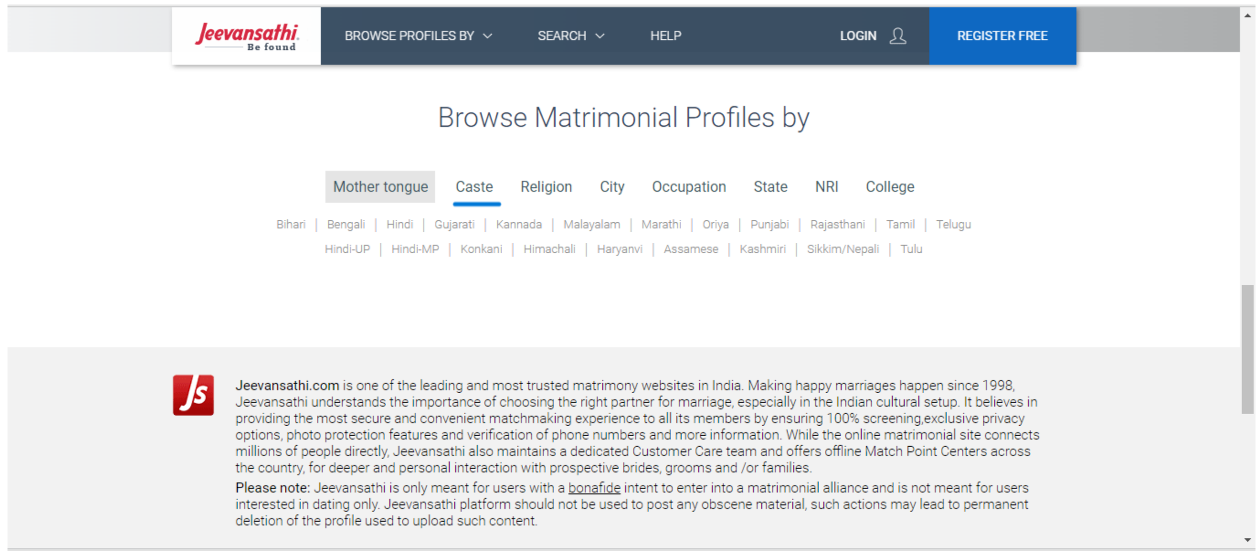
6.3. The case study: *Jeevansathi.com: Bringing people together*

For the case study, I first looked for the popularity among these three top matrimonial sites: Shaadi.com, jeevansathi.com and BharatMatrimony.com. Among these three, Wmmatrimonial (2016), a blog site on medium.com, has done a study showing in its graph that Jeevansathi.com is the most visited site (Analysis of top 10 matrimonial sites in India, 2016). In 2023, reports indicate that Shaadi.com is more popular than Jeevansathi.com. Shaadi.com has made more profits than Jeevansthi.com (Just credible, 2023; similar web, 2023). When I decided to take Jeevansathi.com as the case study, I referred to the blog article, which showed in its graph the

increasing market of Jeevansathi.com is comparatively higher than other matrimonial sites. However, in 2023, Jeevansathi.com will be the second-largest matrimonial site after Shaadi.com. Second, my search for the matrimonial sites for the case study was also based on the caste question. When I compared the features of Jeevansathi.com and Shaadi.com, I saw that Jeevansathi.com in its website mentions that the search for the bride and groom can be based on "caste", whereas Shaadi.com uses the word "community" as one of the filter criteria and not "caste." As shown in the pictures 29 and 30 below, the first one is of Shaadi.com, which gives the option to search for a spouse based on mother tongue, religion, or community. In the following picture, Jeevansathi.com offers more opportunities for browsing, such as mother tongue, caste, religion, city, occupation, state, NRI, and college. Since my study's central aspect has been the caste issues in the matrimonial sites, I chose Jeevansathi.com, which has classified the options initially, and the people entering the site already know the questions which they are going to answer to create a profile. Whereas Shaadi.com did not specifically ask the question on caste on its first page. Since the question of caste has been a crucial aspect of the research, I chose Jeevansathi.com for the case study.



Pic 29. Shaadi.com mentioning "community"

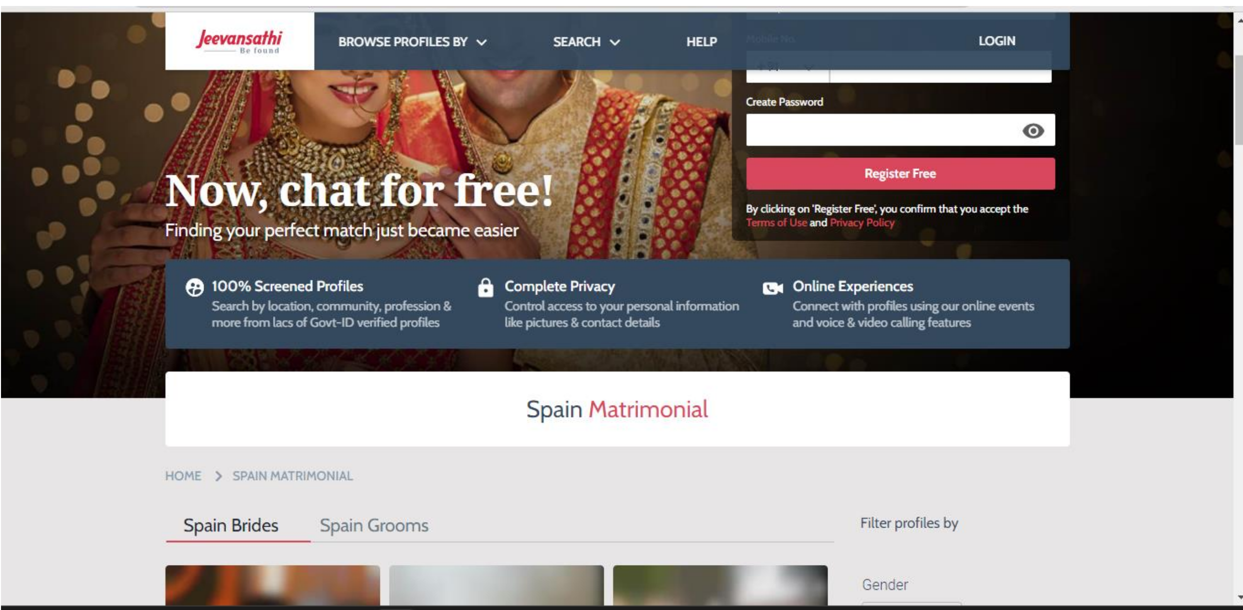


Pic 30. Jeevansathi.com “caste”

Jeevansathi.com, started in 1988, uses the customer-to-customer (C2C) business model. Once the profile is registered, the website lists compatible partners. Parents or members can start looking for the best option among them. The contact details are shared only when the client pays for premium membership. Jeevansathi.com, in its privacy policy, assures a hundred per cent privacy by letting the creators control who can see their profile and pictures with advanced privacy settings. According to the site, the documents on the bride’s or groom’s age, address, and income are verified before letting them surf the website. *Annual Reporter Info edge.in* states that Jeevansathi.com had 5.6 million registered members as of 31st March 2012-13. In the month of Feb 2023, the site had 4.3 million visits (https://www.similarweb.com/website/shaadi.com/competitors/, Similarweb, 2023).

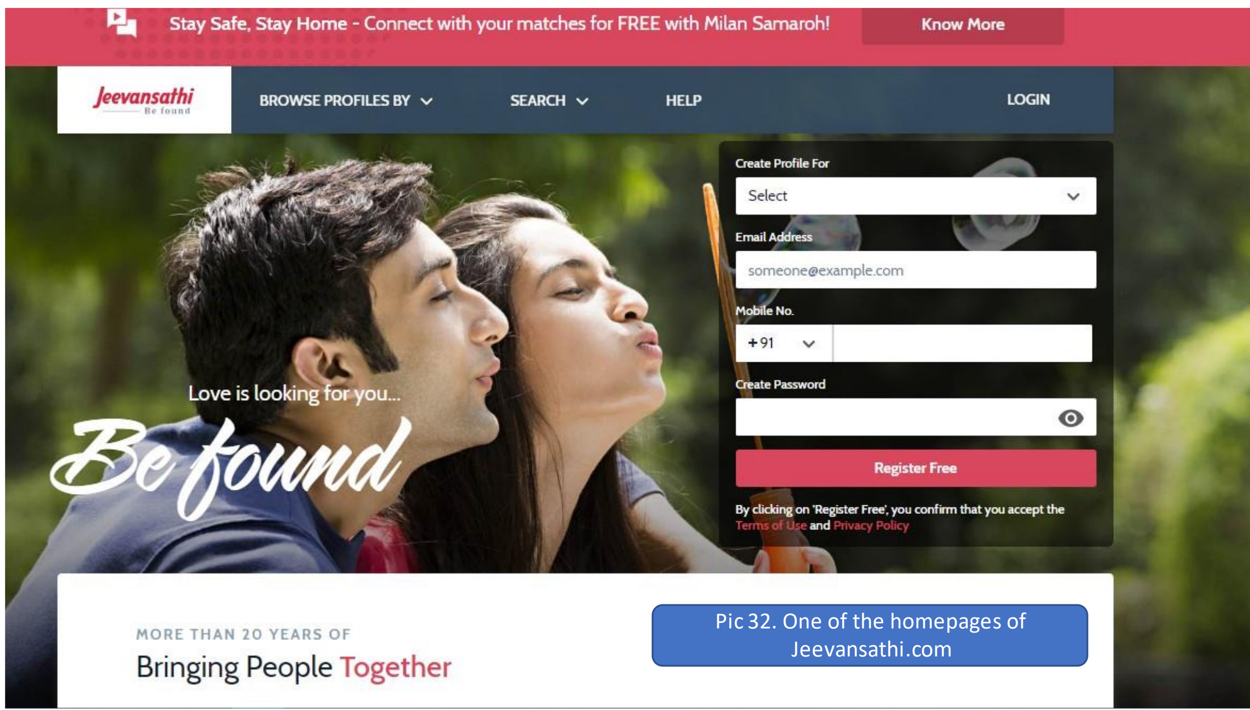
Also, Jeevansathi.com has made a huge market globally especially in the USA, Canada, the UK and also, in Spain.[42] Below, I have given a picture of jeevansathi.com working for the South Asian diaspora in Spain.

[42] Jeevansathi.com website working in Spain for the Indian diaspora living in Spain:
https://www.jeevansathi.com/spain-matrimony-country
https://www.jeevansathi.com/spain-brides-matrimony-country
https://www.jeevansathi.com/spain-grooms-matrimony-country



Pic 31. Jeevansathi.com working for South Asian diaspora in Spain

In this chapter, further research study is based on the data taken from Jeevansathi.com.



Pic 32. One of the homepages of Jeevansathi.com

The first page of Jeevansathi.com (pic 32) features a "perfect and good-looking happy couple" having fun on a bright day. Visitors to Jeevansathi.com are promised the same in its marketing. Also, Jeevansathi.com guarantees its users that they will pick the ideal spouse, particularly in the South Asian cultural setup. It requests that users create profiles because "love is looking for you," and that way, they can "be found" (Jeevansathi.com)

6.4. Methods

To get the data, I created two male and female matrimonial accounts on Jeevansathi.com. I used my profile and my husband's profile to access Jeevansathi.com. I took my husband's (Gaurav Sushant) consent before creating his profile; he was present throughout the process of creating the profile and collecting data from the website.

I collected 50 profiles (25 male profiles and 25 female profiles) from the matrimonial site Jeevansathi.com. I chose the first 50 profiles of the South Asian diaspora without using any other filter method. I did not select the profiles; instead, they were filtered by the matrimonial sites.

The data were collected from May 25, 2020, to May 30, 2020. This period also indicates the COVID-19 pandemic.

I worked on matrimonial sites from Vellore, Tamil Nadu, India.

There was no interaction through email, chat, or messages. I intentionally avoided any interview or conversation because the research intended to collect data from the matrimonial sites and work on the mechanism of the matrimonial sites concerning caste and gender.

Further, the other methods and methodologies used for the research are digital ethnography and digital autoethnography, which we will discuss in the following sections.

Then, theoretically, I have used postcolonial and Dalit diaspora feminist framework, discussed in Chapter 3.

6.4.1. Research method: Digital ethnography

Many scholars have defined digital ethnography according to their research experience and field interest. I will discuss ethnography, ethnographer, and digital ethnography to delineate the role of the ethnographer and its changing position with the internet for my research work. Christine Hine (2017) explains that "the body of ethnographer is the research instrument, sensing the surroundings, recording impressions and turning them into a theoretically informed, rich account of cultural practice" (p. 315). She describes that the ethnographer should get into the life of others as an active observer without any assumption. Ethnographers should be ready to document all the details and live the life of an insider who understands and embodies the norms around them. Elisenda Ardévol and Edgar Gómez-Cruz (2014) also define the role of ethnographers as "they must attend to people's sayings and doings, their condition of existence and their world view" (p. 2). Further, Hine writes:

> Digital ethnography has been able to develop an immersive understanding of social formation that emerges within online platforms, documenting their distinctive culture and highlighting the significance of online forms of co-presence in developing shared experience. (Hine, 2017, p. 316)

The role of an ethnographer working on the internet changes as he/she "uses the same technologies as those that they study, taking part in online interactions and becoming immersed in online spaces (ibid). Sara Pink et al. (2015) define digital ethnography as "an approach of doing ethnography in a contemporary world" where the world is digital (p. 1). According to Hine and Pink et al., current research practices have changed significantly because of the involvement of the internet (Hine, 2017; Pink et al., 2015). However, Pink et al. state that "the involvement with digitality depends on the researcher and the research need" (Pink et al., 2015). Hence, according to Pink et al. (2005), one can use digital platforms starting from finding the research material, collecting data, conversing with other researchers and people, and even talking about the research. Then, the internet is also involved in post-research work in disseminating the study to other researchers. All these processes can be customized according to the need of the research. She also mentions that the researcher can decide whether to go offline or online according to the study.

Ardévol and Gómez-Cruz (2014), Pink et al. (2015), and Hine (2017) emphasize that the whole research process was done earlier also when the internet was not evolved; at that time, libraries were visited, meetings were fixed, and ethical questions are debated. After the 1990s, the internet swiftly entered these research spaces. However, the internet cannot replace the physicality of researching because how much one wants to be involved with the internet and how much one wants to engage physically depends on one's research work, methods, and methodologies. In this regard, Pink et al. write that "how researchers define ethnography will rely on their research, critical perspectives, interests" (Pink et al., 2015, p. 2) and how they want to tell it to the audience (readers). Besides, they also state that "digital ethnography might be practiced and defined in different ways" (ibid) and that "it should be open and adaptive" (ibid). Besides, Christine Hine (2017) delineates that an ethnographer who is working with the internet should never "translate the practices of a conventional form of ethnography developed for offline interaction into the online sphere" (p. 317). Hence according to her, online research differs from offline and can have different methods, methodologies, and ethical questions. It does not mean offline research makes the methods, methodologies, and ethical questions easier.

Besides, Hine points out that people do "not live wholly online" (ibid). Hine (2017) states that ethnographers who only connect with people online find research challenging as they cannot observe other aspects beyond online interactions. This is one point that also made me think about how I will understand other elements concerning the matrimonial sites beyond collecting data from the sites. In this regard, Hine gives an example of creating an online or face-to-face community (p. 317). Although I did not plan to take any interviews or interact with the participants, life beyond the data also seems interesting to me.

In this regard, Sara Pink et al. (2015) have discussed multiplicity and digital non-centric-ness. "Multiplicity," Pink et al. define that "there is more than one way to engage with the digital" (2015, p. 8). They exert that "digital ethnography research is always unique to the research question and challenges it responds to" (2005, p. 8). Multiplicity (Pink et al., 2015) in using the internet and multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995, 1998, 2012) are significant factors in digital ethnography. Not only Sara Pink et al. but many other ethnographers have suggested multiple uses of the internet. George Marcus (1995, 1998, 2012), one of them, has delineated the benefits

of multi-sited ethnography, which allows digital ethnographers to understand the complex characteristics of life through multiple uses of the internet.

Indeed, it was the research where I was working on digital platforms (matrimonial sites) using digital methods. This shows the multiple roles of the internet in the study. Ardévol and Gómez-Cruz (2014) have commented on understanding different manners the internet is involved. First, the digital platform is used as a site for research and gathering data and second, using the internet to analyze the data. This research work on matrimonial sites also involved the internet in multiple ways, such as gathering information about different matrimonial sites. Then, collecting data, reading blogs on matrimonial sites, reading experiences and feedback of the people on the matrimonial sites, and chatting with friends and family relatives who found their partners through matrimonial sites. Although I will not share their experiences in the research study, they have shaped my understanding and given me options to access different matrimonial sites. Besides, this research writing (especially during the COVID-19 pandemic) has taught me to use digital media in various epistemological ways, such as watching T.V. series on the Indian diaspora, for example, *Indian Match Making* (2020), *The Namesake* (2006) and YouTube videos on *Jeevansathi.com* advertisements.

Sara pink et al. also indicate towards "non-digital-centric-ness," through which they exhibit that researchers should be open about going beyond the digital world to understand the world through human intelligence such as feelings and emotions which can be felt and not read:

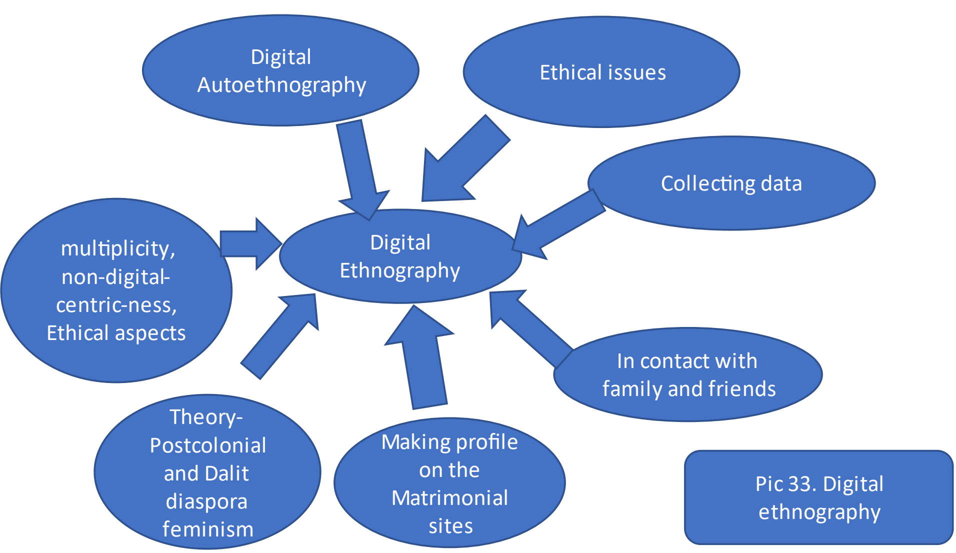
> [T]o understand how digital media is a part of people's everyday worlds, we also need to understand other aspects of their worlds and lives. One might also focus specifically on those domains of activity in which digital media are used rather than on characteristics or use of media. (p. 9)

This is a significant point because the research process does not entirely depend upon the digital method of collecting information regarding matrimonial sites. The data were collected from the internet, but stories about matrimonial sites which were equally important were read at different blogs and newspaper articles. Especially for me who was new to the matrimonial sites without any experience of creating a profile, searching candidates, my understanding of matrimonial sites

was not centred to the digital platform rather common talks with the family and friends who had experiences on matrimonial sites.

These two principles "multiplicity" and "non-digital centric-ness" have been useful in understanding how I want to carry my research work (Marcus, 2012; Ardévol and Gómez-Cruz 2014; Pink et.al, 2015; Hine, 2017;). Further, Pink et al. (2015) also talk about "how researchers define ethnography will rely on their research, critical perspectives, interests" of the research work (Pink et al., 2015, p. 2).

Pink et al. affirm that digital ethnography is not meaningful alone, but it becomes beneficial when engaged through a particular discipline (2015, p. 2) and theoretical methodology (Karen O'Reily, 2005, p. 2). Indeed, as discussed before, it is a method that can be carried out with methodologies and can also be clubbed with other methods. In this case study, I have used digital autoethnography which I will be discussing in detail after this section. The section will talk about the choices I made while researching. Since this is my first case study where I am using ethnographical approach, I tried to explain my choices, limitations, conflicts, and experiences through digital autoethnography. Digital ethnography, Karen O' Reily, argues, also engages with theoretical methodologies according to the aim of the research. In this research work, I will be using postcolonial and Dalit diaspora feminist perspective which we have already talked about in Chapter 3. In pic 33, one can see how I framed digital ethnography in the case study.



Pic 33. Digital ethnography

Then the next point is about the ethical aspects of digital ethnography which we carry out while collecting data in our engagement with the people we meet or talk to for research. According to this case study, while conversing online with the participants and even while working with the data collected, I struggled with the question of personal and public, which I will talk about in a separate section. Besides the debate between public and personal, there are other ethical issues which I will be discussing in the next section.

6.4.2. Digital autoethnographic approach

Autoethnography has been defined as a method of describing one's personal experiences while conducting ethnographical research (Neuman, 1994). Laurel Richardson (2000) also states that autoethnography is a personal experience while conducting research that should not be undervalued. Arthur Boshner and Carolyn Ellis (1996) state that there are different ways of writing autoethnography; some of us write daily wise detailed autoethnography, and others prefer to write essential details.

Digital autoethnography, like offline autoethnography, relies on personal experiences while carrying out digital ethnography, which helps people understand the research well (Dunn, 2020,

p. 44). Digital autoethnography connected to digital ethnography narrates the experience of the ethnographers using digital ethnography as their research method, such as collecting and interpreting data. Hence, digital autoethnography is “situated within and concerned about digital spaces and lived experiences, interactions, and meaning making and beside these contexts” (ibid, 2020, p. 45).

Christine Hine expresses that a researcher’s participation is vital in ethnography and digital ethnography (Hine, 2017). Christine Hine (2017) talks about the ethnographer’s participation depends on the ethnographer and the research need. Most of the time, ethnographers’ capacity for participation is limited because of their level of expertise compared to the research participants. An ethnographer, a crucial part of digital ethnography, should also record his/her experiences. Understanding the importance of digital autoethnography from the above discussion, I, as a digital ethnographer in this case study, found myself a part of the research who created her account on matrimonial sites to get the data.

According to Ahmet Atay (2020), digital autoethnography can be done for different reasons. First, many marginalized voices use digital autoethnography to record their experiences and “address social and cultural issues, challenge oppressive structures, create a sense of community, and alternatives” (2020, p. 274). The second could be the sense of empowerment among the people who feel their voices and experiences might not be heard (ibid). Third, in the digital ethnography field, the new academic voices in the ethnographic field use this method to keep a record of their experiences which has been fruitful in learning and gaining knowledge of ethnography. Fourth, digital autoethnography recorded by scholars can be used by other scholars in understanding the experiences of digital ethnography (ibid). Understanding the purposes of digital autoethnography, my purpose in this case study has been the third one. I am a new research scholar who has chosen matrimonial sites as her first case study based on digital ethnography. To keep a record of my own decisions, choices, and experiences, I preferred to follow the digital autoethnographic approach to the case study.

Ahmet Atay further explains the method of carrying out digital autoethnography. The first one is to describe the cultural identities and experiences of doing digital ethnography. It is mainly in the first person, critical, and creative. The second discusses the “interactivity and digital embodiment” (272). This will focus on the “embodied digital experiences or how embodiment

and digitalized identity performance create a total cyber experience". The third one is narrating the self through social media stories as a form of digital autoethnography (p. 272).

Among these three digital auto ethnographies, I have used the first one to share my experiences while doing research using digital ethnography. I kept my experiences and choices recorded as my digital autoethnography, through which I can be confident, aware of the research work, and be answerable to the questions arising in the research.

