



Caste System in India

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History Behind the Caste System

The Indian caste system is the oldest social structure in the world. It dates back to 1000 or even more years before Jesus was born. The caste system is divided into four groups: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and the Shudras. These groups are believed to have come from different body parts of Brahma, the Hindu God of Creation.

The Brahmins are at the top of the hierarchy, probably why they are given a name directly similar to the name of the god himself. Brahmins are believed to have come from Brahma's head. They were mostly teachers and priests who were considered very intellectual and wise people.

Below Brahmin were Kshatriyas who were warriors, military leaders, civic administrators and governors and came from the arms of the god. Then were Vaishyas, who were mostly traders and agriculturists and came from the thighs. Lastly, Shudras who supposedly came from Brahma's feet and did all the low rated jobs. Some of their jobs include: tanning, washing, shoe making, cleaning, cooking, blacksmithing, and cobbling.

"The main castes were further divided into about 3,000 castes and 25,000 sub-castes, each based on their specific occupation" (bbc).



How it works?

Brahmins were given many privileges in the society based on the caste they belonged to.

The upper and the lower classes were segregated in villages. The lower caste was not allowed to drink water from the same well and attend the same temples. The Brahmins did not accept the food or drink from the Shudras and inter caste marriages were allowed.






Dalits




After the period of Buddhism ended in India, people begin rebuilding their beliefs in hinduism. The high caste wanted their superior position like before and the lower caste rejected that. In all this Dalits (untouchables) came along. They were considered people outside of the caste structure, people who are polluting the society. The characteristic of Dalits were, "They deny the supremacy of Bhramins, do not receive Mantra from a Bhramin or otherwise recognise Hindu Guru, deny the authority of Vedas, do not worship Hindu Gods, are not served by good Bhrahmins as family priests, have no Bhrahmin priests at all, are denied access to interior of Hindu temples, cause pollution (a) by touch, or (b) within a certain distance, bury their dead and eat beef and not reverence the cow".

Dalits faced extreme discrimination. They were "relegated to the lowest jobs, and live in constant fear of being publicly humiliated, paraded naked, beaten, and raped with impunity by upper-caste Hindus seeking to keep them in their place. Merely walking through an upper-caste neighborhood is a life-threatening offense" (National Geographic).



"Statistics compiled by India's National Crime Records Bureau indicate that in the year 2000, the last year for which figures are available, 25,455 crimes were committed against Dalits. Every hour two Dalits are assaulted; every day three Dalit women are raped, two Dalits are murdered, and two Dalit homes are torched".



What is means to be a Dalit Woman?



From what I noted from this video, Dalits are discriminated from every aspect. A Dalit cannot marry someone from a high caste, they cannot sometimes get the jobs they deserve, and they face crude discriminatory comments on daily basis.

“Dalit women lie at the bottom of the gradation of both caste and gender”. Which means they face even more discrimination than Dalit men. There is gender discrimination already and being from a lower caste adds on to it.



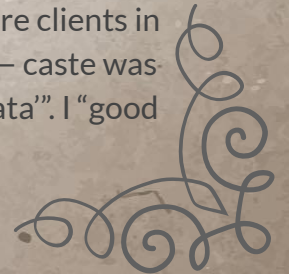
Meera Estrada's story



Meera Estrada is an Indian - Canadian subject of this discrimination even in Canada. In her blog, she talks about a conversation she had with a friend about using a surrogate mother in India. The friend said something very shocking. She said, "I wouldn't use a lower-caste surrogate. I wouldn't want my kid to be stupid." It's really sad to see that this continues even in Indians who long moved out of India and that too in today's generation.

She mentions that the Indian community in Canada talked about caste way often than one would expect. She was asked multiple times about what caste she belonged to and she felt very intimidated by that question. She was reluctant to tell anyone she was from a lower caste.

Caste also plays a huge role in the marriage process. "Watching Netflix's *Indian Matchmaking* — where clients in the U.S. and India are guided by matchmaker Sima Taparia through the arranged marriage process — caste was mentioned in nearly every episode of season one. It was listed on each client's profile card or 'bio-data'. I "good girl" or a "good family" was always mentioned when the girl is fair-skinned and from a higher caste.



Indian Matchmaking Show



This is a scene from the Indian Matching Show, where they talk about the requirements for their future spouse. Most conversation revolve around lighter skin color and higher caste which to them represents a “good” family.



Dalits & Mental Health.

