

Shine Brighter Première

Shortfile 6 Reserved for Dalits

Document 2, Extrait p.63 – Roman *Ants among Elephants*, Sujatha GIDLA, 2017.

I was born an untouchable.

When people in this country¹ ask me what it means to be an untouchable, I explain that caste is like racism against blacks here. But then they ask, “How does anyone know what your caste is?” They know caste isn’t visible, like skin color.

I explain it like this. In Indian villages and towns, everyone knows everyone else. Each caste has its own special role and its own place to live. The brahmins (who perform priestly functions), the potters, the blacksmiths², the carpenters, the washer people, and so on – they each have their own separate place to live within the village. The untouchables, whose special role – whose hereditary duty – is to labor in the fields of others or to do other work that Hindu society considers filthy³, are not allowed to live in the village at all. They must live outside the boundaries of the village proper. They are not allowed to enter temples. Not allowed to eat sitting next to a caste Hindu or to use the same utensils. There are thousands of other such

¹ the United States

² *forgerons*

³ very dirty

restrictions and indignities that vary from place to place. Every day in an Indian newspaper you can read of an untouchable beaten or killed for wearing sandals, for riding a bicycle.

In your own town or village, everyone already knows your caste; there is no escaping it. But how do people know your caste when you go elsewhere, to a place where no one knows you? There they will ask you, "What caste are you?" You cannot avoid this question. And you cannot refuse to answer. By tradition, everyone has the right to know.

Sujatha GIDLA, *Ants among Elephants*, 2017

Document 3, Extrait p.65 – Article de Kamala THIARGARAJAN, *npr.org*,
10 March 2024.

**Q&A: Yashica Dutt on her life as part of an oppressed caste in ‘Coming Out
As Dalit’**

**You point out in your memoir that the attitude toward affirmative action —
reserving a place in schools and colleges for people from oppressed castes —
is often viewed by many as doing them a favor when clearly it is to correct a
historical wrong. Can you elaborate?**

When he was a kid, my great-grandfather wasn’t allowed to touch books. He couldn’t access classrooms and he couldn’t use a slate [blackboard] because his touch would be considered “polluting” it. He had to sit outside and scrawl the alphabet in the mud with a stick.

After being barred¹ from education for generations, now when we try to make up for² it, we enter schools and colleges, only to face enormous discrimination. There’s a culture of resentment — as if we’re being given an unfair handout³.

After hiding your caste identity for years, what made you expose it all with this book?

¹ banned

² *se rattraper*

³ help

For me, the biggest understanding of my caste identity happened after I moved to the United States. It's not specifically to do with the U.S., just that I put an objective distance between myself and India. That hypervigilance eased a bit.

For the first time, I felt that I had a reprieve⁴ from thinking about my caste.

One of the reasons that many Dalit people don't talk about caste in India is because they're certain that in these societies where upper castes are dominant, they would be mocked. But here, it was different.

Kamala THIARGARAJAN, *npr.org*, 10 March 2024

⁴ break

Document 3, Extrait p.67 – Article de *shantibhavanchildren.org*

Dear Friend,

From a young age, society drew lines around me—barriers based on class and gender that I was not allowed to cross. Like many in my community, my family struggled to meet their basic needs to survive. My parents worked in a brick factory as laborers, earning very little to support a family. I was shabbily¹ clothed, and envied other girls dressed beautifully in silk frocks. [...]

One day, while playing, I accidentally kicked a ball onto the other side of a street that was forbidden to us. As my father attempted to retrieve² it, he was assaulted for daring³ to cross the divide. It was a harsh lesson about the limitations of my world.

Fortunately, Shanti Bhavan took me in and brought me up with love and care.

With its sturdy⁴ brick dorms and vibrant colors, the school welcomed me with open arms. Here, I had a bed, warm meals, and toys. I found lifelong friends, mentors who recognized my potential, and teachers who encouraged me through every challenge. Every milestone, from graduating high school to acing the SATs⁵, was a step over the constraints placed on me.

¹ *misérablement*

² get back

³ *oser*

⁴ strong

⁵ doing well at the exam to get into an American university

After fifteen years of your support, I have accepted a full scholarship⁶ to Duke University! [...]

Because of you, I am ready to cross the barriers that held my family back for generations. When I set foot on Duke University's campus for the first time, it won't be just my victory – it will be yours, too!

Most Gratefully,

Megala

Shanti Bhavan, Class of 2023

Duke University, Class of 2028

shantibhavanchildren.org

⁶ *une bourse d'études*

Document, Extrait p.70 – Roman *Coming out as a Dalit: a memoir of surviving India's caste system*, Yashica DUTT, 2019.

When Lies Protected Me

I was born in a Dalit family in Ajmer, Rajasthan. And I grew up learning to hide it. My convent-school education¹, a non-Dalit sounding last name, and a skin color that was “dusky² but still not dirty” eased my passing as a non-Dalit. “Beta, what caste are you from?”

“Aunty, Brahmin.” A lie I spoke so often and with such conviction, that I not only fooled my friends’ mothers but even myself. But I couldn’t fool the shame that spread across my face each time someone mentioned “caste”, “reservation”, “bhangi” – the common slur³, which loosely translates to a human scavenger⁴ and the name of my exact caste.

“This time, they’ll find out,” I had thought when the undergraduate college I attended tucked my name under the SC/ST⁵ quota or when I submitted my birth certificate for my first job at an ad agency. Some did find out, some didn’t. Most didn’t care. The ones who did (a friend, who along with her parents witnessed my first public admission of being “low-caste” at 15) stopped being in touch. But I always cared. I cared enough to lie about my caste and to create elaborate backstories to protect

¹ a religious education

² dark-skinned

³ insult

⁴ *fouilleur de poubelles*

⁵ lower castes

that lie. I conveniently forgot the last name my grandfather dropped to allow him to pass, almost 60 years ago – Nidaniya.

Yashica DUTT, *Coming out as a Dalit: a memoir of surviving India's caste system*,
2019.

Évaluation de la compréhension de l'écrit – Guide pédagogique

India's "untouchable" women face discrimination even in schemes meant to help them

Seema and her husband did quite well when they first opened a samosa stall in the local market of a town in Bihar state, northeastern India.

But then other vendors found out who Seema was.

They yelled at her customers for buying her samosas. They threatened her husband for "polluting" the market by selling food prepared by her. She put up with it for months before giving up.

What had Seema done wrong? She had been born a Dalit, a member of the "untouchables", the lowest group in India's ancient and now officially obsolete caste system. [...]

I met Seema in the summer of 2019, through a non-government organisation that provides vocational training¹ to women.

It was about two years since she'd given up her stall. Now she was completing a cooking course. From the course she would gain a certificate she hoped would improve her chances of getting a microloan from a government bank, backed by the Reserve Bank of India and offered to people who lack the collateral that institutional lenders² usually require.

¹ *formation professionnelle*

² institutions which lend money

A microloan might be enough to buy a sewing machine to start a clothes-mending business, or to buy cows to sell milk and cheese. Seema's plan was to relocate to a bigger city and start a restaurant.

She had already applied for a microloan 18 months before, with no success.

When she enquired about her application's status, she said, staff at the bank brushed her off with comments such as "we have to be extra careful with some applicants", "I can tell just by looking at your name here on the first page that doing business will be tricky for you" and "I don't think it's in your blood".

My research suggests this is a common experience for Dalit women. [...]

Kanika Meshram, *Lecturer in Marketing*, The University of Melbourne, *The Conversation*, 2022