For the case study, two profiles of (male and female) were created on the matrimonial website Jeevansathi.com. Matrimonial sites from the beginning made it clear that the site is specifically for two genders–male and female–reducing itself to the two sexes avoiding the existence of all other genders. The only terms used while filling out the form are man and woman, boy and girl, and groom and bride.

Returning to the profile-creating process, I observed that the responses from the side of the matrimonial sites were swift. I received the desired number of male and female profiles in 5 days from 25th May 2020 to 30th May 2020. The data were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially when most of the countries worldwide were under lockdown. India, too, suffered grievances during this time because of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the business of matrimonial sites was not impacted much; instead, it boomed. The newspaper articles (2021) in *Indian Express* state that matrimonial sites arranged video callings during the lockdown. It also affirmed that most of the youth delaying their marriages, started looking for partners during the lockdown because they spent their lives alone at home. Another article (Vyshnavi, 2022) stated that unmarried people working from home had ample time and hence were involved in finding partners for themselves. Murugavel Janakiraman, the founder of Bharatimatrimony.com, said that during COVID-19, there was a 25 per cent increase in registration (Matrimonial websites do brisk business during lockdowns as millennials hunt for life partners, Indian Express, 2021).

The first step for creating the profiles on the matrimonial website was crucial in choosing whose profile could be made to access it because one could only get the data after becoming part of it. I was also aware that once the profile is created, the person's identity will be displayed on the public platform. Also, for personal purposes, the involvement of many people could jeopardize

the collection of information. Finally, I used my identity to create a matrimonial profile, limited to the research purpose. It was a difficult step as I was already married. I asked my male friend (my husband) to make a male profile with his name and identity. He understood the risk that it might exhibit his identity to the users of the matrimonial sites. His name, phone number, photos, and other details were used with his verbal permission to create a male profile and access other female profiles. Since we both lived together in the same house, we often talked about being potential unmarried candidates on the website. We both agreed that we would not send any requests but observe the suggestions sent to our account by Jeevansathi.com. I collected the information he received in his matrimonial site account.

At this juncture of the research, I went through the discussion of ethical issues. The question was whether researching profiles received from the online platform was equivalent to exploring human participants. Hence, a public forum and private interview have opened an aspect of public and private in the research work based on digital ethnography and autoethnography.

6.4.3. Ethical issues: Personal and public

In this case study, as discussed above, there has always been an internal conflict between "personal" and "public," such as: when does personal become public? Is it reasonable to enter someone's personal space by saying it is in public, especially on social media? Do the data collected about personal life through public forums make the information less personal and more public? Some social media promise privacy, but is the information private with social media?

Matrimonial sites ask visitors to become premium members to share and get private information. As a researcher, I found that the online space is tricky to negotiate in deciding how to apply the principle of not harming ethically to the people involved in the research– 50 profiles, others who shared their stories, the male profile of my husband and my profile as well. Some internet researchers have argued that ethical questions of online research are like those found in offline research (Walther, 2002). Joseph Walther argues that it is problematic to see internet research having more ethical issues than other methods as it creates methodological myopia (2002). He also says that any online information is public and can be used in research. Drawing on this perspective, internet research may not be more problematic than physical research methods, but a

researcher will encounter problems that can differ from physical research. As Adolfo Estalella and Elisendra Ardévol (2014) have shown their concern towards the private and public, and the line between them. It is crucial to understand private and public in digital ethnography. Because with an understanding of the difference between these two terms, a researcher can know at what point he/she needs the consent of the people involved in the research.

Fernando Bruno points out that "sociability on the internet involves the voluntary exposure of personal data, narratives, and different registers of everyday life" (as cited by Iara Beleli, 2015; Bruno, 2001, p. 125). He argues that the data collected from the profiles are considered public. However, considering the research study of matrimonial sites, the data shared on this site is not available to the public. Instead, it is open to those who have registered and come to the site like a registered member searching for a compatible partner.

In this regard, during my PhD thesis writing, it was fruitful to have a conversation with the anthropologists Elisendra Ardévol and María Nuria Romo Avilés. Professor Nuria Avilés et al. (2023) have mostly worked with the participants and have shown in their studies that whenever they interviewed any person, they always got consent from their participants. They worked on the Instagram app and gathered data from the app and then they conducted interviews as well, and hence they showed concern towards the consent, which is necessary before conducting the research. Iara Beleli who has worked with Tinder app (2015) also points out that whenever there is an intervention in the private space of the individuals such interviewing them, then it is necessary to have their consent. Ardévol et al. (2007) have been working with digital sites and individuals, have clarified in her text the ethical norms that should be taken into account while researching and interviewing participants.

Her article "Catálogo de sueños: las relaciones personales en internet como product de consume" (2005) has been found similar to the research I have conducted. She explained that she had to make a profile to access the information. She did not conduct any interviews but instead observed the dating apps and profiles suggested to her profile. Hence, she explained that she did not need consent from the participants whose profiles were sent to her as suggestions because there was no exchange of talks and interests among them. Then in 2007, Adolfo Estalella and Elisendra Ardévol talked about research conducted in 2005 earlier, where they used the pictures of the profiles in their article, but finally, because of ethical questions, they dropped the images.

They did not use the actual name of the profiles of the participants whose consent was not taken. In the final lines of her article, she clears that even if there is no need to take consent from the profiles, a researcher should understand the position of the participants and think about what can be shared and what can invade the privacy of the participants.

Adolfo Estalella and Elisendra Ardévol (2007) have also given examples to clear the ethical issues raised because of the difference between public and private. They argued that if a researcher works with human participants, the first ethical reflection is that a researcher should never take any action that may harm the people involved in the study. Whenever any human is participating should be informed about the research, and hence his/her consent should be taken. Then, they add that the ethical norms also propose in anthropology that when research takes place in a public space, there is no need to get consent from the people in public. The same can be applied to press, radio, or television communication. Again, she advises that if a researcher is interviewing a participant, whether in public or private should be informed, and his/her consent should be taken. She talks about analysis of archives available in public forum is not equivalent to interviewing people and hence in case like this the researcher does not need to take any prior permission. Then, she talks about the social media or websites which display information especially in the form of magazines and newspapers, also does not need any consent.

According to her, when a researcher gets the data from an online medium and does not contact the human subject for an interview or any information, it does not fall into ethical issues and hence does not need to take consent. She explains this situation by giving an example of her research (2005). My research showed no form of sending or receiving a marriage proposal. Instead, the profiles which I received were filtered by the matrimonial site. Hence, according to Estalella and Ardévol, there is no involvement of human subjects but rather the matrimonial site sent the suggestions. Adolfo Estalella and Elisendra Ardévol (2007) clarify that any information available on a public site or the researcher registers on any site to get the information without violating personal space, such as involvement in any conversation, is not considered a violation of ethics. But at the same time, Estalleda and Ardévol (2007) ask the researchers to put themselves in the position of the people whose profiles are used for research and think about what information they can share. She suggested that it is always better for an ethnographer to keep on questioning oneself regarding the ethics of the research.

Since this is my first digital ethnographic research, I also put the question of ethics, especially between private and public, in front of scholars of digital ethnography through my supervisor, Adelina Sánchez, such as Iara Beleli, Beatriz Revelle and Nuria María Romo Avilés on April 11, 2023. They also concluded by pointing out the difference between approaching information available online and approaching human subjects online or offline. In this discussion, they clarified that a researcher does not need to get consent if he/she accesses the data from any website such as dating app or matrimonial sites after registering. Till the time the researcher is not planning any interviews or any kind of conversation, is not violating the ethical norms of digital ethnography. They made it clear that if any kind of chat, exchange of interests or messaging are done then the participants should be informed and even their consent should be taken. I knew that 50 profiles were meant for partner search; hence, it was my task to understand the boundaries of how much I wanted to get the information and put it to the audience without invading the privacy of 50 profiles.

In this case study, substantial precautions were taken during the data collection to ensure no personally identifiable information was retained. The minimal data required were collected to study the relationship of personal attributes associated with gender and caste discrimination. This process intentionally excluded data such as their real names, photos, contact details, and interactions with other users. While accessing the profiles, it was known that the massive risk from this research was the loss of individuals' privacy. To maintain the privacy of the profiles visited and not hurt the confidentiality of the people, I did not indulge in any conversation nor share any data with others.

6.4.4. Jeevansathi.com registration form

While registering the account on Jeevansathi.com, my first concern was to observe the structure of the profile registration form.[43] The registration questionnaire was available only in English, but one could find it in other languages in other matrimonial sites specific to the region, such as Punjabi and Tamil communities. Intriguingly, registration on the matrimonial site was free, but one needed to subscribe as a premium member to get the details such as phone number or email

[43] A registration form of Jeevasathi.com has been given in the appendix.

id. Per the information requirement, I did two profile registrations (male and female) without any payment. After registering on the matrimonial sites, I started segregating the profiles sent to our profiles as suggestions by the matrimonial site. The profiles sent by the Indian diaspora were retained for the study.

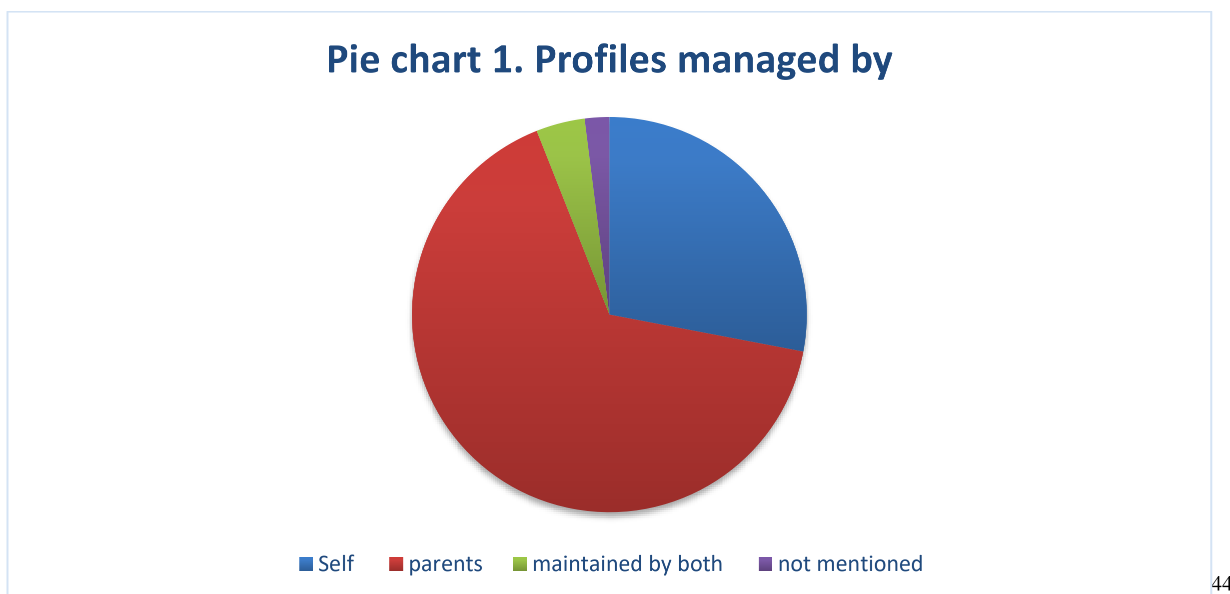
A lengthy questionnaire was filled out in the profile registration, where questions from different aspects were asked. First, I was asked to upload three of my photos. In that section, I uploaded one of my pictures snapped in Granada. It was done intentionally to demonstrate my presence outside the country, studying in Spain, and in the future, I would like to settle outside the country. Picture selection and uploading were crucial on matrimonial sites because it was the first thing one could see and get motivated to open the complete profile. The website suggested uploading more pictures as more photos increase the chance of getting more suggestions. The second question was regarding "marital status," again, the question was not easy to answer because I was married. Then, I had to fake my marital status to register on the site. Among the options "never married," "awaiting divorce," "annulled," and "widow," I chose "never married." From then onwards, I played two characters: the "past of me": unmarried, taking part in the research and being researched, and another one is the "present of me" doing the research. While handling the matrimonial site, I had to live the "past of myself," not only limited to the marital status but also emotionally, the excitement one could have before marriage while seeing the proposal of different men presenting themselves through their profile with utmost care.

Then, when creating a male profile, I used the identity of my husband, who was living with me in the same space. I used his name, photo, and email id as minimum data to create a profile on Jeevansathi.com. He was aware of all the processes and sat with me while downloading data from his profile. Then, the date of birth and necessary details such as "name," "gender" (female and male), "height," "religion," and "mother tongue" were asked. Through these questions, the website assumed my sexual identity and orientation. Only two gender profiles, male and female–calling groom and bride were allowed to fill out the form, which meant that the matrimonial site was a space for binary and heterosexual people to find their spouse.

The other two questions about religion and mother tongue revealed my regional, religious, and lingual identity. Then the questions that followed were about caste, sub-caste, and sect, where several castes, sub-castes, and sects were given to choose from. This question was put under the

mandatory category, which means one cannot complete the form without indicating his/her caste. There was also an option (to tick or not) of "caste no bar," which meant one was open to all castes. I ticked the "caste no bar" option to receive profiles outside the caste I mentioned.

In the following passage, some other questions were asked about "country living in," "city living in," "annual income," and "profile managed" by (self, parents, or siblings). These questions gave a perception of the present position and location of the candidate. Besides, it was fascinating to see that parents or siblings could also register a groom or bride profile where the groom or bride might not be acquainted with registering their profiles on the matrimonial site. Alternatively, the bride and groom often let their parents find a partner for them without involving in the search process. In the profiles, it is also mentioned by whom the profile is managed. According to the data collected 33 out 50 profiles were created and managed by the parents and relatives. 14 out of 50 profiles were managed by the boy or the girl, 2 out of 50 profiles were managed by both the candidates and the parents, and finally 1 out of 50 profiles did not mention who was handling the profile.



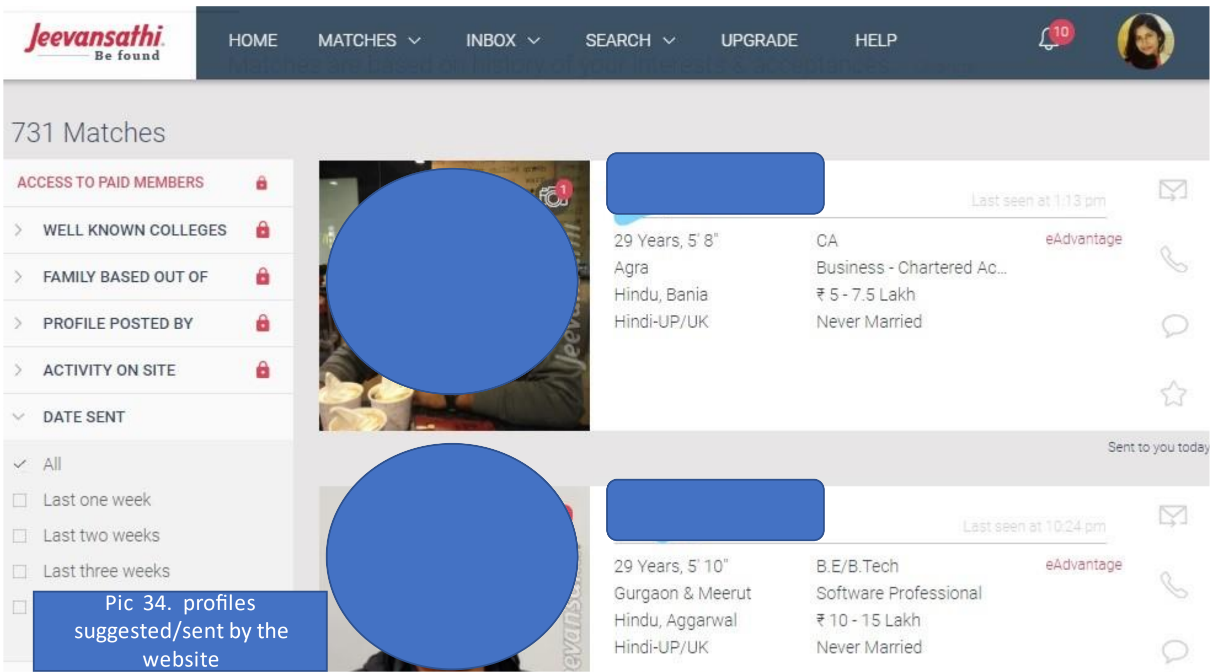
[44]

Then, there was a section called "about me" –where the details about the person, family, and education were asked. In the following section, questions regarding education and career were asked. Apart from that, "family status," "family income," "family type," and "family value"

[44] I will use the abbreviation of Pie chart - PC

("orthodox," "conservative," "moderate," and "liberal") were also filled. In the next section, a description of one's lifestyle was to be provided, such as dietary habits, drinking habits, smoking habits, pet preference, owning a house or car, residential status outside India, body type ("slim," "average," "athletic," and "heavy"), color ("very fair," "fair," "wheatish," "very wheatish," and "dark"), blood group, questions regarding any disability, HIV, Thalassemia. I filled my likes in the next section–about food, sports, movies, fashion, books, music, and hobbies. All these questions looked similar to the ones inquired by the traditional matchmaker before the digital boom, but in the online method, it was detailed and available in written form. The groom and bride in the matrimonial sites can have their opinion when they are creating their own profiles on the sites.

All the questions are worth further analysis, but the research is limited to questions where gender and caste are the categories of analysis. However, other aspects can also juxtapose gender and caste in this study and could be further studied. For the study, I received many profiles of Indian males and females living worldwide. Among those profiles, I filtered out the one I received from India and concentrated on Non- Residential Indians (NRIs). In this regard, 50 profiles were collected which advertised their desire and expectation for the bride or groom. Of that, 25 profiles were of men, accessed through the woman's profile (my profile), and 25 of women were accessed through the man's profile. The data were collected from May 25, 2020, to May 30, 2020. The data were collected within a period to avoid biases in selecting the profiles, as one of the limitations of this study is that their creators could delete the profiles at any time after they find a suitable spouse for themselves. Below are the pictures of two profiles, as an example, that sent the request to the female profile.



Pic 34. profiles suggested/sent by the website

These two profiles have been taken from the website (pictures and names are hidden) . This is the first look at the profiles when a woman receives a proposal for a groom on the website. In this advertisement, the name is optional; it mentions the age and height, current place of residence, religion and caste, education, job, salary, and marital status. After clicking on the profile, a tab with detailed information about the person will emerge for the visitor.

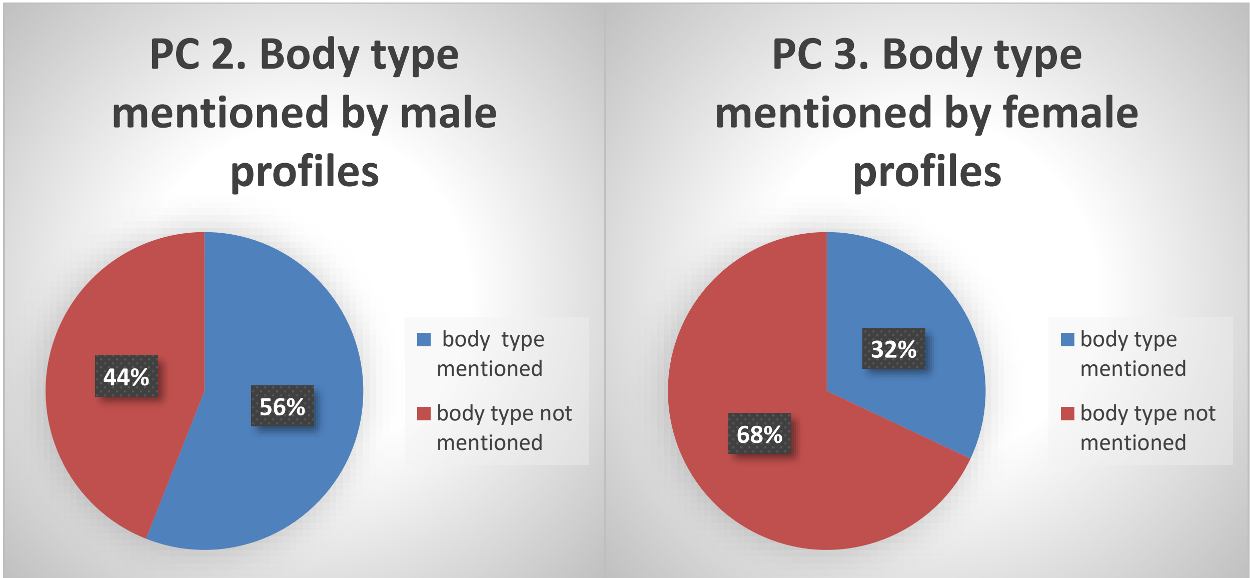
In that way, I collected the first 50 profiles received from Indians living outside their land. These profiles were not selected by me, rather the matrimonial site filtered those profiles for me and sent me as suggestions. Among those suggestions I took the first 50 South Asian diaspora profiles without filtering them on any other basis. I downloaded the profiles to keep them for the record and avoid any loss online. This is a drawback of researching on matrimonial sites that data can be published and unpublished at any time. Also, the researcher must download the data for research purposes when the data has been unpublished.

6.5. Observation and analysis[45]

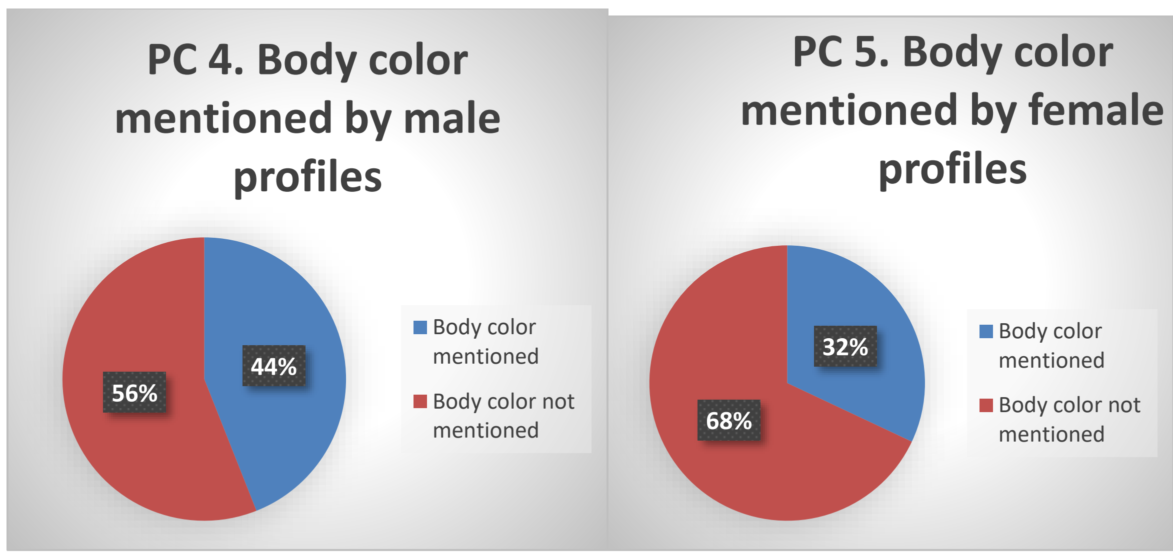
The observation of the data collected takes the research in different directions. First, analysis of gender-specific roles and construction of the gendered body through the matrimonial site; second, the role of caste in the matrimonial site and third, the intersection of gender and caste.