It's interesting how much someone can care about what caste you belong to. Angnee Ghosh writes how a friend stops talking to her when she found out about her caste. The friend mocked at her caste saying, "Oh, she used reservation to get into colleges."

First of all why would schools and colleges care what caste you are from? But, "In India, upper-caste people dominate schools, colleges, government, the law, the media— everything that is important to influence the sociopolitical and economic fabric of the country".

Being from a lower caste and facing discrimination can affect your mental health so much. You feel embarrassed to reveal what your identity is and avoid conversation about caste as much as possible. Some lie about what their caste is to avoid discrimination and hatred.

Aniket Vayadande shares, "I didn't know how to deal with it, and even now, when someone assumes that I'm upper caste, I don't correct them".

There is no healthcare for the trauma Dalits to through. "The systemic oppression that Dalit Bahujans face in India often goes unacknowledged by upper-caste therapists who dominate the field, or it is reduced to one's flaws".



Inter Caste Marriage



Inter Caste marriages are still a persistent issue. It is incredibly challenging to convince both families to allow an inter caste marriage. Even if religion and values match between the two families, having a different caste can still be the sole reason of not accepting the relationship. According to the chart, so many Indians still believe that inter caste marriages should be stopped.

Most Indians say it is crucial to stop inter-caste marriages

% of Indian adults who say it is very important to stop _____ from marrying into another caste

	Men	Women
General population	62%	64%
Hindus	63	64
Muslims	70	74
Christians	36	37
Sikhs	59	58
Buddhists	44	44
Jains	57	61
Men	62	63
Women	63	65
Ages 18-25	58	59
26-34	60	62
35+	65	67
Less than college	64	65
College graduate	48	50
Brahmin	64	66
Other General Category	59	60
Scheduled Caste/Tribe	61	62
Other/Most Backward Class	67	69
North	71	72
Central	82	83
East	62	64
West	66	67
South	35	37
Northeast	49	51
Urban	52	53
Rural	67	69





Annotated Bibliography




“Chapter Ten: Shudras- Untouchables- Dalits.” *Asian Human Rights Commission*, www.humanrights.asia/resources/books/demoralization-and-hope/chapter-ten-shudras-untouchables-dalits/. Accessed 15 Nov. 2024.

This article specifically goes over the Shudras, Dalits and the Untouchables and the difference between them. I like this because this is the only article I found that talks about how Dalits came to be.

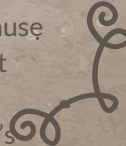
Estrada, Meera. “How I Shed My Shame around Caste.” *How Indian-Canadian Culture Perpetuates Caste System*, www.refinery29.com/en-us/2022/02/10864203/indian-caste-system-real-experience. Accessed 13 Nov. 2024.

This is a blog also about someone’s experience with the caste system. Instead of talking only about India, the author shares her experience as an Indian - Canadian. I am curious to know how this culture carries on with Indians who have moved abroad. This will be a strong source as it suggests that the caste system persists even if you move outside of the country. Which, honestly, is very sad.

Ghosh, Agnee, et al. “I’m Dalit. This Is How My Caste Impacts My Mental Health.” *VICE*, 9 Aug. 2024, www.vice.com/en/article/dalit-caste-india-mental-health-therapy/.



This article talks about personal experience of a woman who also belongs to a Dalit caste. I want to use this specifically because it’s someone’s actual story and how they were treated. I think the author goes in depth about the types of comments you get from the people around you about your caste. This would be really helpful in determining the amount of hatred and discrimination one from a lower caste has to go through. This is not a very well known source, But I want to use it because it’s someone else’s story instead of facts and research.





Annotated Bibliography



Mayell, Hillary. "India's 'Untouchables' Face Violence, Discrimination." *Pages*, 2 June 2003, www.nationalgeographic.com/pages/article/indias-untouchables-face-violence-discrimination.

This source specifically talks about the discrimination against Dalits. It has statistics on the crimes that were committed against Dalits. It's also a pretty credible source.

"India's Caste System: What It Means to Be a Dalit Woman?." *YouTube*, YouTube, 28 Nov. 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=in5gjuWPAvg.

This video talks about some experiences of Dalit women which I believe is the lowest caste. This video will be very informative and helpful in my project. I can learn about their personal experiences and what they have gone through for being part of a lower caste.

"What Is India's Caste System?" *BBC News*, BBC, 19 June 2019, www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-35650616.

This article has the history of how the caste system came about and it talks about how it works. This will also be helpful in mostly understanding how the caste system is. This article also uses simpler language which will make it easier to understand.



Thank You For Watching!