

Shine Brighter Première

Shortfile 6 Reserved for Dalits

Document 1, Vidéo p.62 – Extrait de *Annenberg Media*, 2021

Tannishta Sinha: Hi, I'm Tannishta and as an international student I find myself educating my peers about India. One of our biggest problems right now is the prevalence of the caste system, an intricate hierarchy that still governs who people in India marry, what they eat, and who cleans their toilets. The caste system is one of the oldest forms of social stratification in the country. Followers of Hinduism are divided into groups based on their "kharma" and "dharma", which is their work and duty. At the top of the caste system are the Brahmins, historically they were the most-educated caste and were teachers and intellectuals. At the bottom, is the Dalit community, almost 200 million people who were once considered untouchables in India. They're one of the most oppressed groups in the country right now with regards to job opportunities, with education, and fall outside the rubric of the Hindu caste hierarchy. In between the Brahmins and the Dalits are the Kshatriyas, the Vashyas and the Shudras. I'm making it easy for you because actually, there are thousands of more subcastes. The Dalits are degraded into doing menial jobs like manual scavenging, disposing dead animals and cleaning sewers. They do dangerous jobs like working in tanneries, often without protective gear which result in their death. Even though some argue that the caste system is no longer prevalent in India, recent news shows otherwise. There is still systemic oppression against the Dalit community who continue to be

denied their constitutional rights and be employed in manual scavenging, one of the most dangerous jobs in the world.

India's caste system, *Annenberg Media*, 2021.

Document 3, Vidéo p. 63 – Extrait de *HuffPost*, 2018.

Sujatha Gidla: The first time I knew I was inferior, I probably was 18 months old, I knew that we were untouchables. Untouchability means actually untouchability; you cannot touch them. Caste is a forced occupation based on your birth. When I first came to America, people treated me equally. In fact, even in the beginning, I used to feel “What if they touch me, you know, they’re going to be polluted.” One time, my, a boyfriend of mine was eating from something that I’d already touched and, he was going there and I said, “No no no, stop stop stop, I touched it. I touched it!” And his heart broke, like, “You’re not in India anymore.” Hinduism more or less is an ideological religious prop for this social system that is caste.

Sujatha Gidla (reading from her book): My stories, my family’s stories were not stories in India. They were just life. Your life is your caste, your caste is your life. At 26, I came to America where people know only skin colour. Only in talking to some friends I met here did I realize that my stories, my family stories are not stories of shame.

Why Am I An Untouchable?”, *HuffPost*, 2018.

Document 1, Audio p. 64 – Extrait de *Sansad TV*, 2022.

Voiceover: So what is reservation? Well, the age-old caste system of India is responsible for the origination of the reservation system in the country. In simple terms, it is about facilitating access to seats in government jobs, education institutions and even legislatures to certain sections of the population.

Reservation in India, *Sansad TV*, 2022.

Document 2, Vidéo p. 64 – Extrait de Firstpost, 2023.

Palki Sharma: Reservation has not levelled the gap. It has made gains, yes, but it hasn't solved the problem. At the same time, a new problem has emerged. Everyone wants a quota nowadays. At first, dominant communities had rejected the idea of reservation, but clearly, it's not going anywhere, so their new strategy is this: ask for their own quota and there are examples across India. The Patel community in Gujarat wants quotas, the Marathas in Maharashtra, the Lingayats in Karnataka, the Jats in Haryana. These are politically powerful communities in their respective states, but now they want quota. So where does this end? The Supreme Court had some interesting takes on reservation. This was last year when they said the 50 percent cap on quota is flexible. Here's what one judge said, "At the end of 75 years of our independence, we need to revisit the system of reservation in the larger interest of the society as a whole." Here's another judge, "Reservation is not an end but a means, a means to secure social and economic justice. Reservation should not be allowed to become a vested interest." Unfortunately, that's what it has become, a vested interest, a political tool. That doesn't mean reservation has not helped in India. It has made very important contributions to social justice but it hasn't solved the root problem.

How Caste and Reservation Shaped Indian Politics, *Firstpost*, 2023.

Document 2 p. 66, Vidéo de *Cooper's Hawk Winery & Restaurants*, 2024.

Padma Lakshmi: Shanti Bhavan is a great school. They take one child per family in some of the poorest neighbourhoods in South India and they give that child a complete education from Pre-K, early child education all the way onto helping them apply for universities. They give them room and board and education and arts and music and sports and also psychological counselling cause a lot of these kids are coming from really dire situations. Now the school has been open long enough that we can see some of these young kids grown into young adults and blossoming beyond your wildest dream, getting into some of the best colleges. After graduation you know, getting jobs whether it's on Wall Street or in the arts or you know, whatever their discipline is. And so we know the model works and the only thing that a student at Shanti Bhavan has to agree to do, to pay back everything, is sign a document that says, in the course of they life, they agree to help 100 people to pay the good that they got from Shanti Bhavan forward.

Cooper's Hawk & Padma Lakshmi – Supporting Shanti Bhavan Children's Project,
Cooper's Hawk Winery & Restaurants, 2024.

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Katja Keppner: Kaushal Panwar learned to fight early in her life. Her parents could neither read nor write but the 40-year-old teaches Sanskrit today, traditionally a preserve of ancient Brahmins, the scholars and members of the upper caste. Already as a child Kaushal felt she was different. Her school uniform was blue and not pink like that of her classmates. As a Dalit, she was not allowed to touch the water trough which others would drink from. Her father taught her to stand up when someone from a higher caste entered the room.

Kaushal Panwar: One time, they saw us taking a bath in the pond and as we were about to leave, they called their brothers and other relatives, who came and started beating us and asked us how dare we take a bath in the pond? They declared the water in the pond impure. Untouchable.

Katja Keppner: Today Kaushal Panwar looks proudly at the accolades she's won for her fight for Dalit rights. She's already been invited to the United States four times to talk about the plight of Dalits in India, a country that wants to be seen as cosmopolitan and progressive.

Kaushal Panwar: Even today Dalits are not allowed to enter temples. Antiquated modes of thinking still prevail even in this age of modern technology. When such things happen today I feel really angry, not just towards the government but also towards society.

Katja Keppner: Vivek Kumar has been researching the topic for years. He says about 120 acts of violence take place every day against Dalits. This despite laws against discrimination and quotas for Dalits and universities and government jobs.

Vivek Kumar: How a president from the Dalit community will change this? I don't think that this is going to change because he doesn't have any power intervening in the upliftment of the Dalits. He will have to suggest and if the cabinet acts then and then only things can happen.

Katja Keppner: Back at the University Kaushal Panwar tells her students what to expect from the course next year. She hopes the new Dalit president will take action and change India's deep-seated attitudes.

Dalits in India still struggle for rights, *DW News*, 2017.