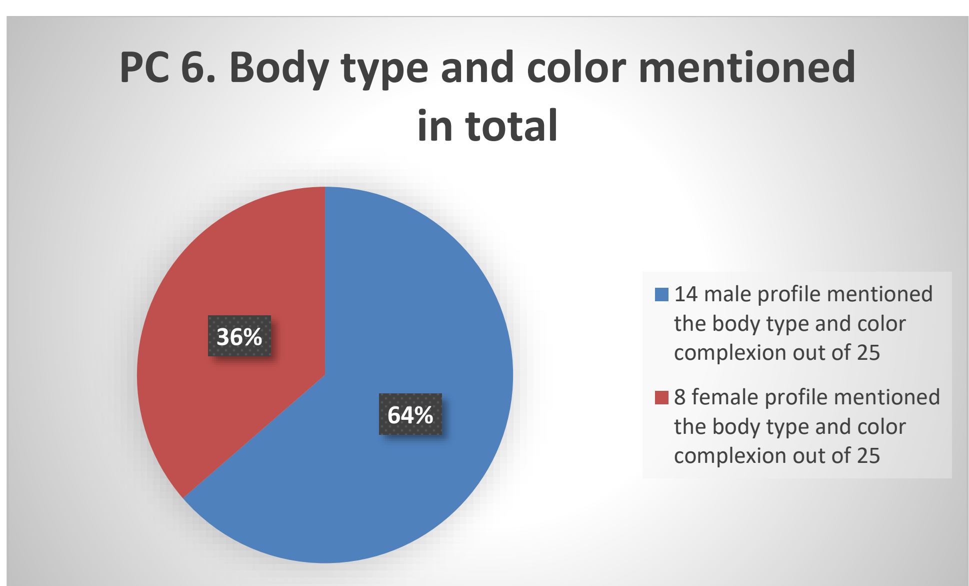
6.5.1. Color, size, and profession

According to the survey, twenty-five men's profiles and twenty-five women's profiles were received as suggestions by the Jeevansathi.com website which were accessed through the woman's (my) profile and man's profile (my husband's profile). Fourteen out of twenty-five (14/25) men's profiles mentioned the body type and eleven out of twenty-five (11/25) mentioned the body color on of the bride they desired to marry, whereas only eight out of twenty-five (8/25) women's profiles mentioned the body type and eight out of twenty-five (8/25) mentioned the body color of men they desired.



[45] The data collected from the matrimonial site is given in the Appendix.





Some did not mention any body type or color, which could obey to reasons such as one is not interested in any specific body type or color. Another possibility could be that one did not give enough time to create a profile and fill in each detail. In the pie chart, we can see that the number of men's profiles detailing the body type and body color of the person they wanted to marry is higher than that of women.

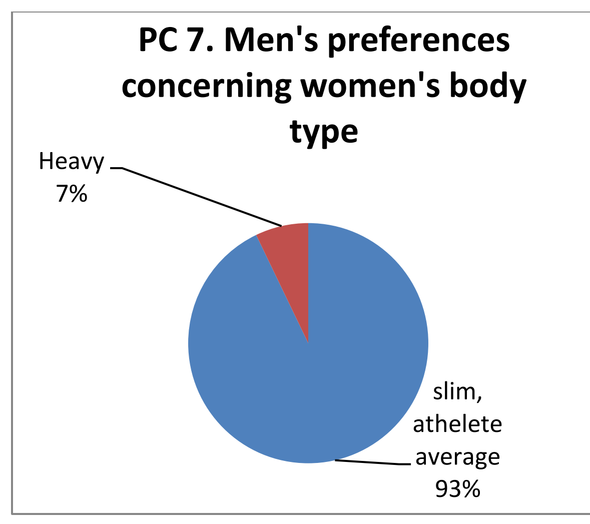
Here, I would like to refer to the Fitzpatrick scale to delineate the color distinction,[46] where different Indian skin color can be understood. In the below-given scale, the skin color types 4, 5 and 6 are commonly found on Indian land and based on these three colors the distinction is made among "very fair," "fair," "wheatish," "wheatish brown," and "dark."

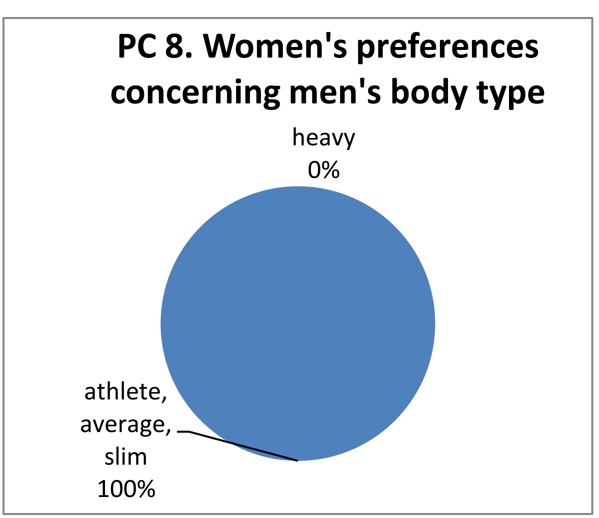
Skin type	Image	Ethnic group	Hair colour	Colour of eyes	Skin colour	Tanning ability
Type 1		Albinos, same redheads	red, blond	blue, grey, green	very pale white, pale white with freckles	Burns very easily, never tans
Type 2		People of northern European origin, such as Scandinavians or Celts	blond, red, light brown	blue, grey, green, hazel	pale white	Burns easily, rarely tans
Type 3		People of Mediterranean and Middle East origin	chestnut, dark blond	brown, blue, grey, green, hazel	white, light brown	Sometimes burns, gradually tans
Type 4		People of East Asian origin, such as Chinese, Japanese and some Indians and Pakistanis	brown, medium brown, dark brown	hazel, brown	medium brown, dark brown	Hardly ever burns, tans very easily
Type 5		People of African origin, South East Asians and some Indians, Pakistanis and Latin	dark brown	brown	dark brown	Really burns, tans easily and quickly darkens
Type 6		People with blue-black skin of African origin, Aborigines and dark-skinned Asians such as Tamils	black	brown	black	Never burns, tans, very dark

Pic 35. Fitzpatrick Scale

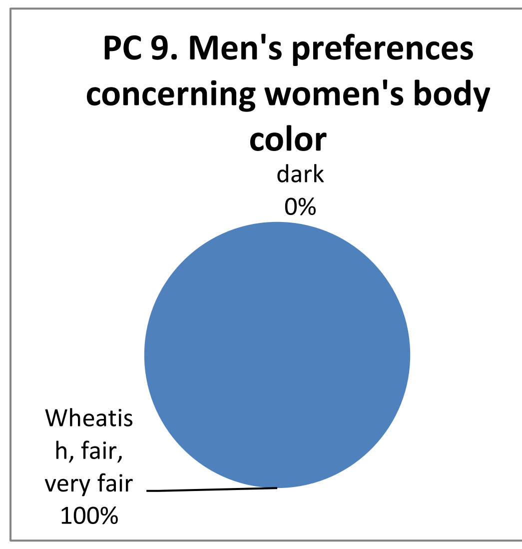
The form provided five options of color such as "very fair," "fair," "wheatish," "very wheatish," and "dark." Among those five options, most men's profiles were filled with "very fair," "fair," and "wheatish" in their preferred color for prospective brides. The other factor juxtaposed with the color is body type. The body types primarily indicated in the men's profiles are "slim," "athlete," and "average" out of the four options, which included "heavy" as well. Besides, men describe themselves as "average" or "athletic" and "wheatish" or "fair." The pie chart below shows the percentages in men's preferences as regards their desired bride's body types.

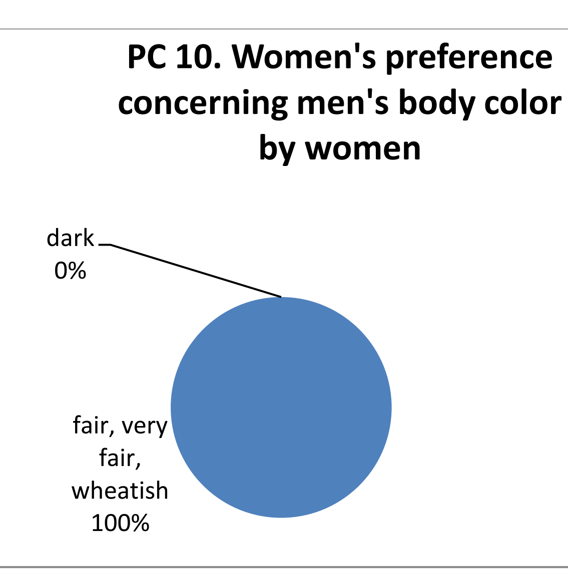
[46] Body color and tanning ability based on the Fitzpatrick skin pigmentation scale (Karolina M Zeilinska Dabkowska, 2014). Copyright: juniart, Olga Ekaterincheva, Lars Zahner, yanmingzhang, Paul Hill, Burlingham /Fotolia.





Among the twenty-five profiles of women who were visited or received interest by the man's (Gaurav Sushant, my husband) profile, the women mentioned themselves as "slim," "fair," or "athlete," and "wheatish." Eight out of twenty-five (8/25) profiles mentioned the body type and eight out of twenty-five mentioned the color of the men they desired. There too, the desired body was "very fair," "fair," "wheatish," and "average" or "athlete," and no one mentioned "heavy" or "dark." Hence, neither men nor women mentioned "heavy" as body type and "dark" and "very wheatish" in their desires, nor did they mention the same about themselves.



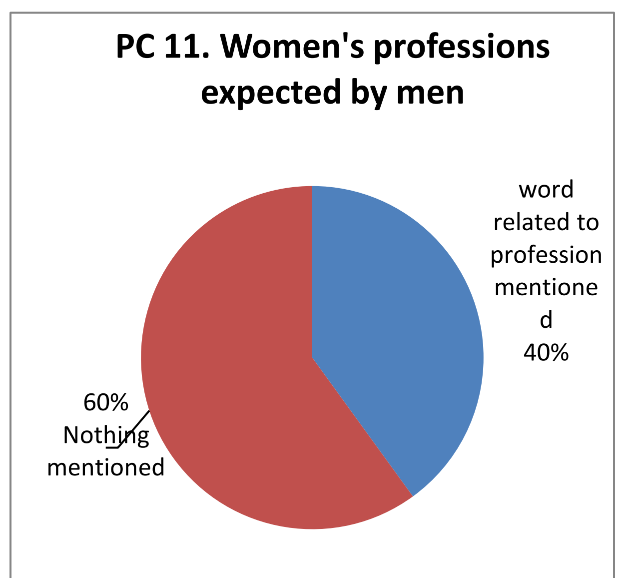


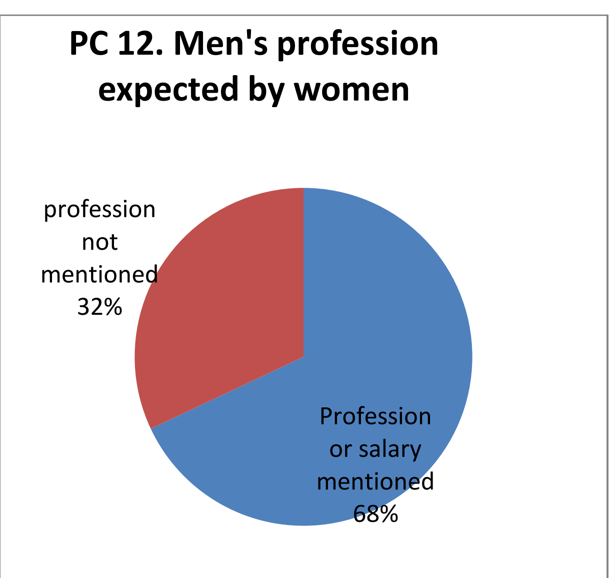
These specific body types and color preferences in matrimonial advertisements are not naïve expectations but have social, cultural, and economic construction. The woman's body and that of a man are desired to be in a particular shape and color. Referring to Foucault's idea of the docile body, he argued that "the classical age discovered the body as object and target of power" (1977, 2017, p. 136). Foucault mentions that different institutions are involved in "training the body," and different cultures use their socio-cultural and economic power in disciplining the body. "It is easy to find signs of attention paid to the body, that is manipulated, shaped, trained, disciplined, which obeys, responds, becomes skilful, and increases its forces" (ibid). Likewise, in this case study, the marriageable bodies, either of a male or a female, are scrutinized to fit into a particular frame of marriage such as ("slim," "athletic," and "average") and color ("very fair," "fair," and "wheatish"). In the pie charts above. One can observe that all 93 percent of male profiles and 100 percent of female profiles who have answered, have mentioned "slim," "athletic," and "average" body type. Similarly, 100 percent male profiles and 100 percent female profiles who have answered, have mentioned "very fair," "fair" and "wheatish" as their body color choices. If we refer to *Manusmriti*, which we talked about in chapter 4, also discusses the similar body type and color– "not too thin nor too fat, nor too dark" –required for the marriage. If we see the total number of men and women who have given these choices in the survey, the number of men profiles is more than the women profiles in expecting such marriageable bodies.

Moreover, repeating these requirements in all advertisements has normalized "slim," "average," and "athlete" bodies among both genders. In *Bodies that Matter,* Judith Butler (1996, 2011) emphasized the significance of the term "repetition" in the construction of gender (2011, p. 24); here, the chapter refers to the marriageable male and female body. The male or female marriageable bodies need to follow the normalized body shape and color. The other option, such as "heavy," which is also present in the options, is not desired by men, nor is it mentioned in women's profiles, and the same is applied to the men's profiles. Even, the body which is "heavy," avoids mentioning its size in the profile. Hence, the "heavy" or "not slim" body must train itself to fit into the normalized category or leave the box untouched. Analogously, the color of the body, which is not "very fair," "fair," or "wheatish," becomes socially less desired.

Concerning the profession, eighteen out of twenty-five (18/25) women have written their choices in the profession of the man they want to marry. The women have used the terms like "good

income," "well-settled outside India," medical doctor, or corporate employee. Contrarily, only six out of twenty-five (6/25) male profiles comment upon the profession but, even in these cases, it is not precisely the profession but more vague terms such as "well qualified," "independent," and "carrier oriented."





Here, we can see Butler's argument that "regulatory norms of 'sex' work in a performative fashion constitute the materiality of bodies and materialize the body's sex to materialize sexual difference in consolidating the body heterosexual imperative" (2011, p. 2). Here, the chapter refers explicitly to the profession that is variably imposed on differently gendered bodies. On the one hand, men are expected to be specific about their profession, which can guarantee security for the family, and the girl marrying him. On the other hand, women are not expected to be highly qualified in their profession. Such low expectations from women professionally show many aspects, such as that women can sacrifice their profession if needed.

Notably, fifteen out of twenty-five (15/25) male profiles mentioned some crucial points that they are looking for in their bride, such as a "simple, educated, cultured, and working girl, adjusts in the family, respects elders, takes care of the family and supports her partner with mutual understanding and believes in family values" and a "healthy blend of traditional and modern

culture." [47]On the contrary, most women expected a "caring and understanding husband" apart from their profession. Moreover, the men's profiles demand that women carry the values of being domesticated and caring wives, daughters-in-law, and mothers because the burden of "purity" relies on them. At the same time, she should be a "modern" earning woman with a perfect body shape and color to satiate her husband's desire. She should be social enough to be able to work outside.

Here, we see that the body is not only physically but also psychologically trained and shaped following the norms of gender. The differences in the prospects from both genders are specific. In this regard, V Geetha aptly says that "behaviors are cultivated among adults from the beginning of their age, and when they enter adulthood, their future appears more or less fixed, both in terms of their work roles and emotional well-being lives" (Geetha, 2002, p. 3). Nivedita Menon also exerts that "from childhood, boys and girls are trained in appropriate, gender-specific forms of behavior, play, dress, and many more" (Menon, 2012, p. 61). Both the writers have instructed, and this study shows that men from childhood are trained to focus on their future as salaried men, whereas women concentrate on marriage and motherhood as their goals. A woman in the matrimonial site is not expected to be ambitious and bold, and a man is not expected to be interested in staying home to take care of the home. That is why male and female behavior is constructed with the participation of different institutions, and one of them is matrimonial sites where distinctive attributes and roles are allocated to the male and female sexes. "Different expectations are imposed on them, which are not easily exchanged. Their roles and expectations follow a norm that is practiced repeatedly and subconsciously. Such norms are naturalized and unquestioned" (Geetha, 2002, pp. 1-3). As we see in the data, a man should be professionally sound and caring towards his spouse, whereas a female is expected to care for the whole family and support and prioritize the husband's family. These male and female roles become powerful and influential, not because everyone adheres to them but because repeatedly presenting such ideas makes them seem universal and natural. Matrimonial sites such as

[47] Interestingly, Bharati Mukherjee in one of her interviews (1998) with Shefali Desai et al. also discusses about such double burden on South Asian diaspora women. Women are trained to be adaptable, to accommodate themselves to the husband's families and lifestyle. They carry a life outside their homes and inside the home they become conventional wives. This way they also become a bridge between two cultures. While men are threatened with the American culture (p. 135).

Jeevansathi.com which have already marked their presence globally propagate the stereotyped gender roles for South Asian men and women.

Indeed, there has been a shift in men's and women's roles due to changing norms with time and location. The matrimonial site also uses the blend of "tradition" with "modern" as its motto. Men are "caring and loving" toward their wives, and women are "professionally active." However, this shift has burdened women doubly with an expectation of being traditional in their thoughts who should fulfill their families' desire with priority and at the same time, they should go out and earn as "modern" women. This double role has given insecurity to women in balancing their professional lives and their lives after marriage as they can be asked to leave the job at any time for her husband's job or childcare. According to the teaching of *Manusmriti* and its *Pativrata* norm these tasks always come before the women's desire and self-identity. V Geetha argues that:

> Norms of masculinity and femininity are not unchanging. Nor are they consistent and uniform. In social upheaval, norms and expectations are often challenged and even altered. However, when the order is restored, the norms re-assert themselves or co-opt whatever transformations may have been affected. (Geetha, 2002, p. 5)

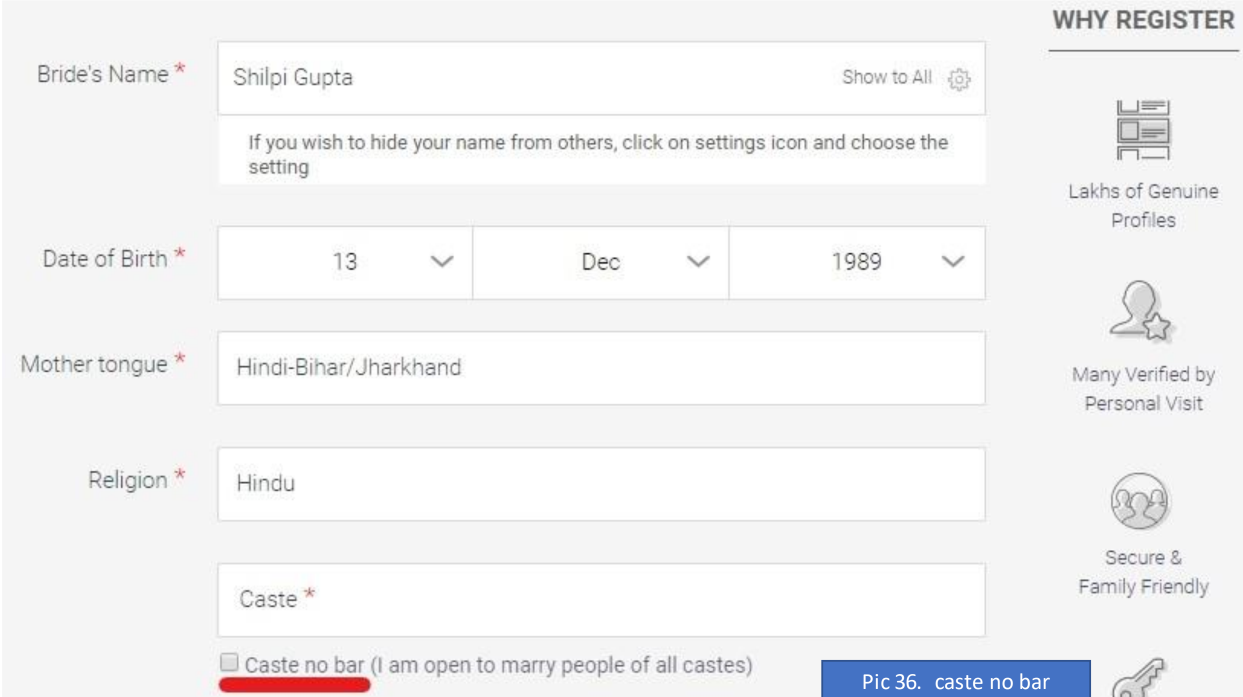
In this case study, till now we have seen how the norms defining male and female prescribed by *Manusmriti* have shifted. Matrimonial sites have indicated such changes in the role of women. However, they have double burdened the women where they must fit themselves in both the categories: "a good responsible wife" and "working woman." At the same time, women can be asked any time to give up their profession which creates a sense of insecurity among women for their profession.

The prescribed gender roles for men and women are also influenced by other things: caste, religion, language, class, and sexual preferences. For instance, if we investigate gender together with caste, one can see the discussion by V Geetha, who explains that gender role varies according to caste. Poor Dalit women spend most of their time working in the field with their men folk and are not worried about their household chores and wifely duties, whereas a woman of upper caste is burdened with the anxiety of housekeeping, child-rearing, cooking, and pleasing husband (2002, p. 7). Caste influences and shapes the masculinity and femininity of two different

genders. Hence, one must see the complexity which goes beyond gender. Here, in the case of the matrimonial site, we will see how gender and caste function together.

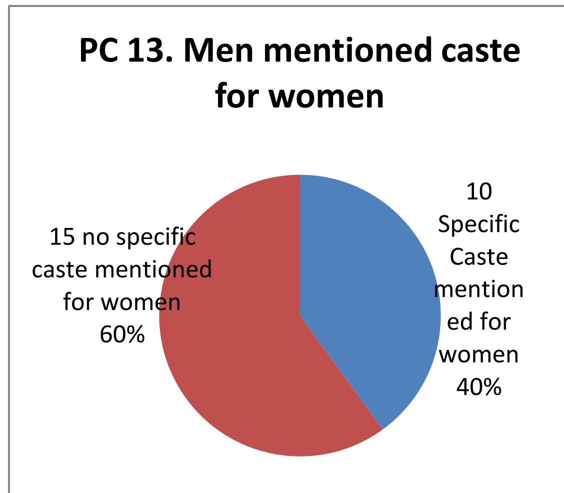
6.5.2. Caste

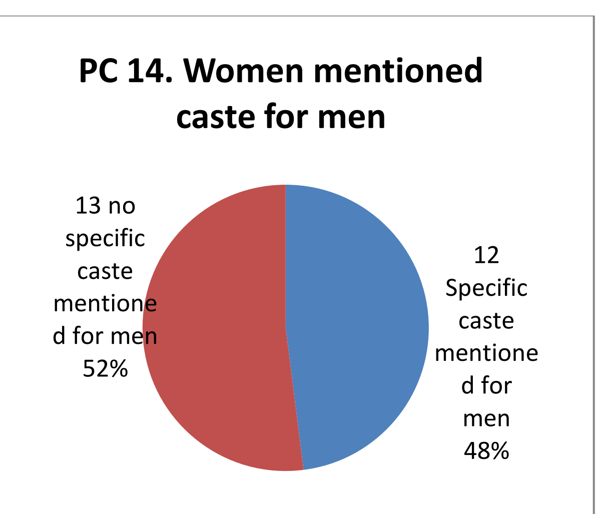
Ashwin Rajadesingan et al. have argued that "youngsters are more open to inter-caste marriage and look for their life partners outside their caste" (2019, p. 393). It is true to some point, that youngsters are more open to inter-caste marriages. Jhumpa Lahiri in her novel *The Namesake* shows that the younger generation is not worried about the "purity" of their caste. However, in the novel, the male characters marry the women of their religion and caste which are fixed by their parents. Bharati Mukherjee in *Desirable Daughters* (2002) shows the importance of caste among protagonist's parents who married her off at younger age because they feared that she might marry outside caste. In this study, it has been found that new diaspora generations fall into the trap of an endogamous marriage system because of the technicality of matrimonial sites. All the visitors are asked to mention their caste while filling in the form, as it has been made mandatory with an asterisk (*) mark on it, as one can see below.



Pic 36. caste no bar

The website automatically filters the caste and shows the profiles from that caste or the caste of the same status.[48] In the above picture, one can see the option of "caste no bar," which means one is open to marrying people of all castes. Despite filling the option of "caste no bar," the options will be suggested from that caste or of equal caste status. As a visitor, I filled out the caste in my profile (Gupta) and Gaurav Sushant's (Kayastha, the male) profile. As we perceived, we both received the offers from the caste we mentioned, as shown in the survey above. Indeed, the profiles made by the parents look for the bride or groom from the same caste. The young generations also unintentionally carry their caste in their profiles. Consequently, each caste looks for a partner within the same caste.





In the above pie charts, one can see that the desired "caste mentioned" are the caste names they belong to and are also looking the bride or groom from the same caste which they have mentioned. The ones with "no specific name" have mentioned other castes of equal status, only mentioned the religion, or did not mention it. Intriguingly, my profile received interest only from the same caste profile, even though my profile was open to all caste marriages. On the contrary, the profiles that do not mention any caste are filtered based on the caste they filled for themselves. The question arises here, why is mentioning caste so crucial that it is mandatory in the online matrimonial forms? Marriage based on caste is a typical and traditional norm in South Asia, as we have seen before; however, the question here is does the digital media continue to carry the same endogamic marriage norms. The digital connection of Indians with the Indian

[48] This has been an interesting point to discuss which can be done in further research– the technicality of matrimonial sites and function of algorithm in filtering profiles.

diaspora is not only about their connection to the homeland but ensuring the purity of caste hierarchy by keeping them closed to caste-based marriages even after leaving the country. As many scholars have shown the importance of endogamic marriage in Hindu religion in continuing the caste "purity" (Tambiah, 1973). As far as this case study is concerned, caste plays a crucial role in segregating the profile, which is done by the site itself. It brings to the point that, matrimonial site such as Jeevansathi.com which has spread globally is carrying the double task of not only finding the bride and groom but also finding them from the specific castes. So, this caste-nation- "an imagined community" is carried beyond the border by matrimonial sites.

6.5.3. The intersection of gender and caste on matrimonial site

When the site is read closely, it continues the social structure of caste and gender, where class is also part. Matrimonial sites, mainly created by upper-caste and upper-middle-class Indian men who entered the market with the internet boom during the 1990s, have defined gender according to their class, caste, and gender (Radhika Gajjala, 2019). They disseminate the same ideology of gender construction: heterosexual, reproductive, and maintaining the hierarchy in society by imposing endogamous marriage and separating castes.

In the matrimonial site, one thing should be noted: the normalized body shape, size, and color, and the behavior expected from a woman, is a gender construct which only upper-caste women can fit. Research has reported that the social structure defined by the caste system is highly dependent upon skin color ("Skin colour tied to the caste system," Times of India, 2016). Further the study also says that because of strict endogamy, there is variation in skin color (ibid) where the upper castes mostly carry lighter skin color and lower castes have darker skin tones. That is why rejecting a dark-skinned body is not only a rejection of a gendered body but a caste-d gendered body.

Most likely, matrimonial sites create a double bind where if a lower caste woman or man wants to enter matrimonial sites, they must go through the normalized body shape, size, color and many more, or they are not entertained on such matrimonial sites. They are not accepted in such upper-

caste and high-class matrimonial processes. Matrimonial sites ensure the purity of the sexuality of women and the caste lineage by arranging marriage within the caste.

6.6. Conclusions

Most registered members do not know who is creating profiles, but they are still connected to each other through online matrimonial sites. At the same time, they feel closer to each other because they are one among them, a compatible groom or bride or parents of the groom or bride belonging to the same nation, culture, homeland, and religion. Matrimonial sites represent what Benedict Anderson called, an “imagined community” for their visitor to connect to find partners for themselves, as I have discussed in chapter 2. Indeed, online matrimonial sites for the Indian diaspora open the door to connecting with their people, talking to them, and finding the one s/he want to marry. Notably, the search for the partner is carried out through filters based on caste, class, body shape, color, location, etc. Hence, this “imagined community” is a space to look for an ideal pure Indian blood husband or wife among many and demonstrate their loyalty and love towards the most traditional values of the Indian culture, nation, homeland, kinship, and caste.

Also, we are not the ones searching for the bride or groom, but the website filters and gives us options, and from there, we take one. Most of the questions already have their answers in options: the groom or bride does not go beyond the fixed responses. They are repeatedly produced, making the questions look general and typical for their visitors. The registered members adhere to the professional ideologies, institutional knowledge, and assumptions of others while making profiles or visiting their advertisements. As per the study, most of the questions are centred upon gender, caste, and class-based ideology, where the victimization of an individual cannot be seen from one perspective. Instead, it needs to be deciphered with multiple lenses. In the survey, we compared the body type, body color, professions, and other expectations mentioned in searching for a bride or a groom. It is observed that men and women both are moving towards achieving a perfectly trained marriageable body. However, there are differences regarding the high number of male profiles than that of female profiles in mentioning the body type and color. Besides, men are desired to be professionally active, whereas women should be professional and domesticated, where their family lives and values should be

prioritized to the detriment of their professional lives. As we have seen in the analysis, the central function of marriage is seen as to procreate. The children born of such normative marriages maintain and reproduce the social order. Both the hierarchical relations of caste and the immortality of the male line and ancestors, thus, rest on marriage practices.

Consequently, women within marriage are the carriers of the caste. When they cross the border after marriage or marry any Indian diaspora, their gendered body also carries the caste. They also become the re/producer of the caste and its hierarchy. Because of globalization, urbanization and the nuclearization of families, it was not possible to keep the caste-based communities closed until the emergence of internet sites such as matrimonial sites. They are used as a new advanced method for following the same. The caste-based matrimonial sites are a result of the fear of the contamination of caste (higher caste) by the lower caste inside the country and outside the national borders. In this way, matrimonial websites serve to find a partner and ensure the continuity of purity of the caste. The digital platform connects the diaspora with Indians for love, nostalgia, root search, and the fear of impurity of the caste. At the same time, lower caste men and women are not invited to the matrimonial sites. They must first fit into the upper caste criteria of being a "man" and a "woman," such as the color, body size, and shape, and act like upper caste men and women losing their own identities. They may end up being humiliated by the upper caste for entering an upper caste space. Thus, matrimonial sites successfully carry their Brahminical patriarchal agendas openly even beyond the border.

Moving towards, the next case study, we already know that the South Asian diaspora started postcolonialism as their need to theorize their identity within a particular time and space. Hence earlier male writers claim their space as colonial others in the colonial master culture and land. South Asian women who were unrecognized also took charge and reformed the diaspora literary writing. However, with the movement of heterogeneous groups of Indian diasporas or their prominent presence in the diasporic groups, caste and gender, and class cannot be left outside the postcolonial discussion. To head toward the heterogeneity of the South Asian diaspora and underline the self-representation of gendered caste and caste-d gender by the South Asian Dalit diaspora, the thesis will next explore the blog article written by Valliammal et al. (2016).

Pic 37. Taken from Instagram @comics_in_crisis

https://www.instagram.com/p/CounE4My8kx/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=

Chapter 7. Self-representation of caste and gender among the South Asian diaspora: A case study of a blog article

> *The struggle to speak for oneself cannot be separated from a history of being spoken for, from the struggle to speak and be heard. Speaking for oneself is not a simple act but rather a complex process.* (Ella Shohat, 1995, p. 173)

> *Many people on the side of privilege seldom see privilege as it is visible to the naked eye shrouded within the artefacts of material culture.* (Suraj Yengde, 2019, p. 245)

In the previous two case studies, we have already seen the representation of the caste-d gender and gendered caste among the South Asian diaspora by Bharti Mukherjee in her novels and matrimonial site, Jeevansathi.com. This chapter questions the South Asian diaspora narrative concerning the limited representation or underrepresentation of marginalized sections of the South Asian diaspora. In this case study, I will take a blog article titled "Spearheading a survey of caste in South Asian diasporas" (2016) written by Valliammal Karunakaran, Asmita Pankaj, Thenmozhi Soundararajan, and Prathap Balakrishnan. The blog article is published through a blog account which is under the name of Valliammal Karunakaran (https://medium.com/@Bahujan_Power/pioneering-a-survey-of-caste-in-the-diasporas-6e5a27cd82ef). The blog article is based on a survey "The caste in Diaspora Survey" (2016) conducted by organizations such as the Ambedkar International Mission[49] and the Ambedkar Association of North America[50]. The survey presented data which was later published online by Equality Labs[51] (2016), an online organization working on gender and caste issues among South Asian diaspora in the USA. The survey also included testimonies written by the South Asian diaspora sharing their experiences of being othered on the basis of their caste and gender. The

[49] The weblink of the Ambedkar International Mission https://www.ambedkarmission.org/

[50] The weblink of the Ambedkar Association of North America https://aanausa.org/

[51] The weblink of Equality Labs https://www.equalitylabs.org/

blog article “Spearheading a survey of caste in South Asian diasporas” (2016) has published thirteen testimonies in it. I will focus on these testimonies.

In the blog article, Valliammal Karunakaran et al. (2016), themselves from Dalit diaspora community, share the experiences of thirteen young South Asian diasporas from different gender groups and castes. In these thirteen narratives gendered caste and caste-d gender others have shared their experiences of caste and gender and hence narrate their stories. This is also the reason for choosing this case study because it emphasizes the experiences self-narrated by the gendered caste and caste-d gender other.

We have discussed in chapter 2 about the representation (Butler & Spivak, 2007) juxtaposing with “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1983) to see how caste-nations have been created among the South Asian diaspora. We have also seen how in such “imagined communities” dominant castes have been representing themselves and how they have represented the one who are gendered caste and caste-d gender other. In that chapter, I discussed according to Butler & Spivak (2007) who explained that those who are effectively stateless are still under the control of power of those who have constructed those “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1983). Then in the discussion I talked about Permila Tirkey’s case (Dalwai, 2006). The lower caste diaspora woman is treated as an outsider within the South Asian diaspora community. At the same time, is controlled and dehumanized by the South Asian diaspora family. Butler and Spivak also argued that there cannot be “radical politics of change without performative contradiction” (2007, p. 66). In this case study we are going to see the testimonies of the Dalit diaspora which serve as the “performative contradiction” against the dominant discourse of the South Asian diaspora community.

Coming back to the case study, in the beginning of the blog article, Karunakaran et al. briefly historicize caste apartheid in South Asia. They debate some of the dominant myths about caste, perpetuated by the so-called upper caste members, such as “caste is specific to Hindus” and “caste does not exist among diasporas.” Subsequently, they discuss the methodology of collecting the narratives on caste of the South Asian diaspora, highlighting that the survey was open to the diaspora of all castes. The survey was conducted online and offline through a questionnaire. South Asian diaspora could fill out the form at places such as temples, cultural

halls, or workplaces. The identity of respondents (thirteen participants) was revealed in the blog article only with their permission.

The testimonies of thirteen individuals collected through the survey in the blog article demonstrate their intent of self-representation against a history, which is not only (his)story but a casteist (his)story. We will see that their narrative aims to delineate a) the complexity of a South Asian Dalit diaspora identity(ies) at a transnational level and b) their trauma, sufferings, pain, and wounds which need to be historicized to place them in history and their struggle against the caste apartheid.

Through three theoretical lenses–postcolonial, decolonial, and Dalit feminism, as discussed in chapter three, this chapter enters the question of self-representation of gendered caste and caste-d gendered other. We have already seen the question of representation theoretically discussed in Chapter 3 from postcolonial, decolonial and Dalit diaspora feminist perspective. Chapter 3 has shown the notion of representation from the perspective of the colonized subject (Bhabha, 1990; Bhabha, 1994), the Third World women (Spivak, 1988), and women of color (2007). Then finally we talked about Dalit diaspora feminist agendas through the text of Thenmozhi Soundararajan (2022). We saw the question self-representation from gendered caste and caste-d gender other. For this purpose, I used a real story of a 13-year-old Dalit diaspora girl' death in 1999 in Berkeley which was covered in the newspapers in the USA (Anita Chabria (2001), Matthew Artz (2004), Koshy (2005), Svati P Shah (2008), Viji Sundaram (2012), and Lisa Fernandez (2021)). The newspaper articles were published online, and through those articles, I tried to delineate the complex position of Dalit diaspora woman identities. This real incident reflected on the question of self-representation and its "impossibility" gendered caste and caste-d gender other among the South Asian diaspora. Based on these theoretical frameworks, we saw in the two case studies, the representation of gendered caste and caste-d gender other by Bharati Mukherjee in her novels and in the matrimonial site Jeevansathi.com.

In this case study, I will use feminist close reading (Lukic &Sánchez, 2011) from a Dalit diaspora feminist perspective (Soundararajan, 2022) to delineate the self-representation of gendered caste and caste-d gendered other. Later, to delineate the narratives of the diasporas which have been their experiences as presented in the blog article (Karunakaran et al., 2016) –I will use Gloria Anzaldúa's "Coatlicue State." I expect "Coatlicue State" to shed light on the

oppressive mechanisms which still operate among the South Asian diaspora and to unravel the "otherness" hidden in the internal conflicts within it. It will also touch on becoming the "conscious other" (Gupta, 2018; Gupta, 2022). Later, through "Nueva Conciencia Mestiza," the chapter will see the rising of marginalized voices from the borderlands (in-between spaces) as a collective narrative creating cyber activism against neglected gendered caste and caste-d gender writing.

In order to closely read the blog article, especially the thirteen narratives shared by the Dalit diaspora, I have, first, mapped the testimonies based on the caste related problems they have narrated, then how they are overcoming such problems, and finally how they are fighting against the caste apartheid. Hence, I have divided them under the categories a) trauma, b) hiding, c) separation from self, d) dominant caste's ignorance, and e) returning to self: healing, and finally f) collaboration, confrontation and cyberactivism. Before entering the case study, I will talk about the advantages and methodological issues related to the blog article.

7.1. The blog: An alternative mode of writing

I am trained in literature; my methods are primarily oriented to considering blog writing as a literary text. Hence, this research analyzes a blog article written by the South Asian diaspora using a qualitative method of feminist close reading (Lukic & Sánchez, 2011) as explained in detail in chapter 2. Nevertheless, I have found some unexpected valuable points after choosing the blog article for the case study, perhaps known to many researchers but new to me. One practical advantage of using a blog article has been that the content generated is relatively easy to access as compared to what I could have collected offline. Especially in the field where I work, the intersection of caste and gender in the South Asian diaspora is a relatively less investigated area.

Another relevant point is that during the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, when access to many universities' research spaces and traveling was not allowed, working online with the blog article helped to keep research going. Although, I have chosen one blog article for the research

work[52], I followed other blog writers related to the theme of caste and gender. Those articles helped in delineating the current debate on caste and gender issues. Besides, the blog article (Karunakaran et al, 2016) helped me in connecting with other scholars and activists who worked on caste and gender, as most of them followed the blogger Valliammal Karunakaran blog account. This is one of the advantages of using blog articles as a case study, it opened other sources of reading. I will talk briefly about the other bloggers and blog articles published on this topic and how the blog article selected for the case study is unique from them for the research work.

Since 2016, when the blog article (Karunakaran et al., 2016) was posted, during the same time, blogs and the internet in general became a space of writing and healing for the gendered caste and caste-d gender other. For instance, several blog articles were published chiefly that year by Dalit diaspora. Such as “A lion in sheep’s clothing: The curious case of conservative Hindu groups masquerading as progressives” (2016) was published by Vinay Bhat[53]. In the article, Bhat talks about how the dominance of different Hindu organizations in the USA, especially Hindu American Foundation (HAF), has suppressed other cultures and identities of South Asian caste minorities living in the USA. He compares HAF with the lion in sheep’s clothing, which has been working in the USA as a Hindu diaspora group in minority, but they carry a casteist agendas against the lower caste South Asian diaspora.

“The Dalit-Bahujan guide to understanding caste in Hindu scripture” (2016) by Valliammal Karunakaran[54] historicizes the caste system in South Asia. Karunakaran in this bog article touches the topics such as perpetuation of caste by Brahmanical system through the Brahminical ancient texts such as *Vedas*. In his text, Karunakaran also argues that although caste is a European term, the caste system is not rooted in the European colonization, rather it is grounded by the dominant castes long before the colonization. Further, dominant caste used their texts to build the caste hierarchy.

[52] https://medium.com/@Bahujan_Power/pioneering-a-survey-of-caste-in-the-diasporas-6e5a27cd82ef
Spearheading a Survey of Caste in South Asian Diasporas (2016)

[53] Vinay Bhatt’s blog account- https://medium.com/@vinaybhat_2510

[54]Valliammal Karunakaran’s blog account- https://medium.com/@Bahujan_Power

Suraj Yengde[55] is another Dalit diaspora writer who has published his book *Caste matters* (2019). He has also written blog articles from 2016 onwards. Some of his articles related to caste and gender are “How caste interplays in India’s failure at Olympics” (2016), and “Letter to the president of India” (2020). In his first blog article he has analyzed sports and Dalit people where he argues that Dalit sports people have performed very well in the sports at international level and despite their dedication in representing their country, they have not received the recognition when compared to other upper caste sports person (2016). Yengde has given the example of Palwankar brothers, first class ace cricketers, P V Sindhu, won a bronze medal in Olympic 2020, has been questioned for her mixed caste identity. Yengde in his blog article “Letter to the president of India” (2020), has written an open letter to the India’s first Dalit women president where he explains about the injustices towards the Dalit population.

Thenmozhi Soundararajan[56] has also written blog articles such as “Why it is time to dump Gandhi” (2017), where she criticizes Mahatma Gandhi’s ignorance towards the Dalit population in India which has resulted in the further marginalization of Dalits all over the world. She targets Gandhi by saying that “behind his carefully crafted image there was a calculating, cunning leader who was deft at playing communities against each other for the benefit of Savarna (caste Hindu) privilege” (Why is it time to Dump Gandhi, 2016).

Anirvan Chatterjee[57], another Dalit diaspora blog writer has blogged articles such as “The 1940 Singh Census, and the attack on Indian immigrants” (2022). In this article, he has touched the theme of immigration of South Asians in the USA through data. For the case study, I have concentrated on only one blog article written by Valliammal Karunakaran et al. (2016) on medium.com blog, published under Karunakaran’s blog account. Among all other blog articles, I chose this article because the selected blog article gave scope to read the self-narrated experiences of gendered caste and caste-d gender other. The blog article, based on the data of the survey, shares thirteen narratives of Dalit diaspora through which they have self-represented themselves. This narrative will be used in this case study for the close reading and understanding the marginalization of the Dalit diaspora and their activism.

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[55] Suraj Yengde’s blog account- https://surajyengde.medium.com/

[56] Thenmozhi Soundararajan’s blog account- https://medium.com/@dalitdiva

[57] Anirvan Chatterjee’s blog- https://medium.com/@anirvan

There is much writing after the "Caste in the diaspora survey" in 2016 because it opened many questions and answers suppressed by the South Asian dominant caste diaspora. It also gave the confidence to the Dalit diaspora to talk with the data gathered from the survey which was not available earlier. The survey conducted in 2016 answered questions in graphs and data collected from the respondents. In the blog article, Karunakaran et al. state that the survey was conducted only after repeatedly hearing about Dalit Americans' experiences of being discriminated whereas the dominant-caste South Asians insisted that caste was not an issue. Thenmozhi Soundararajan (2022), who has also written about the survey in her book and is also one of the blog article writers, explains in her book that it was not easy to conduct the survey; however, despite the fear, people came forward to share their experiences (Soundararajan, 2022, p. 22).

> While we gathered data, interviewing people in front of South Asian markets, business, and religious centers, dominant-caste individuals hurled caste slurs at us. Our researchers in multiple states all experience open bigotry and disgust. One South Asian organization had an existential crisis over the survey and convened a board meeting to debate sharing the survey. We stood before that board with courage and explained the data would create powerful conversations that would not only document the problem but also help everyone heal. (Soundararajan, 2022, pp. 22-23)

Soundararajan exerts that after the 2016's survey, it is hard to deny the existence of caste. Apart from the narrative of the Dalit diaspora on which I am working in this case study, there are other findings which are published on the website of Equality Labs (2016)[58], which affirms that 25 per cent of Dalit diaspora respondents stated that they have been through physical and verbal insults because of their caste, and 60 per cent have gone through caste-based jokes or comments. It says 40 per cent talked about being discriminated against at their workplaces because of their caste, and 40 per cent of respondents have reported being rejected in a relationship based on caste. After publishing these data, Equality Labs published many other details and debate on gendered caste and caste-d gender issues. After this year, Equality Labs has published and provided the links of the newspaper articles on its Instagram page[59] to update people on caste and gender

[58] The detailed survey of Equality Lab is available on its website https://www.equalitylabs.org/castesurvey

[59] The Instagram page of Equality Labs https://www.instagram.com/equalitylabs/

issues. Such as, it has shared a newspaper article written by Sanya Mansoor, "Lawmaker faces violent threats for trying to make California the first state to ban caste discrimination" (2023) where she talks about the threats which a South Asian-American lawyer has received because she decided to fight the case to make California ban caste discrimination. Another article "Anti-caste movement in US seeing snowball moment" written by Aditi Kumar has been shared by Equality Labs on its Insta page. Many articles related to gender and caste, such as "A statement on caste bias in Silicon Valley from 30 Dalit women engineers" (2022) and "India's 'untouchable' women face discrimination even in schemes meant to help them" (2022) can be found on its Instagram page.

Besides, many other activities were going online together with the blog writing which also narrated the Dalit women experiences all over the world. For instance, the Casteless Collective[60] singing band was launched in 2017 by the caste and gender others who earlier used to sing at funerals (Vice, 2019; Samuel, 2020). A female Dalit singer of the group, Isaivani (pic given in the appendix), has been recognized as one of the inspiring BBC's 100 women of 2020 (Samuel, 2021)[61]. She together with other Dalit singers have self-represented their stories, identities, their counter stories against Brahminism. Pramila Venkateswaran states that "Isaivani expresses her feminist agency in her performance as a Dalit woman, a trained singer, as well as her performance as an activist who desires change for Dalits and for Dalit women" (p. 181) Isaivani chooses songs to express her identities and fight against Brahminical patriarchy. Pramila Venkateswaran write that Isaivani through her songs criticized the male dominant norms where women are not allowed to enter in the Sabrimala Temple. She is very proud of being in a collective group because it gives her the power to fight and an experience of equality. She feels that her songs against casteism and patriarchy make her fulfilled. She dresses up like an urban working woman without makeup who also carries her lower caste with her. Dressing up like a man and carrying long hair, no makeup and walking all around the stage and singing against Brahmanical patriarchy makes her unique on the stage. She has created a stage to live her

[60] Casteless Collective singing band provides a good scope for further research on Dalit voices.

[61] The link of Casteless Collective performance: https://youtu.be/47J4H3fuE-o
In the video, one can see that Casteless Collective use the word "behindwood" as a counter existence of Bollywood and Tollywood, the mainstream cinema. "Behindwood" represent the cinematography of the people who are underrepresented in the Bollywood and Tollywood.

passion and start her activism. Venkateswaran also quotes Isaivani who says “A woman speaking out is criticized. A woman speaking out about casteism is criticized. I just keep doing what I do. Change is the goal” (Quoting Isaivani, Venkateswaran, p. 181). Parmila venkateswaran also translates an excerpt of her song:

> How, how, how, how can we not ask this?
>
> How, how, how, how can we not erase caste?
>
> Our brothers and sisters, all need to smile
>
> Our brothers and siters, all need to be educated. (188)

Thenmozhi Soundararajan, one of the writers of the blog article selected for the case study, calls herself Dalit Diva on social media such as Instagram and Medium.com, started using social platforms against Brahmanical patriarchy from 2016 onwards. She has around 14.1 thousand followers on her Instagram page[62]. Dalit Diva (her pic is given in the appendix) is one of those first proud Dalit women who chose to be called by this name on the internet and then revolutionized the #Dalitwomenfight, creating a global conversation around caste-based sexual violence. She used Instagram to connect with Dalits and discuss various topics related to caste and gender.

[62]Instagram page of Thenmozhi Soundararajan. https://www.instagram.com/dalitdiva/

Pic 38. The picture is taken from the Instagram page of Thenmozhi Soundararajan

Regarding the online presence of the Dalit diaspora women, Soundararajan expresses that "when you heard the stories or heard a reflection, or you spoke a reflection, it felt proudly healing to be seen, to feel resonance, to mirror each other. We could see each other as one" (Soundararajan, 2022, p. 132). Seeing their presence, according to her, Dalit women found recognition online when they found each other. They support and celebrate each other through discussions and debates. According to her, the online space allowed everyone to hear Dalit experiences and reintegrate truths about their lives previously kept away from them by caste oppression. Az

Causevic et al. (2020) in their conversation with Maari Maitreyi talk about the online presence of Dalits taking the case of opening Wikipedia of Dalit history, culture, and activism has made their presence global and has connected the Dalits worldwide.

Dalit diaspora feminists started connecting with the community through publishing online articles, such as Maya Kamble has written "It is time to end caste discrimination in the tech industry" (2020). "Caste in America: Mothers like me are excluded from Indian parent networks because I am a Dalit" (2023) and "Dalits are winning against caste discrimination in the US, too" (2023). Anahita Mukherji has discussed about the marginalization of Dalits in her newspaper article "Insults, isolation, broken friendships: Dalit students open up on caste discrimination in US" (2022). There are interviews as well, such as "Google: Tanuja Gupta opens up about her exit due to caste discrimination" discussing the caste problem in multinational companies (An interview with Tanuja Gupta, The Quint, 2022). All these Dalit diaspora women have come forward through their writing about caste-based gender discrimination in the USA among dominant caste South Asians. Then in 2019 and 2022, we can see the auto-ethnography books published by the Dalit diaspora, *Caste matters* (2019) by Suraj Yengde and *The trauma of caste: A Dalit feminist meditation on survivorship, healing and abolition* (2022) by Thenmozhi Soundararajan. The popularity of these books is only possible because of the visibility they created among their followers online and offline as well before the publication of the books. This way, Dalit diaspora have made their presence online, through their blog article, online newspaper articles, YouTube, Instagram and have books published on the issues of caste and gender. However, for the case study, we will work on the blog article by Valliammal Karunakaran et al. (2016)

Coming back to the blog article, the comments or conversations on the blog article can be extended and scanned unless the writer deletes them. Besides, some of the followers of the blog have also written on the same topic. For this research, I can go back and forth to see the comments, questions, and answers and simultaneously move to different places worldwide, which means one could examine more stories than one can with offline methods.

These are some of the technical benefits of choosing a blog article. Besides, there are personal and political reasons for considering this text as one of the case studies. As a blogger, on the one side, I blog poems and stories from a feminist perspective. Blogging allows me to share

experiences, understand, unravel, and knit feelings through poems and short stories. Conversely, the academic interest in diaspora studies from a Third World feminist always makes me aware of going beyond gender, though gender continues to be a foundational concern. In the concluding remarks of my GEMMA master's research work, the questions on caste were developed. Thus, these two positions have merged, especially in this case study, to see blogs as a source of knowledge for looking further at the self-representation of gendered caste and caste-d gender other in South Asian Dalit diaspora writing. As I have discussed before, I followed bloggers such as Valliammal Karunakaran, Thenmozhi Soundararajan, Vikram Bhat, and Suraj Yengde. These bloggers have narrated their experiences and used blogs to historicize and politicize their personal experiences. Helene Snee says blog writing is about sharing personal experiences, where the "personal is political," and the personal and political questions become public through the blog (2013). In this way, this research writing has become an attempt where personal interest and political questions meet academic writing through the case study of the blog.

Regarding the writers of the blog article, Valliammal Karunakaran is a Dalit diaspora who writes about the Dalit history and its activism in his/her blog on Medium.com. Interestingly, in his/her profile picture he has a picture of a Dalit woman, and the name of his account is masculine according to the South Indian name culture. S/he has blurred not only his/her gender identity but also through the Dalit woman's profile picture, s/he shows his/her fight for the cause of the Dalit woman who is the face of his/her blog account. Similarly, Thenmozhi Soundararajan is active on her Instagram webpage, and she uses Dalit Diva as her profile name on Twitter, Medium.com, and Instagram. She uses her caste identity to present herself then calls Diva to show her pride in her caste and gender identity. Asmita Pankaj and Prathap Balakrishnan, the other two writers of the blog article, have shared their testimonies in the blog. However, they do not have separate blog accounts. I tried to find them on Instagram and Twitter, but I could not find them.

7.2. Methodological issues of the blog: limitations

It is necessary to consider what Gajjala has recognized that not all diasporas have access to connect to the online community (2019). Gajjala (2019) has also expressed that the number of lower caste South Asian diaspora online is less because of the accessibility to technology,

economic factors, and social factors where technology is understood as a privileged tool. We can see the examples of Permila Tirkey and Sitha Vemireddy, the South Asian diaspora who have been victims of race, caste, class, gender, and sexuality, and because of multiple marginalization they are not easily heard. Permila Tirkey and Sitha Vemireddy who are working at South Asian diaspora household are restricted within the four walls without any access to social life and the internet. Based on that, only the privileged members of the South Asian diaspora and Dalit diasporas have access to education and a way to become social, not only online but offline. Since blog writing is an online activity, it is limited to the educated South Asian Dalit diaspora and feminists writing collectively for their less fortunate compatriots of legal, economic, and social injustices.

Against the example of these two women, another challenge is that the caste-driven, patriarchal society that maintains a rigid social structure does not let them speak or let out most gendered caste or caste-d gender narratives. Next, the fear, trauma, and pain of Brahmanical patriarchal suppression do not let the Dalit diaspora gather the courage to speak and collaborate with other activists. For instance, the case of Permila Tirkey took years to become common knowledge because she lived in a caste-driven patriarchal set-up that did not let her speak, and she, too, did not gather the courage to speak out against the caste apartheid. Then, most of the Dalit diaspora women who are brought to the foreign land cannot speak the language of the host land and hence are depended on other dominant caste diasporas who are educated. This can be seen again in the case of Sitha Vemireddy and Permila Tirkey who are not able to speak English. All these issues are commonly seen among Dalit diaspora women who are brought or come to serve other South Asian diasporas.

The problem related mainly to the blog article is that, according to Soundararajan (2022), it was not easy to conduct the survey and collect narratives of the Dalit diaspora, on which it was based. Soundararajan explains that the dominant caste diaspora repeatedly said that “caste does not exist,” making it difficult to convince others. Then, according to her, most of the Dalits did not want to open up about their victimization because of their lower caste as it could cause further humiliation. Soundararajan (2022), in this regard, states that dominant caste individuals hurled caste slurs at them when the Dalit diaspora were interviewed. They faced open bigotry and disgust (p. 117).

Moreover, Dalit diaspora women such Maya Kamble and Soundarajan in conversation with each other, who are also in the Dalit activism and are writing articles, stated that Dalit diaspora women are targeted digitally by rape and death threats. At their workplaces, they are repeatedly humiliated because their gender also carries their caste identity. They said that despite of rising number of South Asian diaspora in the USA, caste has not been classified as a discriminatory factor in the US companies such as Google and because of that Dalit women are double marginalized at their workplaces (Dalit Women in Tech: In conversation with Maya Kamble, 2020). Soundararajan writes that "the places such as Silicon Valley, the USA, despite the domination of South Asians in those workplaces, only a few companies have listed caste as a protected category" (p. 117).

Despite all these issues mentioned above, many activists are using blogs effectively to connect with diaspora online by creating organizations, spreading the word, and awakening others to raise awareness among those who are not connected online, which can be converted as an instrument of politics (Kelly Garrett, 2006; Olson Carter, 2016). Understanding the methodological limitations of the online writing, especially from the perspective of Dalit diaspora women such as Permila Tirkey and Sitha Yemireddy, the blog article "Spearheading a survey of caste in South Asian Diasporas" (2016) presents thirteen testimonies written by Dalit diaspora. These experiences shared in the blog article give a scope to go through the narratives of the Dalit diaspora. Karunakaran et al., in the first half of the blog article writes about the caste apartheid among South Asian diaspora communities and then share the history of caste system which has traveled from the land of its origin to worldwide. They also write how South Asian Dalit diaspora identities and cultures have been suppressed. They share the example of the Hindu America Foundation (HAF) which has portrayed the South Asian upper caste culture and tradition as South Asian's unique culture globally which has benefited the upper caste worldwide (2016). Then, they have shared the reason for writing about caste system and caste as identity and caste-based oppression. Karunakaran et al. describe the need to write about themselves:

> The biggest drive is the fear that if we do not obtain the data on castes of our communities, we will lose a rich narrative, a whole new lens through which we can begin to understand ourselves as immigrants, new-life seekers, as dreamers, as refugees, as indentured workers, as slaves, as soldiers—or whatever the reason for our people's

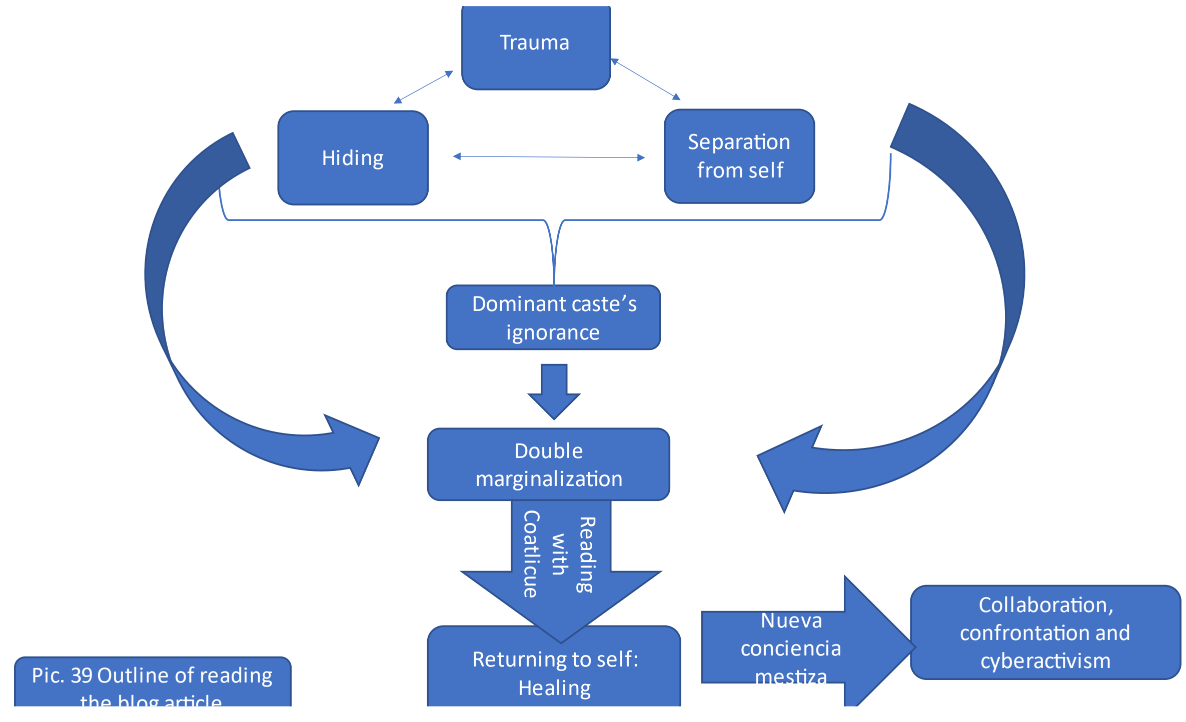
> departures and arrivals. Caste is an important part of the stories of why our ancestors, or we left, how they travelled, what they had with them, and how they made their new lives in the new lands and left a legacy for us. It is an integral part of the history we will pass down to the next generation. (2016)

Finally, they have given thirteen testimonies of the diaspora who participated and shared their experiences. In the blog article they have not done the analysis of the testimonies rather given them as evidence of caste apartheid happening among the South Asian diaspora. In this chapter, I will map those testimonies in order to understand their cased-based experiences in the South Asian communities living in the USA.

7.3. Close reading of the testimonies of the blog article

There could never be one singular narrative of the South Asian diaspora against the caste apartheid. As we have seen, various methods are used to narrate caste and gender-based stories; some are autographical narratives, while others include the incidents of caste-d gender or gendered caste stories. The blog article chosen for the case study contains fragments of thirteen lives and self-narrated experiences, creating a collective voice. The thirteen respondents who have shared their experiences, have also touched different psychological aspects such as some of them have talked about trauma of being victimized because of the caste-based oppression. Some of them have narrated about being divided based on caste as caste "other." Some of the respondents also touched about the process of healing from the caste apartheid. Some talked about the confrontation of the caste dominants. There are respondents who have talked about the reactions of dominant castes towards the lower caste. Seeing that all the respondents' testimonies are different form each other, I have tried to map them in categories and go through all the testimonies and do a close reading (Lukic & Sánchez, 2011) starting from the problems they face because of caste and then how they are overcoming the problems, and finally how they are suggesting fighting against the caste apartheid. The categories I have titled are: a) trauma, b) hiding, c) separation from self, d) dominant caste's ignorance, e) double marginalization, f) returning to self: g) healing, and h) collaboration, confrontation, and cyberactivism. As shown in the picture below, trauma, hiding, and separation from self are interrelated to each other causing

each other. Hence, I have talked about them as interconnected terms. Then I talked about Dominant caste ignorance, where I emphasized the reaction of Dominant caste towards the people of lower caste. Then all the issues, trauma, hiding, separation from self and dominant caste's ignorance cause double marginalization of women of lower caste. Showing all the problems shared in the testimonies, I will use the theories of Anzaldúa to do an analytical reading of seeing the passage from being the other to the one who is conscious about the otherness. Finally, I will discuss the about their collaboration, confrontation and cyberactivism.



Pic. 39 Outline of reading the blog article

Since their narratives cover psychological aspects, I will use decolonial theorist Anzaldúa's "Coatlicue State" and "Nueva Conciencia Mestiza" to shed light on their problems and reactions towards the problem. Gloria Anzaldúa is a Chicana feminist writer who in her book *Borderlands* (1987) refers to the physical border Mexico-USA, but at the same time she incorporates psychological aspects. As discussed in chapter 3, we have seen how Anzaldúa goes beyond the physical meaning of the border to make us understand border as a diving line between "us" and "them." She also talks about borderlands- as in-between spaces where "transition is constant" (p. 3). In this regard she talks about Coatlicue which covers the psychological aspect of in-betweenness where the question of un/belongingness is related to the identities. As she explains "Coatlicue Space" is a space of choosing between death and life or choosing both. Hence, taking

this idea basically, I will touch the conflicts which the participants have shared of living a caste life and how they have chosen their identities to stand against the caste apartheid in creation of a space of resistance. In this chapter, I want to keep their testimonies in italics, as it is presented in the blog article, to avoid mixing my words with their story.

7.3.1. Trauma

Soundararajan (2022) emphasizes the term trauma in her book to narrate her caste-based discrimination which she has carried from her childhood. Earlier, she was not able to understand the reason for being discriminated against. According to her trauma of caste is a wound, a pain, a suffering which started with caste apartheid where the caste oppressed becomes a victim in various ways starting from childhood. As a child growing up unaware of caste identity, words such as "'untouchable,' inherent 'spiritual pollution,' and 'deserves servitude for the crimes of the past'" (Soundararajan, 2022, p. 13) are traumatic.

> You are condemned to a life of servitude, humiliation, and exploitation. You are less than human. You have no choice but to live in a caste apartheid of segregated ghettos and be denied access to schools, roads, and basic amenities like fresh water. You are forbidden to speak, hear, or read the language of Sanskrit, in which the laws that determine your fate are written. You are not allowed the consolation of spiritual practice, or relationship with a higher power, because you are considered spiritually defiling before God. (Soundararajan, 2022, pp. 14-15)

Children grow up with questions about their inferior caste identity that are hidden, unanswered and unexplained. Most parents have learnt to live with it, so they teach the same to their younger generations. Soundararajan writes that life is traumatizing when fate and worth are determined initially (2022). In the blog article, the testimonies which are shared show a frustration towards such determined faith. The narratives of Dalit diaspora serve as routes to explore the emotions attached to their experiences while living outside their land. Dalits have been traumatized by something rooted in their land, to their birth, but it is spread everywhere they go. Sinthujan Varatharajah, one of the respondents also talks about his emotions when he is discriminated in his South Asian diaspora community. In the blog article his testimony states:

> *After casteism has left us disowned and expelled, it made us seek self-isolation and erasure to avoid everyday discriminatory practices. Community spaces were spaces that were unsafe, where constant social profiling, in other words, caste profiling, happened, which rendered us hyperconscious and wary of interactions within the community. If you were found out, it would lead to discrimination, shaming, and isolation. To be was to not be, to erase was a diktat that we, like many other Panchamar and lower caste refugees, followed.* (Sinthujan Varatharajah, Eelam Tamil Dalit, Berlin/London-based, "Spearheading a Survey of Caste in South Asian Diasporas" cited by Karunakaran et al., 2016)[63]

The above statement uses the terms such as disowned and expelled because of the casteism which results in the self-isolation, hyperconscious, ashamed, and so on, which narrate a long process of othering the lower caste South Asian diaspora. As per Varatharajah, within the South Asian community there is a profiling of the South Asian diaspora based on their caste and segregation of people based on the hierarchy of caste. Segregation results in making the caste other feel isolated, haunted, and separated from the rest of the South Asian community and closed within. Separation of the caste other from dominant caste South Asian diaspora result in isolation and trauma as Peter Levine states:

> Trauma is not what happens to us but what we hold inside without an empathetic witness. Trauma is caused when we are unable to release blocked energies to fully move through the physical or emotional reactions to a hurtful experience. (Peter Levine, 2012, p. xii)

As in the case of Sinthujan Varatharajah and many more, trauma and oppression can leave caste oppressed people with a deep sense of powerlessness, isolation, hyperconsciousness, and shame that they cannot talk to someone about it. People, in this case, start giving up his/her identity, which looks like a burden to them, and they go away physically and mentally to isolation. Trauma, if not healed, leads to further othering of the oppressed, which ruins the spirit in pieces. People in pieces torture further the families and relationships. Seeing the history of caste apartheid, in chapter 4, caste-based oppression is a historical trauma that passes from generation

[63] I am citing the testimonies of the South Asian diaspora participants which are shared in the blog article. I will keep the testimonies in italics so that it is comprehensible where I am using the testimonies.

to generation, a circle of hatred towards one another within the community, as Eduard Duran et al. write:

> Trauma is multigenerational and cumulative over time; it extends beyond a single person's life span. The trauma response constitutes a constellation of features in reaction to multigenerational, collective, historical, and cumulative psychic wounding over time, both over one life span and across generations. (Eduard Duran et al., 1998, p. 342)

7.3.2. Hiding

Unfortunately, most South Asian Dalit diaspora going through the trauma found hiding as their only way to save themselves from caste apartheid. As we can see in the above testimony of Varatharajah, he states that *we seek self-isolation after being disowned because of casteism in order to avoid further discriminatory practices* (cited by Karunakaran et al., 2016). Then, there are also Dalit diaspora group who do not reveal their caste identity to avoid the discrimination. This way, Dalit diaspora is in a double bind: either they keep their identity hidden and do not confront the dominant caste diaspora, or when their caste is revealed, they keep themselves hidden. In both the cases, hiding is their only solution. One such incident describes Asmita Pankaj, one of the respondents present in the blog article:

> *In the United States, when my child was in second grade, she used to have playdates with an upper-caste Hindu kid. Once, the kid's mother had come over to our house and in the course of conversation came to know that we follow Buddhism which is largely considered to be the religion of Dalits in India. This was the last time that that family ever interacted with us. And the word that my family belongs to the Dalit community spread like wildfire, this led to seclusion of my child from all other caste Hindu children. It angered me and broke my heart that my child had to face the feeling of being outcaste in the 21st century in the United States too*. (Asmita Pankaj, Dalit-American, Houston, TX, "Spearheading a Survey of Caste in South Asian Diasporas" cited by Karunakaran et al., 2016)

Asmita Pankaj's narrative also explains that how her family who used to follow Buddhism is separated from the South Asian diaspora community after being revealed her religion. She explains her daughter was a part of the South Asian diaspora community until her caste was known to the other family. Once it was not hidden, it only broke her heart to think that her child had to go through the similar discrimination which she and her community have been going through in her country and outside (Pankaj, cited by Karunakaran et al., 2016). Here, her Buddhist religion symbolizes her caste which opens her history, her culture, and her caste. Hence, most of the south Asian Dalit diaspora hide their caste and through that they hide–their identities, history, and belonging to their history–to erase the discrimination. They do not reveal the god they worship, the beliefs they follow, the food they eat, or the culture they follow because all these cultural aspects expose their caste to the outer world. As another respondent Vinay Bhat states that *South Asian NGO in the diaspora organizes annual conferences where casteist practices such as having a vegetarian-only menu are unquestioningly carried out* (Vinay Bhatt, cited by Karunakaran et al., 2016). So, the food vegetarian or non-vegetarian, also carries the caste identity with it. Soundararajan (2022) also talks about hiding while sharing her childhood experience that how her father was hiding his full name especially his surname which carried his caste identity and his ancestors who did jobs of a lower caste. Soundararajan explained that the repercussions might be too much for him, i.e., being cut out from the South Asian diaspora community, further exploitation in his workplace, and in the community. According to Soundararajan, the hiding is not done in one way; it must be followed by all the family members at all places because if any member reveals the caste, the whole family will suffer the consequences. As we have seen earlier when Asmita Pankaj revealed her religion which connected her to the Dalit caste, her whole family was victimized, especially her daughter who lost her playmates, according to Asmita Pankaj (2016). In the same line, Soundararajan (2022) explains that together with her father, her mother used to hide their Dalit culture at home. She kept her god in a closet and worshipped only in a closed room (2022). Further, we will talk about how this hiding will result in the separation from self.

7.3.3. Separation from self

Indeed, caste apartheid follows one system of oppression, i.e., separation. Caste apartheid is a fictitious system of separation for exploitation, just like white supremacy. It separates the caste-privileged from the caste-oppressed, dividing "us" from "them." Eisha Pillay, one of the respondents, writes:

> *Being Indo-Fijian, and growing up in a Hindu home, caste really didn't mean anything to me in regard to my family or my identity. In Fiji, the difference and separation were due to religion, the North vs. South Indian binary, and the different islands you were from. My own direct exposure to caste happened in the US among the South Asian community. I had a large group of Indian friends, and it was through them that I learned that certain friends were treated badly in the homes of upper caste friends and that dating and marriage could only happen within the same caste. Even among folks who had grown up and lived in the US for most of their lives. It was also the parents of these friends who thought that the Fijian Indian kids were bad, and they did not like their children hanging out with us or in our homes. I have always felt a sense of exclusion from South Asians because they think my South Asian-ness is either not authentic or there is something tarnished about my Indo-Fijian identity. I believe this othering has to do with the fact that the majority of indentured laborers in Fiji are descendants of lower caste and class communities which is a red flag for those who don't know or understand our histories*. (Esha Pillay, Indo-Fijian, Boston, MA, cited by Karunakaran et al., 2016)

According to the above testimony, the division between "us" and "them" can easily be observed in the treatment of the upper caste towards the lower caste by questioning their authenticity. Another point we have debated before is the endogamous marriage system and not letting the "other" enter the space of the dominant caste. Pardeep Singh, another Dalit diaspora respondent, states, "*I met many Dalits, living in the UK, some for almost 50 years or so, describing most of the marriages happening within their castes. There are separate Gurudwaras and separate temples for different caste groups*" (Pardeep Singh, Dalit immigrant, London, United Kingdom, cited by Karunakaran et al., 2016). Further, the dominant caste has introduced some cultures projecting a homogenized South Asian diaspora community, which separates the lower caste diaspora such as "*having a vegetarian-only menu are unquestioningly carried out in South Asian*

diaspora events" which is only a dominant caste culture (Vinay Bhat, respondent, Indian American, CA, cited by Karunakaran et al., 2016). Shahgul Wahid, another respondent, also affirms that "*they stopped eating at our house once they came to know about our caste*" (Shahgul Wahid, Pakistani-American, Houston, TX, cited by Karunakaran et al., 2016). Thenmozhi Soundararajan adds that "*parents of her friends switch plates on me once they learnt I am Dalit*" (Thenmozhi Soundararajan, respondent, Dalit American, Los Angeles, CA, cited by Karunakaran et al., 2016).

The above fragments of the testimonies show a visible physical separation between dominant caste and lower caste South Asian diaspora. Parallel to this division, there has been another process of breaking which goes simultaneously, i.e., separating the caste oppressed from themselves– "separation from self." This traumatic process is not visible but is impactful in carrying the caste apartheid. It has been carried out for generations. It is a process of separating one from its true emotions, spirit, body, family, ancestors, and oneself.

It is a separation, either by hiding one's caste identity and the pain one goes through while living with a fake identity or by hiding oneself from being caught as a caste "other." Both these examples we have seen in the testimonies of Asmita Pankaj and Varatharajah. One can also understand from their testimonies that hiding is not only from the dominant caste but also a disconnection from self, identities, and belonging to their community. The separation from the self results only in disruptive emotions such as hatred for oneself, frustration towards the situation, and anger for the "other," which goes on further with physical abuse and sexual violation of the weaker section of the community. In these situations, Dalit women bear the pain given to them from the top to the bottom of the hierarchy. Dalit children do not get the correct ambience to grow up and finally live with violence. There is never a space to heal in the unending atrocity, violence, and indignation. They deny themselves the space to grieve and release the suffering from their bodies. Instead, they sink deep into the closet, burying their identity, sorrow, and histories in hopes they will not be outed, but their exploitation goes further.

Moreover, even after separating from themselves, are expected to continue working and supporting the economy, while their bodies, psyches, and relationships are broken because of caste apartheid, generation after generation. Consequently, the emotional wounds caused by the

caste are not permitted to be seen, acknowledged, or legible. Brahmanism ensures they do not bring their caste injury in front by shaming them further.

Another method that separates Dalits from themselves is separating them from their history, movements, and revolution. Interestingly, Soundararajan narrates her experience in her university when she was looking for a professor to supervise her in her doctorate program. She wanted to study "caste and violence," realized that all the Indian professors at UC Berkeley are caste privileged (2022, p. 43). They have prevented her from going into the research by asking her not to waste her time on something which is "not relevant" (ibid). She was dissuaded from pursuing knowledge that belonged to her history, which might free her from caste apartheid and strengthen her with her community's inspiring history. This way, the Dalits are locked out of their history and knowledge, which belongs to them; of their pain, grief, suffering, and trauma, which they go through but cannot show; of themselves from having a future beyond violence.

7.3.4. The dominant caste's ignorance

The South Asian young generation diaspora is taught from the beginning the difference between them and the lower caste population. South Asian dominant caste youth also observe the caste differences which their parents carry. As the respondents narrate the caste differences such treating different to those South Asian diasporas who are non-veg eaters, those with lower caste surnames, following Buddhism. The dominant caste youth have also seen, as Vinay Bhatt another respondent states, how in cultural places and conferences, their culture, food, and dress represent the whole South Asian community (cited by Karunakaran et al., 2016). The young South Asian diaspora have learned about the untouchability from their parents. As one of the respondents state *My mother asked the cleaning lady to do the dishes too. I happened to mention that to acquaintances, and they stopped eating at our house*) Shahgul Wahid, Pakistani-American, Houston, Texas, cited by Karunakaran et al, 2006). Because of such practices, they have learned the difference between the South Asian dominant diaspora and lower caste diaspora. They have also learned that they are the ones who are representing South Asia economically, culturally, and socially whereas Dalits are the burden that the upper caste is carrying on them. Hence, Dalits are pictured as a burden on them, are taboo, do menial jobs, are

unhygienic, are involved in wrong activities, do not come from a good family, and eat animals (Karunakaran et al., 2016). Such belief is also rooted in the reservation given to the South Asian Dalit population in their homeland making the dominant caste feel that they have been a burden on the upper caste South Asians.[64] All these characteristics given to them are used in derogatory terms to make them feel worthless, demean their culture, and make their identity a curse. Prathap Balakrishnan, one of the respondents, shares his experience:

> *When I was doing my internship at the Center for Global Development and Sustainability, Brandeis University (which mainly focuses on social exclusion in South Asia, especially India's caste system), we were looking for volunteers to help with caste data analysis. When I approached a fellow Indian-origin classmate to get some help, she said a big NO to me. She said, "We belong to a Brahmin community, and I don't like getting involved in such casteist activities!" I was shocked. How can the study of caste be casteist?* (Prathap Balakrishnan, first generation Dalit in America, Boston, MA, "Spearheading a Survey of Caste in South Asian Diasporas" cited by Karunakaran et al., 2016)

The above statement narrates that caste issues have nothing to do with the dominant caste and are a Dalit caste problem. On the contrary, the children of the dominant caste diaspora are ultimately proud to be Brahmin because they are taught that they are the ones who are contributing to the world culturally, socially, economically, and politically. As says another respondent: "*So much in the diaspora that gets pushed as being "our culture" is not our culture at all; it is savarna culture. The hegemony of savarnas is perhaps one of the most important ways caste perpetuates*" (Thenmozhi Soundararajan, Dalit American, Los Angeles, CA, cited by Karunakaran et al., 2016). There is no room for difference. The caste apartheid intentionally makes others forget about the existence of the "other." Ultimately, the younger generations of the dominant caste are not aware of something called caste because they do not know about the privileges they have:

> *I am an Indian, Hindu, non-Dalit who has finally come to understand the unique complexities of my family's casteism as an adult child. My parents are an inter-caste love marriage, the only one of their kind in both families. My mom is of a high caste and my*

[64] Article 15 (4, 5, and 6) of Indian constitution state the reservation of seats in the government institutions for the lower castes.

> *dad is lower caste. I have no idea what that makes me. Our blend of north and south Indian adds friction to how my parents view Savarna folks. My dad's family makes Brahmin jokes in safe spaces, despite arrange marrying their children into Brahmin families. All the while there are zero discussions of caste in my mom's upper caste family. It's like they aren't even aware caste exists. Privilege is bliss. Regardless of these differences, each of my parents' wishes for their children to marry only within their birth castes: Kayastha and Shimpi.* (Sonalee Rashatwar, Indian American, Philadelphia, PA, cited by Karunakaran et al., 2016)

This demonstrates that the caste-privileged can enjoy all the benefits they want; the caste-oppressed are responsible for calling caste into question. The Dalits must take on the burden of overthrowing the caste system because they are the ones who bear the consequences of privileges given to the caste privileged.

Suraj Yengde (2019) and Soundararajan (2022) explain that when the caste privileged are questioned about their privileges, they often escalate their emotional responses because they never considered their position in this system as oppressors but rather as the ones carrying the lower caste burden. According to these scholars, the privileged may have not been exposed to it because many Dalit people are hidden and passing while absorbing the brunt of caste trauma. Moreover, when they encounter caste stress, they are unprepared for the situation and attack the one who confronts the reality of their privilege (Yengde, 2019; Soundararajan, 2022). They conclude that the fear of losing power, being blamed for injustices, and being exposed threatens the caste privileged to the extent that any discussion of equity or parity with the caste-oppressed ends up in aggression or violence.

Further, it is even more humiliating for dominant caste men to be questioned by a Dalit feminist. Soundararajan again shares her experience of coming out in public as Dalit Diva and feeling proud of her caste and gender identity. She explains that her identities, first, attack Brahmanism, the theory of upper caste South Asians which shapes their culture, society, and beliefs. Second, counter their masculinity, based on Brahmanical patriarchy and white masculinity. Third, when they encounter any Dalit woman who is more significant than what they have been asked to see–it creates confusion among the dominant caste, who do not know how to behave and are not ready to accept her. Especially, for upper caste men, Dalit women are "animalized,"

"sexualized," referred to servitude. As seen in the case of Sitha Vemireddy and Permila Tirkey. The presence of Dalit Diva is a multiple attack on Brahmanical patriarchy. Consequently, Soundararajan receives instances of being harassed, sent rape threats, and hate threats for disclosing her identity as a Dalit and having pride in her identity–Dalit Diva (2022, p. 39).

7.4. Double marginalization

Indeed, Soundararajan has shown that she has been attacked by the Brahminical patriarchy for coming out as a proud Dalit woman. Dalit women, as Asmita Pankaj, Sonalee Rashatwar, and Yalini Dream, the respondents, also pass through trauma, go into hiding, and separate themselves from the society like their male counterpart when they marginalized. However, their marginalization is wrapped in many manners; it intersects differently, geopolitically, based on the situation; it is relative, multiple, and contradictory. Each life is a counter-story to Brahmanical (his)story.

Further, most of the respondents have said that within the South Asian diaspora community, "*dating and marriage could only happen within the same caste*" (Esha Pillay, Indo-Fijian, Boston, MA, 2016). Endogamic matrimony, repeatedly discussed in the testimonies, segregates the castes and strengthens the caste apartheid. This matrimonial idea exploits upper-caste women, lower-caste men, and women. It is a Brahmanical patriarchal system where caste and gender are intrinsically linked to propagate a system of endogamy and to protect the caste system and its hierarchy. Within the caste system, heteronormative relations are highly priced, as they can give an heir to the privileged families and all other relationships apart from the heteronormativity are polluting and punishable. Children of inter-caste marriages are tagged as "bastards." "*My mom is high caste, and my dad is a lower caste. I have no idea what that makes me. Our blend of north and south Indian adds friction to how my parents view savarna folks*" (Sonalee Rashatwar, Indian American, Philadelphia, PA). Nobody else out of caste is permitted to enter. "*Regardless of these differences, each of my parents' wishes for their children to marry only within their birth castes: Kayastha and Shimpi*" (ibid).

Further, dominant caste men and women have tortured Dalit women who even dare to fall in love with a dominant caste boy. The humiliation goes to her, her family, and her community. The

lower caste families, already knowing the consequences, do not let their girls indulge in relationships with the dominant caste. The trauma of long casteist (his)tory: ritual acts of rape and sexual mutilation practices, particularly on the bodies of women and non-binary people, are used to enforce caste. The act of violating a Dalit body–is performative to socially construct the position of the Dalit woman's body as a space of violation, to dishonor the body, family, and community, and to remind them about their oppressed position in a Brahmanical patriarchal society. This is what happened to Sitha Vemireddy and Permila Tirkey, so as to remind them of their positions as Dalit women wherever they go. It was the same when Soundararajan received rape and death threats when she came out as a proud Dalit calling herself Dalit Diva. Silence has been maintained on caste-based sexual violence. On the one side, the dominant caste does not let them speak (self-represent), or they think that Dalit women are not worthy of self-representation. Conversely, Dalit women are so traumatized that they do not dare self-represent. Besides, no one is prepared to understand how profoundly caste has shaped the psyches and terrorized women for centuries.

7.5. Reading with Anzaldúa's "Coatlicue state"[65]

After discussing trauma which leads to hiding and separation from self, and after studying how the dominant caste participates in caste apartheid and still ignores the perpetuation of caste and gender-based violence, we discuss "Coatlicue State." In all the statements which I have discussed above, respondents have explained their plight by using terms and expression such as "disowned," "expelled," "self-isolated," "erased," "unsafe," "caste profiling," "rendered," "hyperconscious," "wary," "discriminated," "ashamed," "secluded," "unauthentic," "less-cultured" "to be was to not be," "ashamed for eating meat," "separate temples," and "marriages based on caste" etc. These terms describe the state of exclusion and struggle as the "other." All

[65] Part of this section of the chapter has been published:
Gupta, Shilpi. (2018). (Dis) locating Homeland:" In-betweenness" in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and Taslima Nasreen's *French Lover*, GEMMA TFM. Instituto de las mujeres y género, University of Granada.

Gupta, S. (2021). Reconceptualization of National Spaces: A Close Reading of Bharati Mukherjee's selected novels with Gloria Anzaldúas Nueva Conciencia Mestiza. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, *13*(3).

these expressions delineate their trauma, their separation from society and from themselves. If one is not conscious of the "otherness," it can lead to a loss of self. As Soundararajan writes, "because of being unconscious of [the otherness], we inflict its wound everywhere. Caste is the wound that, left untreated, will ultimately destroy us" (Soundararajan, 2022, p. 4). Anzaldúa describes such a state as a mental and emotional state of perplexity– "Coatlicue State" –the site of conflict between inner and outer voices. Anzaldúa explains that Coatlicue is a state in which "depending on the person, she represents duality in life, a synthesis of duality, and a third perspective–something more than mere duality or synthesis of duality" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 46).

Anzaldúa uses the "Coatlicue State" in her book *Borderlands* (1987) to refer to the mental state of the "other" who is struggling to get out of the "otherness" either by accepting or rejecting it. Before choosing either of these positions, she states that silence is an ambience around the person who lives the conflict within of being the "other":

> As she falls… lost in the silence… of the empty air… turning… turning at midnight…turning into a wild pig…how to get back all the feathers… put them in the jar…the rattling …full circle, and back…dark…windowless…no moon glides across the night sky…night sky…night sky. (Anzaldúa, 1987, pp. 41-42)

Anzaldúa points out that experiencing the "Coatlicue State" one lives with an imposed and repressive silence; it is full of fear and terror to sustain the oppression. At the same time, the internal state passes through conflict, confusion, and doubts. Being the "other" is painful because of the vulnerability of struggling between un/belongingness to self–choosing or rejecting oneself as caste "other." Their ambiguity questions their loyalty towards their community and identity. There is the fear of being abandoned, accused of being faulty and damaged, or unaccepted by the dominant caste. The one who stands in this situation of the "other" is blocked, immobilized, and cannot move forward or backwards. Anzaldúa writes, "To avoid rejection, some of us conform to the values of culture; push the unacceptable parts into the shadows" (Anzaldúa, 1987, 20). Anzaldúa's explanation being "other" also makes us understand the mental situation of the caste other. Those who choose to remain isolated and not confronting the caste apartheid. The phases which we have seen such as trauma, hiding, separation from self, Dominant caste's ignorance and double marginalization lead us to understand how the other is repeatedly marginalized.

However, Anzaldúa also talks about getting out of this duality of being the other in opposition to the dominant caste. She discusses "Nueva Conciencia Mestiza" as a space of acceptance of one's identities. Hence, in the two sections, returning to self: healing and collaboration, confrontation, and cyberactivism, we will Dalit diaspora shifting from the position of the other to the conscious other as nueva conciencia mestiza.

7.6. Returning to self: Healing [66]

This blog article does not limit us to the narratives of the respondents' pain, suffering, wound, and trauma, instead, the article directs us towards further reading to understand that the wound, pain, suffering and trauma can be a teacher. Anzaldúa, too, shares the same thought:

> Our greatest disappointments and painful experiences–if we can make meaning out of them–can lead us toward becoming more of who we are. Or they can remain meaningless. The Coatlicue state can be a way station, or it can be a way of life. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 46)

As Peter Levine reminds us, "Trauma is a fact of life. It does not, however, have to be a life sentence. Trauma can be healed and transformed with appropriate guidance and support. How we handle the trauma greatly influences the quality of our lives" (Levine, 1997, p. 2). One can only fight outside after winning the struggle inside. Soundararajan (2022), who has been through the process of being "othered" and then returning to self, explains her healing process through Buddhist teaching or practice–to separate herself from the pain to understand the pain, to get the insight, perspective, and much-needed respite from caste suffering (p. 3).

It is a phase of silence–a separation from the definition of "otherness" and the "other" defined by the dominant caste discourse. A silence, neither repressive nor resistive in this case, is the space and time one takes to move from the position of the "other" to the "conscious other." Silence–outside but conversing within–to understand the self, the otherness, to become conscious of the otherness, a "conscious other" (Gupta, 2018, pp. 64-82; Gupta, 2021). That distancing,

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[66] Gupta, S. (2020). De/constructing Borderlands beyond the Border: Gender and Caste among Indian Diaspora. I*nternational journal of multidisciplinary educational research*. 9(10(5))

non-attachment, and silence give time and space to soften that frozen feeling. It gives time to touch that space tenderly, with both a cognitive approach and a somatic practice; it is a process of eradicating Brahmanical patriarchy from the body and understanding the trauma, suffering, pain, and wound through which the body has gone for generations. This healing process is continuous and always in transition (Soundararajan, 2022, p. 3). Most Dalits have found refuge in Buddhism, which teaches "Dhamma" –a "duty" to be free. Dhamma is to seek, inquire, and choose conditions, all toward liberation from caste and all forms of oppression. The process is a phase when the "other" passes to the stage of being the "conscious other." It gives time and space to see the structural and scriptural systems that created the conditions and justifications for harm. With space and regulated nervous systems, one can create new processes of restoration after harm that do not cause more wounding and violence.

Moreover, "once you see the truth of the cause of suffering, you can't unsee it. The hunger to address it and move through it demands that you respond" (Soundararajan 2022, p. 7). Getting out of the duality does not signify the neutrality of the subject, whereas "a massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle," and it becomes the position of standing against, or reacting against, dominant views and beliefs (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 80). It prepares oneself to create an equitable playing field between the caste-oppressed and caste privileged–where the caste oppressed may fall many times but is always ready to fight back. For instance, when Soundararajan came out in public online and offline with her new identity–Dalit Diva, it challenged and reminded others of her identity, her existence, and her narratives. Consequently, she is not invited to the South Asian events as a speaker and performer. Now, her presence is too controversial. She knows that she needs to continue to fight. As Anzaldúa writes:

> When you live in the *borderlands* means
> You are the battleground
> Where enemies are kin to each other,
> You are at home, a stranger,
> The volley of shots has shattered the true
> You are wounded, lost in action
> Dead, fighting back. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 194)

7.7. Collaboration, confrontation, and cyberactivism

Our goal is to break the silence collectively. (Karunakaran et al., 2016)

Dalit diaspora who has come together to demonstrate their experiences have shared their discriminatory position and are readily disclosing themselves on a public platform. They have shared their pictures and names on the blog. They have accepted themselves and are conscious of their "otherness." The names of the Dalits are badges that remind past wounds and platforms for the reclamation of self-determination. Their claim of their existence is their resistance against the Brahmanical patriarchy.

> Acceptance of caste existence is important. Acceptance of the lower caste is important. It is the acceptance of the community and their narrative of being slaves, refugees, workers, dreamers, and immigrants. Caste is the background of their narrative, traveling, and history, which is often not told. (Karunakaran et al., 2016)

Further, the blog and its participants symbolize a "borderland" between "us" and "them," a "conscious other" which questions the existence of discrimination within the gendered caste and caste-d gender system (Gupta, 2022). Those who have taken part in the survey to share their experiences are already at the "borderland" – "conscious other" – "Nueva Conciencia Mestiza," particularly where Anzaldúa states that:

> This assembly is not one where severed or separated pieces merely come together. Nor is it a balancing of opposing powers. In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness- a mestiza consciousness. (Anzaldúa, 1987, 80)

Further, many organizations have been started by Dalits and Dalit feminists, who have the privilege of university education and social life, to support the Dalits. After the "caste in the diaspora survey," they have good reason to expose that caste should also be included in the list as one of the possible reasons for discrimination among students in colleges, universities, and workplaces. Because of their constant struggle, some universities have recently included caste as

one of the discriminatory factors, such as Toronto schools on March 8, 2023, and Seattle city, the first city in the USA, in Feb 2023. Then, many organizations working on caste as a discriminatory factor have already marked their presence online and offline, such as Equality Lab, the Ambedkar International Mission, the Ambedkar Association of North America, and the Dalit American Women's Association and other organizations, writers, scholars, and activists present online have collaborated in the creation of a space of cyberactivism. They keep interacting with diverse groups online such as Equality Lab organizes talks through Instagram. Soundararajan also holds debates and discussions through her Instagram page. She uses reels where she conducts interviews.[67] Some strategies Dalit feminists have observed are "collective action" against entrenched power and "collaboration" to strengthen their voices against each other.

For instance, Dalit feminist leaders such as Maya Kamble, Sarita Sagar, and Neha Singh have shepherded the slow process of building inter-caste and interfaith coalitions for years. This is because many others from the dominant caste have joined the fight as caste abolitionists. They are the ones who have suffered many forms of gender violence, trans violence, and homophobia in their own families, which led to their awakening to the violence of caste apartheid.

> *My mother refused to let her son undergo a Brahmin thread ceremony — breaking with generations of caste tradition and angering her in-laws*. (Anirvan Chatterjee, Indian American, Berkeley, CA, cited by Karunakaran at al., 2016)

> *I am a casted South Asian Muslim, queer woman living in Boston, MA. I immigrated to the States 25 years ago and spent most of my life undocumented. Though I experienced the immense injustice, danger, and instability of being undocumented in a largely Islamophobic and anti-immigrant country, I still live with privilege as a casted South Asian American. Many of my Muslim peers argue that caste doesn't affect us because our religion does not accept social hierarchy. However, those of us with South Asian ancestry are undoubtedly affected by caste privilege and benefit from a casted experience. I have to admit that most of my life, I was not aware of my caste privilege. In attempts to find out about my family's caste standing and privilege, I found that there was much done to*

[67] Links are given https://dalitdiva.com/
https://www.instagram.com/dalitdiva/reels/

> *bury the truth about our privileges, as well as ignorance and a blind eye to the ways in which we have stepped on the backs of Dalit and Adivasi people, as well as a dismissal of our own Adivasi roots*. (Leila Zainab, Bangladeshi Indian American, Boston, MA, cited by Karunakaran et al., 2016)

Most Dalit feminists, activists, bloggers, writers, and scholars have collaborated online for their movements, as we have seen blog articles, YouTube, and Instagram used by Dalit diaspora. These organizations have established their identity and their existence globally. Causevic et al. writes that Maari Zwick-Maitreyi a Dalit diaspora feminist activist also believes in building community resistance against Dalit oppression (2020, p. 7). Their existence has been their first mode of resistance. “We were animals, and we continue to be. But dangerous ones. If people want to mess with us, we know how to deal with it. We can even eat them raw. We are angry, and angst in us is incomparable” (cited Sahebrao Yerekar, Yengde, 2019, p. 91).

When existence is more potent, then it becomes resistance. As one of the respondents states, “*One upper-caste man, on seeing me eating beef asked me if I am a ‘sweeper.’ I just said ‘Yes*’” (Rama Hansraj, International Worker, Kenya, 2016).

7.8. Conclusions

Self-representation, in this study, has been revised from the narrative of Sitha Vemmireddy, which seems impossible because it goes through multiple suppression. Even after Lakireddy was convicted, the representation of the Dalit diaspora girl was not justified because the dominant caste narrative in support of Lakireddy overpowered the narrative of a subaltern. Hence, the question remains there: are the subalterns heard? instead of, can the subaltern speak?

The blog article where thirteen testimonies are registered, provides the answers on how these people came forward to self-represent themselves. They know they will be suppressed, but they have chosen to move from the state of the “other” to the “conscious other.” They are stronger, louder, connected, and healed/healing in their activism. They have shared experiences of the gendered caste and caste-d gender “other,” not only to show the injustice based on caste and gender globally but also to join hands. The blog article aims to visualize the “other,” to reach out

to people unaware of these issues and their own victimization. It aims to connect the scattered suppressed voices as a collective and stronger voice and to create a new empowered discourse that belongs to the caste and gender "others." It has been realized that it is easy to suppress scattered voices, and hence, their main aim is to become collective. They have also invited people from other castes and other activism to join hands and create a new discourse together. A new discourse needs to be formed, though this discourse has always existed. It needs to be spread and visualized to its fellow beings so that they can get to know themselves, and love themselves, their identity, and their selves.

In this regard, there have been multiple platforms to create such oneness. Blog writing one of them, brought the scattered voices to one platform, making it stronger and louder at the transnational level. Blog writing, specifically in this study, has been hailed as an alternative to mainstream writing which mostly belongs to the upper-caste South Asian diaspora. Hence, it is not only the experience of the bloggers but a collective experience, a collective narrative against the gendered caste and caste-d gender differences. These organizations challenge cultural domination by constructing collective identity and identifying a shared definition from its members' common interests and solidarity. The fragments of thirteen lives have built a history of the "others," a collective history against Brahmanical patriarchy.

Here, I also want to emphasize the Casteless Collective singing band in which all the Dalit singers are living their caste identity, enjoying on the stage, feeling proud of each of their lines and standing together as one another's support. Thenmozhi Soundararajan has also created a collective identity through the name which she carries on online platforms "Dalit Diva." In real terms, this means marginal people connecting as they tell their stories, support each other, and identify strategies for improving the quality of their lives. Hence, the South Asian Dalit diaspora can speak, but their aim is not only to be heard by the dominant caste but rather to become a collective voice. They also insisted on collaborating voices, speaking, and standing for each other. The fear is that when a Dalit is targeted s/he may fall; so, hundreds should be standing with him/her not to let him/her fall. Collaboration needs to be spread among different faiths. They need to stand with all despite the difference in class, gender, and race. They know it is not easy to be heard, but their pride in that existence with their collective and collaborative nature

breaks the Brahmanical patriarchal discourse. I end this chapter with a song originally written in Tamil language called Jai Bheem and its translation has been found in the link given below. is:

To touch us is impurity, they said

To see us is sin, they said

Kept building myths and fables

Made sure we were animals in stables

Schools we can't enroll

Temples will not save our soul

Roads we can't walk

Kill us even, no one will ask

1000 years passed by like this

Things are changed, tell me who ensured this?

Revisit your history

See who changed our story.

Caste and religion

Throw your differences

Take up equality

To change consequences

Undo the control of religions that divide

Bridge the gaps and we will unite

(Jai Bheem, Casteless Collective, taken fromhttps://poetly.substack.com/p/jai-bhim-anthem-the-casteless-collective)

Conclusions

1. Answering the research questions

The conclusion is a comparative reading of the texts by Mukherjee, Jeevansathi.com matrimonial site, and the blog "Spearheading the caste survey" to see the elements of caste and gender and their representation in these texts. The purpose of the comparative reading of the texts is to answer the question asked in the introduction of the research thesis: *How are gender and caste represented by the South Asian diaspora, taking the case studies of the texts of Mukherjee, Jeevansathi.com and the blog*? Together with this question, two more questions followed. The first question is *Should caste be an essential factor in defining feminism in the case of South Asian diaspora caste women?* Then second, *how can the term (self)representation be re-defined in the thesis considering the factors of caste and gender among the South Asian diaspora through the given case studies*? These three questions will be answered in this concluding chapter. Finally, I will talk about the theoretical bridge built between postcolonialism and Dalit diaspora feminism, which can prove to be a collaborative and collective method against Brahmanical patriarchy.

Although the three case studies have different characteristics regarding their production and readership, they are brought together in the research work. The interdisciplinary nature of this research work is a need, and at the same time, it makes it unique. It is one of the contributions of this work to build a bridge between different disciplines. The work indicates that a researcher should move beyond one domain to achieve the research aim. To realize this research, various research methods are collaborated to manage different texts individually, where feminist close reading (Lukic & Sánchez, 2011) has been one of the most effective methods in analyzing the case studies. Indeed, close reading has been accompanied by other skills, methods, and methodologies according to the requirements of the research aim.

A feminist close reading of the novels of Mukherjee in the fifth chapter has focused on the postcolonial and Dalit diaspora feminist perspective to delineate the historical and cultural background on which the novels are written. In addition, a close reading of the texts with the

theories mentioned above has been fruitful in complicating the question of gender, race, and class with caste-d gendered and gendered caste identities in the novels. The second case study about the matrimonial site has included a feminist close reading and other methods, such as digital ethnography and digital autoethnography. Theoretically, this case study is based on postcolonial and Dalit diaspora feminist discourse. Methodologically, digital ethnography has proven to be one of the most crucial methods to explore the site, especially during COVID-19. As Sara Mills et al. (2015) define it, this method does not limit the researcher methodologically in their research work; instead, it leads the researcher towards the research aim in various ways. In this case study, I used the digital autoethnography method to keep my decisions and choices recorded and this method is impactful for the research work. Especially in a matrimonial site, where my decisions while filling the questionnaire affected the search and filters suggested by the site. I also felt necessary to share the analysis and the experiences, such as excitements, decisions, choices, limits, and ethical issues working on a matrimonial site.
In the last case study, in the seventh chapter, the feminist close reading is accompanied by Dalit diaspora and decolonial feminism. This chapter has focused on a Dalit diaspora feminist methodology that debates self-representation of the Dalit diapora women. According to the study's objective, this case study has worked with the blog article written by the Dalit diaspora as an alternative writing, a space of writing by/ from the "margins."

Coming back to the question of representation of caste and gender, earlier, at the time of research plan writing, I used the terms "ignorance," "recognition," and "acceptance" for the case studies regarding the caste-d gender and gendered caste representation. Later, after the research writing, many debates kept shifting the answers, which I will discuss here. The first reading of Mukherjee's novels shows a discussion from the point of a diaspora woman writer, with the gender aspect being the focus, as we have seen in the second chapter. Nevertheless, the close reading of the texts and emphasizing the historical and cultural background underline that Mukherjee has not ignored the caste and class issues but dealt with them from a locus she comes from. She clarified that she writes from a particular class and caste, i.e., *Bhadralok* society. However, a close reading of the "gaps," "silences," "noises," and "obstacles" shows that her belonging to a *Bhadralok* society is built on the marginality of a group of community. She has used the lower caste and lower-class sections of society as filler, which cannot be sidelined from

the discourse of Dalit diaspora feminism. For instance, a Dalit Christian boy is not marriageable even if a girl from the *Bhadralok* community is pregnant. The girl (in *Desirable Daughters*) is forced to marry another boy of her caste. The writer showed the suppression of the desire of the girl of the upper caste and used the Dalit caste as a filler. Similarly, in *Jasmine*, lower caste is compared with widowhood's plight. In *The Tiger's Daughter*, the narrator keeps on comparing the social status of the protagonist by portraying the position of the "other."

Indeed, Mukherjee portrays the conflict of caste and class with gender, which is a point to enter into the caste debate. At the same time, this intersection of caste works only from the axis of dominant caste and upper-class women. At the same, the historical and cultural background of South Asian diaspora in the novels also led to an understanding of deeply rooted issues related to lower caste. Maybe Mukherjee wanted her readers to open them for further study. However, another point from the Dalit diaspora feminist perspective is the characterization of Jasmine, the protagonist of *Jasmine*, who, unlike the other protagonists of the two novels, has "no caste." The writer mentions her class and portrays the intersection of class and gender, but class and caste are two questions that should be discussed through the intersection but not as a replacement. The question of ignorance of the caste system's hierarchy and Jasmine's situation in that system raises arguments such as: does she not have any caste? Or is her caste blurred with her class?

In the second case study, the matrimonial sites are the spaces where one can see the recognition of caste. Indeed, as shown in the sixth chapter, caste is essential in arranging Indian (diaspora) marriages. According to the matrimonial site Jeevansathi.com, a marriage without considering caste is impossible, as it is one of the questions that must be answered. As per the debate, the matrimonial site is constructed according to the needs of the upper caste and upper middle class. Matrimonial sites, which are one of the results of the construction of "imagined communities" based on the search for belongingness to the nation, at the same time, build a caste nation where profiles are segregated into small nations based on caste. Such segregation of the caste nation is achieved and maintained through the bodies of Indian (diaspora) women as they are the re/producer of the caste. Their bodies become the site of the imposition of Brahmanical patriarchal norms to continue caste purity. As discussed in the fourth chapter, "Gendered caste and caste-d gender," women's bodies are trained to be submissive, passive, and dedicated to the

service of the purity of the caste hierarchy either through fear, force, or economic dependence. *Pativrata dharma* is one of the significant achievements in securing the loyalty and dedication of women towards their husbands and submitting themselves to the Brahminical patriarchy.

Chapter six has answered that the Brahmanical texts and their norms have remained consistent with the digitalization and modernization of the matrimonial system. Instead, there has been a paradigm shift where women are double burdened, first as active contributors in the economic structure of the family and, second, as the reproducers of caste. As a result, they produce women who are "simple, educated, cultured, and working girls," who "adjust in the family, respect elders, take care of the family, and support their partner with mutual understanding and believe in family values," and who are "a healthy blend of traditional and modern culture." At the same time, the dominant caste and upper-middle-class male locus of the matrimonial sites do not let lower caste women survive in such space within the league of upper caste women. The matrimonial site targets upper caste families and their normalized prescription of body size, shape, color and many more things in which Dalit women do not fit. That way, it is clear that the matrimonial sites do not consider lower caste women or men as part of the South Asian diaspora community.

Both the cases in the fifth and sixth chapters from a comparative reading of Dalit diaspora feminist discourse show that Dalit diaspora women are not considered part of the South Asian diaspora community. The two cases have ended with arguments such as using Dalit diaspora only as filler, and Jasmine's caste has been blurred with her class. The case study on the matrimonial site also ends with the underrepresentation of Dalit diaspora women. This has become a challenge to postcolonialism as many scholars from Dalit feminism, and even postcolonialism have targeted its incapacity of understanding/ representing/ letting self-representing the subjectivity of the Dalit or Dalit diaspora women. Postcolonialism has not opened a debate on the section of society that carries the burden of caste oppression and whose victimization has been multiplied because of colonialism, Brahmanism, patriarchy, racism, and classism. Thus, Dalit diaspora feminists have separated their discourse from postcolonialism.

In this course, one can see in the seventh chapter how the separation of Dalits from the dominant caste functions. There is a strict line of division between the dominant and lower castes. This has been visible in the prevailing South Asian texts as well, as discussed in the second chapter of the literature review, the fifth chapter of the close reading of Mukherjee's novels and the seventh chapter of matrimonial sites where Dalits are not able to connect themselves with the South Asian diaspora texts. Dalits do not find any point of connection with the South Asian community as it has been a homogenized "brown" community. The separation has been generational and multi-layered, which has continued outside the Indian land.

The result is not only separation between upper and lower castes but also multidirectional: it separates Dalits from themselves and causes them to go through trauma and hiding. Then there is the double marginalization of Dalit women. Dalit diaspora women, such as Permila Tirkey and Sitha Vemireddy, have shown their marginalized position among the South Asian dominant diaspora. They are trained to be in servitude and are women who are assumed less "women" because, according to Brahmanism, they lack respect and honor as women of the dominant caste, are sexualized, and are prone to sexual violation by dominant caste men. Their oppression by the dominant caste has been naturalized.

Further, Tirkey and Vemireddy are not considered the subjects of the "imagined communities" constructed far from the nation: the caste nation. The Dalit diaspora women do not meet the criteria for being part of such a caste nation because their lower caste and gender, and class freeze them as the "other" within the Brahmanical patriarchy. The intersection of gender, caste, and class has resulted in their subaltern position. They are filled with the trauma of the consequences an upper-caste male can do to them. Although they are not the subject of the caste nation, at the same time, they are not out of that nation either; instead, they are outsiders inside (Butler & Spivak, 2007). They must provide service, go through sexual exploitation, caste humiliation, the burden of caste issues, and many more things.

Here, comes the question of self-representation; in the earlier two case studies, it has been seen that a dominant caste male-oriented matrimonial site has been a site of marginalization of dominant caste women. At the same time, it perpetuates the caste system and hence double

marginalizes the women who carry their lower caste status. Mukherjee, on the other hand, a woman writer from the upper caste and the upper middle class, has shown the secondary status of women, but she is not talking about Dalit women. The question of caste, when it comes from the lower scale of the caste pyramid, has been used only as filler, a symbol, and a metaphor but not as a person who needs a space to be placed. Thus, in both cases, the subjectivity of the Dalit diaspora women is underrepresented, which leads to the understanding:

1. They are unworthy of representation.
2. They are incapable of representing themselves.
3. The empowered people care little about their representation.

The third case study shows Dalit diaspora feminist discourse accepts caste as an identity. There has been an acceptance of caste, which challenges caste-related oppression. Especially women, for whom the fight has been doubled; they are not only brown women or only members of the South Asian community. They carry their caste and class along with their gender. It has been an essential turn in the research because this case study has questioned postcolonialism and representation. As representation has been the main agenda of postcolonialism, it has failed to represent the lower-caste South Asian diaspora. Instead, the South Asian postcolonial scholars have represented and self-represented themselves, forgetting about the section of society called Bahujans, Dalits, Adivasis, Tribals, or “untouchables.”

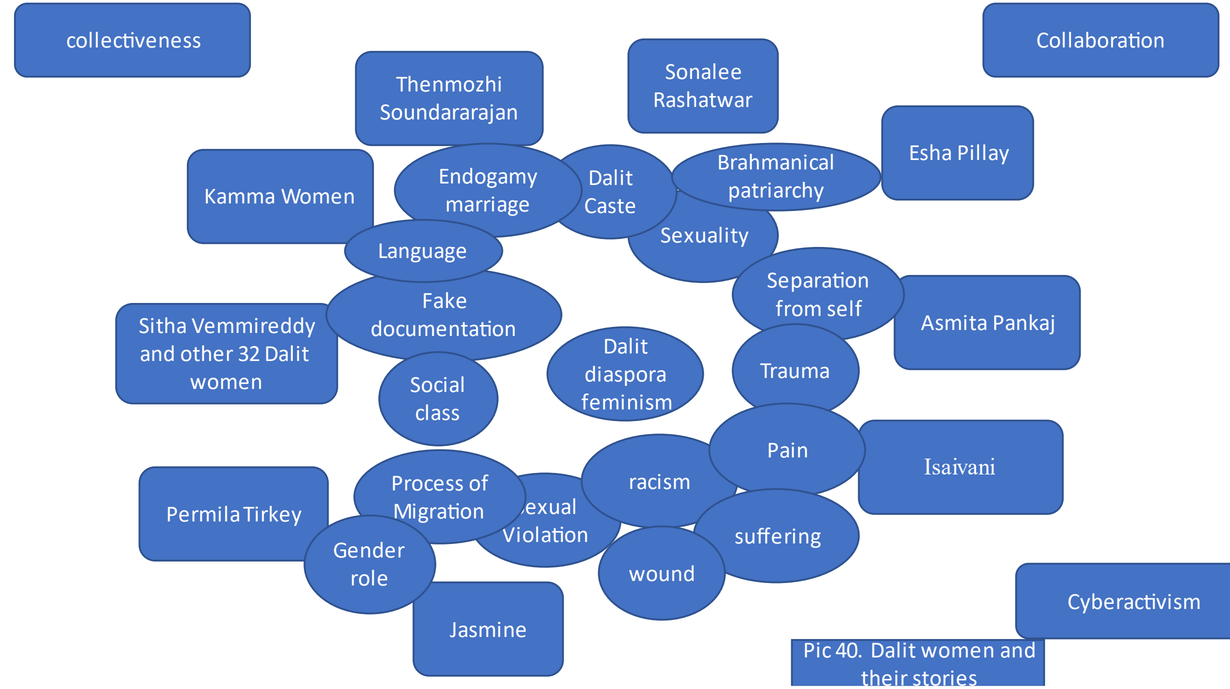
Nevertheless, there has not been a complete exclusion; Dalit subjects are often used in writing only as an object of study, not as a member who can speak for him/herself. Such representation in a postcolonial discourse has problematized the position of Dalit diaspora women. It has created a fear of the loss of Dalit identity, the narrative of their movement, their pre- and postcolonial existence, which is different from other South Asian diaspora communities, their trauma, their revolution, their healing, their culture, and their history. That is the biggest fear—hence, the self-representation of the “others,” which is almost “impossible,” as we have already talked about in the case of Sitha Vemireddy, but at the same time, “it is the urge.” The marginalized constantly urge to represent themselves because their self-representation will only make them visible. The seventh chapter intends to bring to light through the case study of the blog article, self-representation is the tool that has been used to historize their narrative against

the casteist (his)story. The reading of the blog article proves that there is an urge to theorize their narrative, collaborate, and create their activism collectively.

One thing commonly referred to is endogamic marriage, starting from the novels of Mukherjee, matrimonial sites, and the respondents' narratives on the blog. The fourth chapter discusses the relationship between caste and gender, which details the presence of caste in shaping gender, sexuality, (child) marriage, and widowhood. The maintenance of caste purity can only be achieved through marriage and reproducing caste heirs. Therefore, endogamic marriage has been essential for the dominant caste to maintain the hierarchy, whereas mixing castes will result in the loss of power related to caste. For instance, one can debate the question of the impossibility of inter-caste marriage in *Desirable Daughters* and the early marriage of the protagonist, Tara, which also indicates the rooted fear of caste impurity. Hence, women of high caste and upper middle class have been suppressed in the questions of gender to achieve the caste heir.
Hence, to maintain such a hierarchy, there have been many methods adopted, such as training women of the dominant caste to submit themselves to the caste purity through the *Pativrata* concept, fear of loss of upper caste and upper-middle-class privileges, as well as giving punishment to the women by killing them, which has been popularly known as "honor killing."

Returning to the seventh chapter, the testimonies reveal that their pain and suffering have led to the darkness where they have separated from themselves. At the same time, it teaches that the trauma created by caste oppression is their teacher; it teaches them to accept the "otherness" in order to get away from it. It is an understanding that their caste is not a problem; instead, suppressing on the name of caste is problematic. When it comes to the "Nueva Conciencia Mestiza," it shows that the blog writing and the participants in the blog article are already on the path of consciousness and healing. "Nueva Conciencia Mestiza" symbolizes their acceptance, collaboration, and activism. The last case study also shows that Dalit diaspora feminists have opened themselves for collaboration and collectivity beyond caste, gender, and class. They know that understanding caste apartheid is equally necessary for the upper caste as much as it is essential for the lower caste. Here, I will present the picture where I have made a collage of all the Dalit diaspora women, we have talked about in the research work. I have also tried to bring

the issues which these Dalit diaspora women go through in their lives. At the exterior I have also used the terms collaboration, collectiveness and cyberactivism which have been observed as their aim of Dalit diaspora feminism.



Pic 40. Dalit women and their stories

Permila Tirkey, Sitha Vemireddy, Thenmozhi Soundararajan, Sonalee Rashtwar, Esha Pillay, Asmita Pankaj and Isaiwani, all of them have one thing in common, which is their caste. The upper caste South Asian diaspora family could suppress Permila Tirkey because she was a gendered caste "other" whose other identities such as class, education, and language skill made her vulnerable to exploitation. Sitha Vemireddy was marginalized because of her caste, gender, class, language, education, fake documentation, and racism. Jasmine in Bharati Mukherjee's novel, a fictional character, although not carrying the caste, shows similarity with the gendered caste other, symbolizes herself as a strong woman who fights all the adversities such as sexual violation and racism, against imposed norms of widowhood and *Sati* tradition. Sonalee Rashtwar, Esha Pillay and Asmita Pankaj have shown their frustration toward the caste apartheid and talk about their marginalization because of caste even when working in recognized companies and are educated. They have also stated how caste-based marginalization continues because of endogamic marriages. We also see different colors through Thenmozhi Soundararajan

who has used internet platform such as Meidum.com, Instagram, and Twitter to share the vision of Dalit diaspora feminism. She started #DalitWomenFight on Instagram and continues to fight against Brahminical patriarchy. She calls herself Dalit Diva on social platforms, talking pride in her identities and at the same time carries the collective idea behind the term Dalit Diva. Then, Isaivani another woman Dalit woman who speaks for all the Dalit women living inside or outside the country. She stands in a collective group with her male Dalit singers and often leads them which shows her empowered figure who is proud of her caste and gender. She stands on the stage without any fear and speaks her mind through songs which reach people worldwide. We have seen different shades of Dalit women who finally teaches us to stand in collective, collaborate and start (cyber)activism.

The last case study invites everyone who can feel for the caste oppressed people. They invite them for the collective fight against caste apartheid which is also open for postcolonialism. Dalit diaspora feminism has already come forward for a collective and collaborative fight. It invites Postcolonialism too to listen to more Dalit stories and collaborate with Dalit diaspora feminists for research where they are provided the equal space to speak. In this research work, to establish the link between postcolonialism and Dalit diaspora feminism, I have used decolonial feminism to build a bridge through which it is easy to move toward an inclusive method. However, it should not be denied that many postcolonial scholars have realized the problem and are not afraid of being criticized and critical of caste ignorance in their research.

2. Limitations of the research and future lines of research

In this research work there have been some limitations. First, I could not find Dalit diaspora texts, especially novels, so I moved to digital writing. That became one of the projects of this thesis: to cross the disciplinary border to make the research work interdisciplinary. Second, while working on a matrimonial site, I wanted to interview the employees at Jeevansathi.com to understand the function of the matrimonial site from the other side. However, it looked risky because my profile could be eliminated from the site. Moreover, I wanted to avoid risking the

research since I had already started collecting profiles. Now, it makes me curious to conduct such interviews in further studies.

The third limitation I felt with the blog was that the bloggers of "Spearheading a survey of caste in South Asian diasporas," except Thenmozhi Soundararajan, never replied to my comments. I wanted to talk about their experiences in collecting information and writing the blog. So, I contacted Thenmozhi on Instagram and shared my thesis work there. She shared her unpublished book with me, which got published after a few months.

This research work, which I did not assume initially, served as a bridge to enter the digital space, to enter the digital humanities from the interdisciplinary method. The digital presence of Dalit diaspora feminists on sites such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube have opened much discussion on cyberfeminism from the perspective of Dalit diaspora feminism. It can be a broader research field that can be pursued further. It can also be an exciting project to work on using an interdisciplinary and collaborative methodology. In the future, I want to extend my research on this field.

While working on the matrimonial site, I continuously felt that the matrimonial site should be approached from an interdisciplinary perspective—feminist studies and computational studies—to broaden the research work on the algorithm and coding on which the matrimonial site is based. Such a study might open a fruitful discussion on how the profiles are filtered, specifically how the caste filters are done.

3. **Additional remarks**

This research work for me has been a learning and strengthening period. I moved to digital platforms where I could read daily updated narratives of Dalit diaspora feminists. I have been going through their struggle of considering caste as one of the discriminatory factors in workplaces, colleges, and universities where caste discrimination goes unnoticed. I have also participated in their activism online and will support their struggle. Because of the research

work, I contacted scholars, activists, and writers who listened to my work and appreciated taking this research work and topic globally.

Appendix

1. The matrimonial form of Jeevansathi.com

4/11/23, 6:59 PM Search Matrimonial Profile - Find Matrimony Profile - Jeevansathi.com

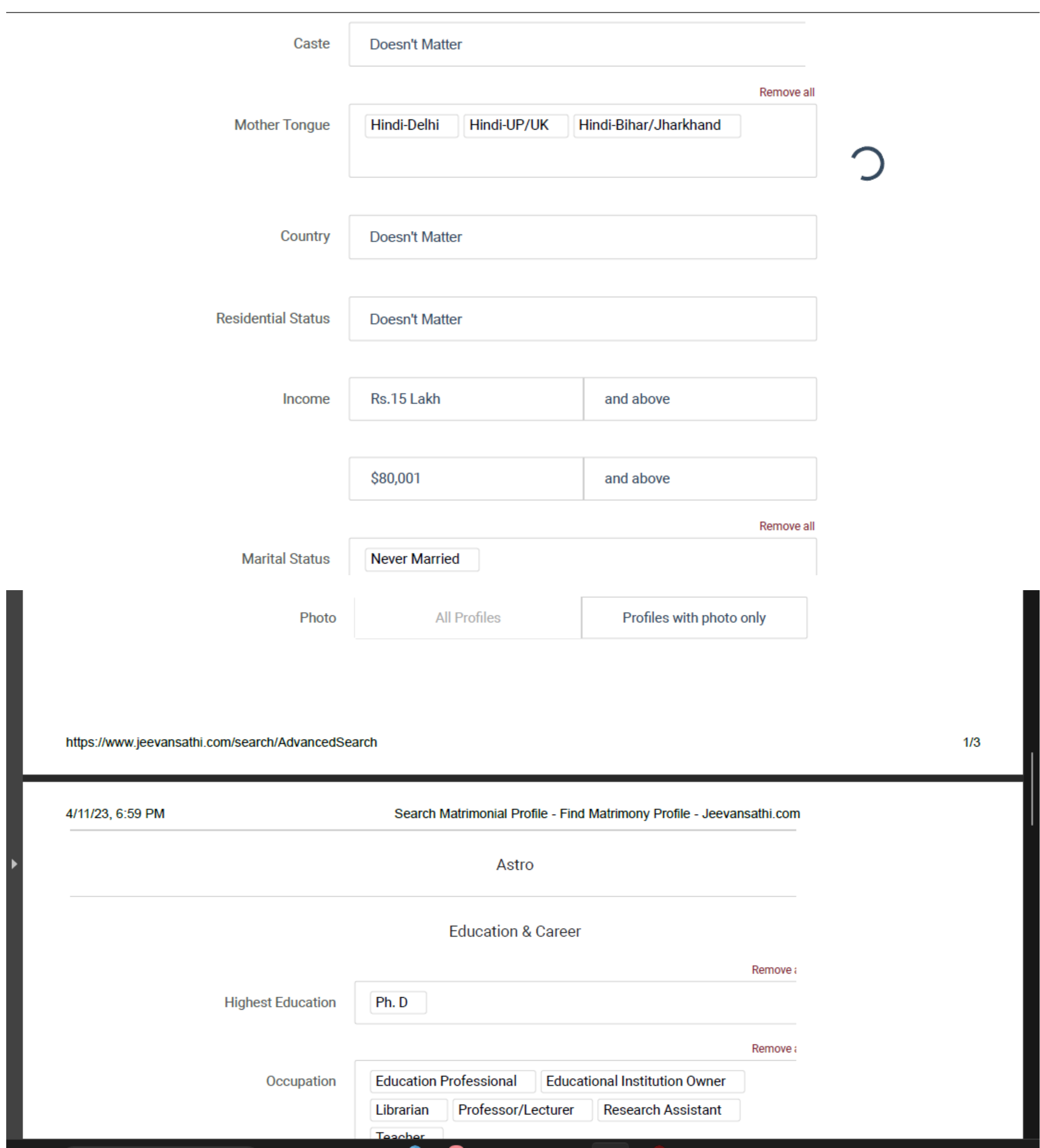
Jeevansathi Be found MATCHES INBOX SEARCH UPGRADE HELP

Search | My Saved Searches | Sear

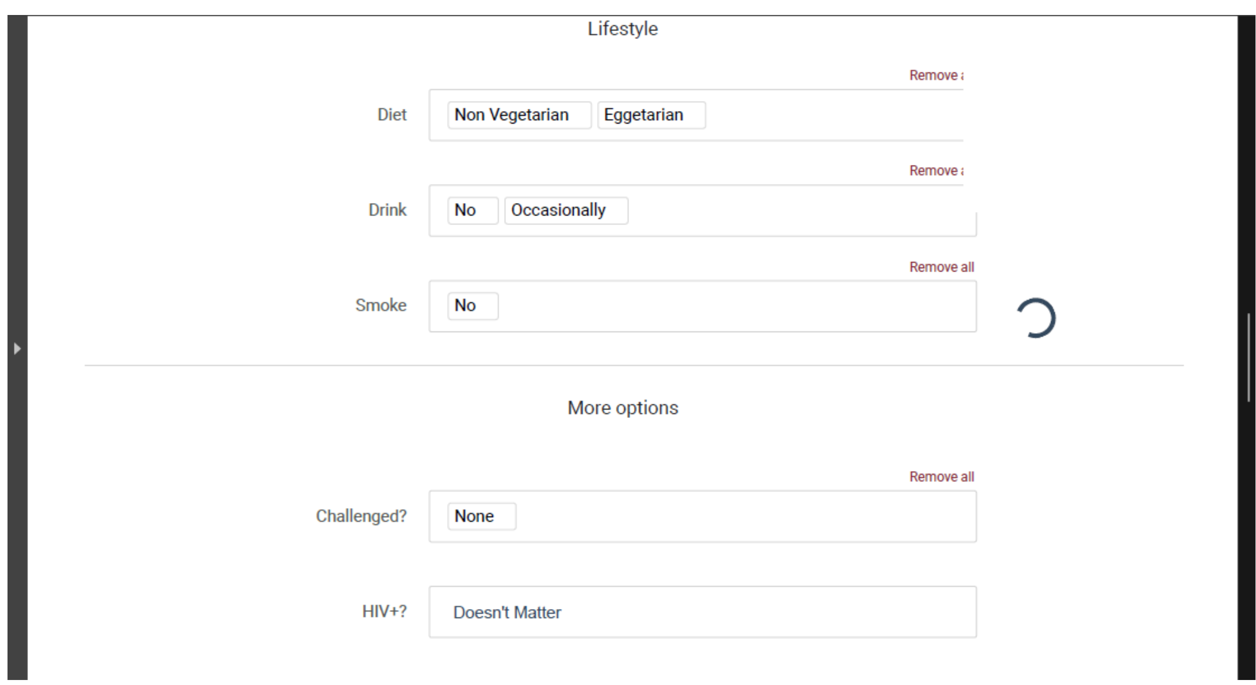
Age	33 years	38 years
Height	5' 6" (1.68 mts)	5' 6" (1.68 mts)

Remove

Religion	Hindu



Caste
Doesn't Matter
Remove all
Mother Tongue
Hindi-Delhi
Hindi-UP/UK
Hindi-Bihar/Jharkhand
Country
Doesn't Matter
Residential Status
Doesn't Matter
Income
Rs.15 Lakh
and above
$80,001
and above
Remove all
Marital Status
Never Married
Photo
All Profiles
Profiles with photo only
https://www.jeevansathi.com/search/AdvancedSearch
1/3
4/11/23, 6:59 PM
Search Matrimonial Profile - Find Matrimony Profile - Jeevansathi.com
Astro
Education & Career
Highest Education
Ph. D
Occupation
Education Professional
Educational Institution Owner
Librarian
Professor/Lecturer
Research Assistant


Lifestyle
Remove a
Diet
Non Vegetarian
Eggetarian
Remove a
Drink
No
Occasionally
Remove all
Smoke
No
More options
Remove all
Challenged?
None
HIV+?
Doesn't Matter

2. Survey: Data collected from the profiles of male and female participants

Male profiles	Profile managed by	Profession or salary expected	Other expectations	Body type expected	Body color expected	Own caste	Caste expected
M Subject 1(USA)	parents	not mentioned	"well, read, independent, full of life, values family"	slim, average	Very fair, fair, wheatish	Aggarwal	not mentioned , Hindu, Sikh, Jain.
M Subject 2 (USA)	parents	Income between 20,000$ to 200,000$		Slim, Athletic, Average	Very fair, fair, wheatish	Bania	not mentioned , Hindu
M Subject 3 (Netherland)	self and parents	Not mentioned		Slim, Athletic, Average	Very fair, fair, wheatish	Brahmin	Bania, Brahmin, Kashyap, Kayashtha
M Subject 4 (USA)	parents	professionally qualified	"a healthy blend of traditional and modern culture"	Slim, Athletic, Average		Agarwal	caste not mentioned
M subject 5 (Spain)	parents	professional	"good family background"	Slim, Athletic,		Brahmin Saraswat	not mentioned , Hindu,

				Average			Sikh
M subject 6 (Luxembourg)	parents	not mentioned		Slim, Athletic, Average	Very fair, fair, wheatish	Aggarwal, Bania	Aggarwal, Bania, Gupta, Khandelwal
M subject 7 (USA)	parents	not mentioned	"Educated, family-oriented, good looking"			Aggarwal	Aggarwal, Bania, Brahmin
M subject 8 (USA)	parents	Not mentioned	"Family values"	Slim, Athletic, Average	Very fair, fair, wheatish	Bania, Agarwal	not specified, Hindu, Jain
M subject 9(USA)	parents	Not mentioned	"Similar values of family as he has. She should respect, be honest"	Slim, Average, Athletic,	Very fair, fair, wheatish	Bania, Agarwal	caste not mentioned, Hindu and Jain
M subject 10 (London)	parents	Salary-25,000 $ or more.	"Tall, Beautiful, good-looking, well-educated,			Bania.	Not specified, Hindu, Jain

			and family oriented."				
M subject 11 (USA)	parents	well qualified				Brahmin.	Brahmin, Aggarwal
M subject 12 (USA)	Self	not mentioned		Average		Brahmin.	Aggarwal, brahmin,
M subject 13 (Spain)	Self	independent				Aggarwal	Marwari, Aggarwal,
M subject 14 (Canada)	Self	not mentioned				Brahmin	not mentioned
M subject 15 (Germany)	Self	not mentioned	"Family-oriented"	Average	fair	Kayastha.	not mentioned
M subject 16 (Canada)	Self	not mentioned				Gupta, Gahoi	Aggarwal, brahmin
M subject 17	Self	Carrier oriented				Kurmi.	Hindu religion

(Paris)							
M subject 18 (France)	parents	not mentioned	"European citizen, Indian, Hindu girl, adjustable, caring, open-minded, good looking, and confident."			Brahmin	not mentioned
M subject 19 (Denmark)	parents	not mentioned				Kayastha	caste not mentioned, Hindu
M subject 20	parents	Not mentioned	"Decent looking, fun-loving, cheerful, and happy girl."	Slim, Athletic, Average	Very fair, fair, wheatish	Gupta	Bania, Brahmin, Kayashtha

M subject 21 (USA)	parents/relatives	not mentioned	"Simple, educated, cultured, and working girl, who adjusts to the family, respects elders, and takes care of the family. Supports her partner with mutual understanding and believes in family values."			Aggarwal Gupta	not mentioned
M subject 22 (USA)	Self	well qualified	"Well-qualified, intelligent, stand by me in every situation."	Athletic, Average, heavy	Wheatish Brown, Wheatish, Fair, Very Fair	Bania, Aggarwal	not specified, Hindu, Jain
M subject 23 (USA)		not mentioned		Slim, Average, Athletic,	Fair, Very Fair	Gupta Aggarwal	Not mentioned

M subject 24 (USA)	Self	not mentioned				Aggarwal, Brahmin	Not mentioned
M subject 25 (London, UK)	Self	not mentioned	“Someone expressive, humble, and easy-going, international or multi-culture exposure.”	Slim, Average, Athletic,	Wheatish Brown, Wheatish, Fair, Very Fair	Bania	not mentioned

Female profiles	**Profile managed by**	**Profession or salary expected**	**Other expectations**	**Body type expected**	**Body color expected**	**Own caste**	**Caste expected**
F subject 1 (USA)	Parents	Income	“Kind, compassionate, ambitious, honest, and	Not mentioned		Kayastha	Kayastha, brahmin

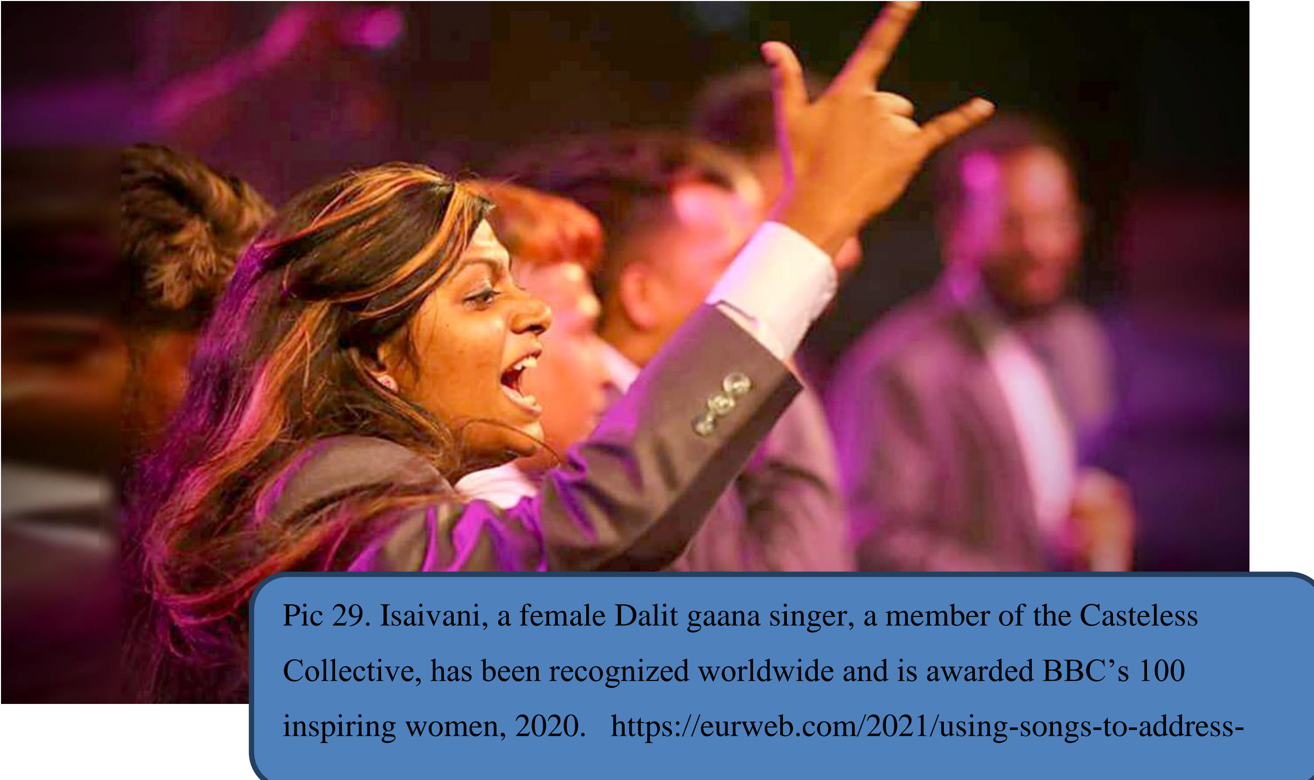
			with a good sense of humor.”				
F subject 2 (USA)	Parents	Income		Not mentioned		Kayastha, Ambastha	Brahmin, Bhandari, Bhatia
F subject 3 (USA)	Parents	Income		Not mentioned		Kayastha	Kayastha
F subject 4 (USA)	Parents	Income		Athletic, Average	Very fair, fair, wheatish	Digamber, Aggarwal	not mentioned, Jain
F subject 5 (USA)	Parents	Working in the USA		Athletic, Average	Very fair, fair, wheatish	Kayastha, Srivastava	Kayastha
F subject 6 (USA)	Parents	Working in the USA		Athletic, Average		Srivastava	Aggarwal, Bania, Brahmin, Kayastha
F subject 7 (USA)	Self	Carrier oriented	“values family”	Not mentioned		Hindu, Kayastha	not mentioned, Hindu
F subject 8 (Singapor	Parents	Not mentioned		Not mentioned		Kayastha	not mentioned, Jain or

e)							Hindu
F subject 9 USA	Parents	Not mentioned		Slim, Athletic, Average		Brahmin	not specified, Hindu, Jain
F subject 10 (USA)	Parents	Income		Not mention ed		Brahmin	Marwari, Aggarwal,
F subject 11 (USA)	Parents	Not mentioned	"Smart, educated, family-oriented from India"	Not mention ed		Kayastha	Kayastha
F subject 12 (Canada)	Parents	Income		Average	Very fair, fair, wheatish	Kayastha	not specified, Hindu, Jain
F subject 13 (USA)	Self	Not mentioned		Not mention ed		Brahmin Sharma	Brahmin
F subject 14 (USA)	Parents	Doctor	"Simple and respectful	Not mention ed		Brahmin	not mentioned , Hindu
F subject 15	Self	Income	Understands her and	Not mention	Very fair, fair,	Brahmin	Brahmin

USA			treats her family as his own."	ed	wheatish		
F subject 16 (USA)	Self	Income	"Independent, smart and in the USA"	Not mentioned		Brahmin	not mentioned
F subject 17 (USA)	Self	Not mentioned	"Modern"	Average Slim, Athletic	Very fair, fair, wheatish	Brahmin	not mentioned
F subject 18 (USA)	Parents	Income		Slim, Athletic, Average	Very fair, fair, wheatish	Brahmin	Sonar, Shwetambar,
F subject 19 (USA)	Parents	Income		Not mentioned		Brahmin	not mentioned
F subject 20 (USA)	Parents	not mentioned		Not mentioned	Very fair, fair	Brahmin	Brahmin, Bhandari, Bhatia
F subject 21 (USA)	Both	not mentioned		Not mentioned		Brahmin	not specific, Hindu and Jain
F subject 22 (USA)	Parents	doctor	"Indian origin settled in the USA"	Not mentioned		Brahmin	not mentioned, Hindu, Jain,

F subject 23 (USA)	Parents	not mentioned	"Indian Vegetarian, teetotaler Brahmin boy"	Average and Athletic	Very fair, fair	Brahmin	Brahmin,
F subject 24 (USA)	Parents	not mentioned		Not mention ed		Brahmin	Hindu, Jain, Parsi, Sikh
F subject 25 (USA)	Parents	not mentioned		Not mention ed		Kayastha	Not mentioned

3. Pictures of Dalit diaspora women



Pic 29. Isaivani, a female Dalit gaana singer, a member of the Casteless Collective, has been recognized worldwide and is awarded BBC's 100 inspiring women, 2020. https://eurweb.com/2021/using-songs-to-address-

Pic 30. Profile picture of Valliammal Karunakalam on Medium.com

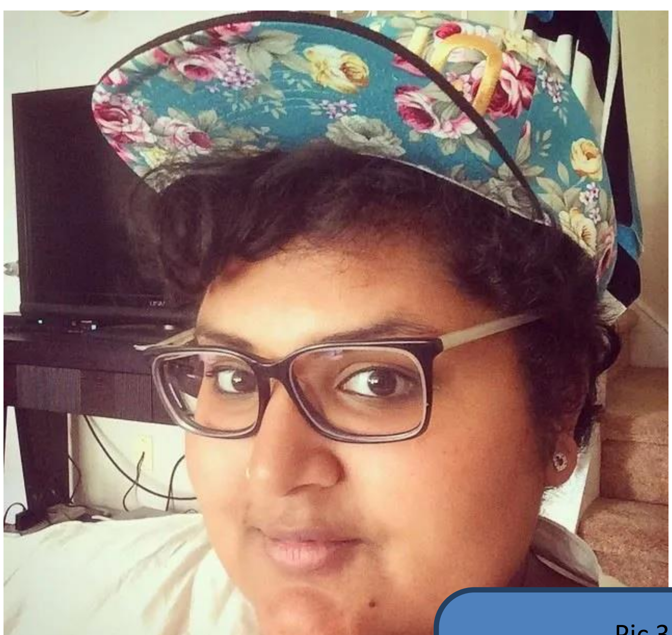
Pic 31. Thenmozhi Soundrarajan/Dalit Diva @DalitDiva

Pic 32. Laila Zainab, a respondent, Medium.com

https://medium.com/@Bahujan_Power/pioneering-a-survey-of-caste-in-the-diasporas-6e5a27cd82ef

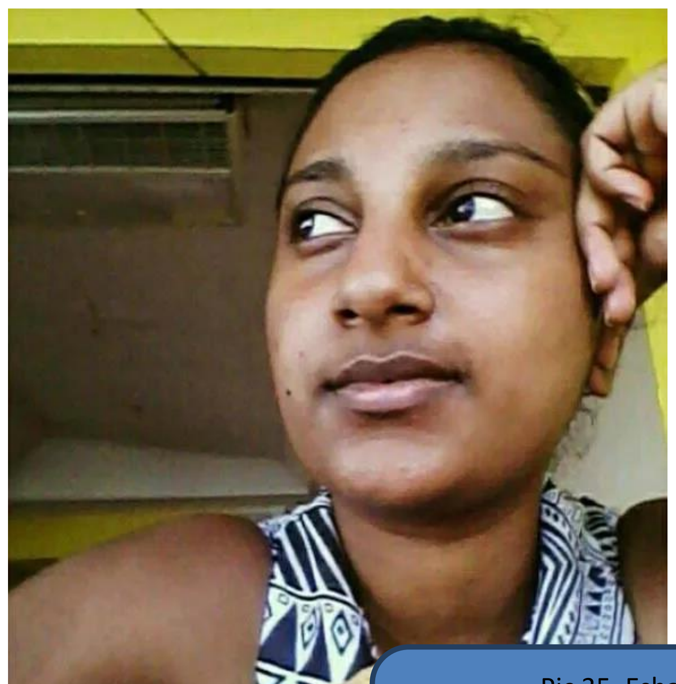
Pic 33. YaliniDream, a respondent, Medium.com

https://medium.com/@Bahujan_Power/pioneering-a-survey-of-caste-in-the-diasporas-6e5a27cd82ef



Pic 34. Sonalee Rashatwar, a respondent,

https://medium.com/@Bahujan_Power/pioneering-a-survey-of-caste-in-the-diasporas-6e5a27cd82ef



Pic 35. Esha Pilay, a respondent, Medium.com

https://medium.com/@Bahujan_Power/pioneering-a-survey-of-caste-in-the-diasporas-6e5a27cd82ef

Pic. 36. Rama Hansraj, a respondent, Medium.com

https://medium.com/@Bahujan_Power/pioneering-a-survey-of-caste-in-the-diasporas-6e5a27cd82ef

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D. Pictures

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Picture 5. Blog article https://medium.com/@Bahujan_Power/pioneering-a-survey-of-caste-in the-diasporas-6e5a27cd82ef Accessed on 25 July 2018

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Picture 22. A dating app yourlovemeet.com https://www.yourlovemeet.com/ Accessed on 16 March 2023

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Picture 38. Instagram page of Thenmozhi Soundararajan

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