

#DalitHistoryMonth

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April was celebrated as #DalitHistoryMonth. An amazing team of Dalit women that included Thenmozhi Soundararajan, Christina Thomas Dhanaraj, Manisha Mashaal, Sanghapali Aruna Lohitakshi, and Vidya Karunakarn, among others, toured the United States and conducted teach-ins and workshops and led discussions in partnership with various organizations and educational institutions. But such activities beg a more basic question: How should one define the “Dalit” in #DalitHistoryMonth? This essay is dedicated to exploring that question.

In his book *Untouchables: My Family’s Triumphant Escape from India’s Caste System*, Narendra Jadhav notes that every sixth human being in the world is an Indian and every sixth Indian is a “Dalit”—the self-ascribed name communities that were historically discriminated and cruelly treated as “untouchables” have given to themselves. In terms of statistics alone, such people are more numerous than half the population of the United States.¹

It is not uncommon for Dalits to continue to face gruesome incidents of violence in India. Just in the latter half of May 2015, Sagar Shejwal, a Dalit youth, was beaten to death by a mob of “upper-caste” men² for having a ringtone that praised B. R. Ambedkar, an Indian statesman and early advocate of Dalit’s rights. In other news that came in just as I was finishing up this essay, three Dalit men were mowed down with a tractor³ and five Dalit women were beaten and paraded naked because of one of their sons eloped with a girl from an “upper” caste.⁴ This is 21st century India.

To understand the manifestations and practices of continuing caste-based discrimination and cruelty in India (and the diaspora⁵), one must first grapple with the logic of caste. Caste does have a certain logic, however malevolent, and is embedded within textual and cultural traditions. Literary sources that sanction caste-based stratification may be traced back at least a thousand years before Jesus to a text called the Rig Veda. There, in the infamous *Purusasukta* hymn, one finds, as James Massey, a prominent Dalit theologian, argues, an etiological account that sanctions the caste system. It reads:

When they divided the Man, into how many parts did they apportion him? What do they call his mouth, his two arms and thighs and feet? His mouth became the Brahmin; his arms were made

¹ Narendra Jadhav, *Untouchables: My Family’s Triumphant Journey Out of the Caste System in Modern India* (New York: Scribner, 2005), 1.

² <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/dalit-youth-killed-for-ambedkar-song-ringtone/article7232259.ece?homepage=true>; accessed May 20, 2015.

³ <http://scroll.in/article/728776/three-dalits-were-mowed-down-with-a-tractor-why-are-officials-describing-this-as-a-group-clash>; accessed May 21, 2015.

⁴ <http://www.deccanchronicle.com/150518/nation-current-affairs/article/dalit-women-paraded-naked-punishment> accessed May 21, 2015.

⁵ See Singh Swapnil, “Caste and Diaspora,” *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity* 5, no. 1 (January 2015): 80–82.

into the Warrior (Kshatriya), his thighs the People (Vaishya), and from his feet the Servants (Shudra) were born.⁶

In this reading, a divine origin is hinted at for the hierarchical division of Indian society. The four levels correspond to the four major parts of the primordial man and there are many communities that fall into each of these four levels. Dalits don't fall into any of these levels and do not have a place in the body politic. Consequently, along with Tribals⁷, Dalits are deemed, in this version, "outcastes." Other textual bases for caste-based discrimination include the *Chandogya Upanishad*. There, in the section dealing with paths after death, 10:7 says:

Accordingly, those who are of pleasant conduct here the prospect is, that they will enter a pleasant womb, either the womb of a Brahmin, or the womb of a Kshatriya or the womb of a Vaishya. But those who are of stinking conduct here the prospect is, indeed, that they will enter a stinking womb either the womb of a dog, or the womb of a swine or the womb of an outcast (*Chandala*).⁸

"Chandala" is a derogatory name and is one among other discriminatory and injurious names that are used in ancient Hindu texts for those that are deemed "other;" in essence "outcaste." Other textual sources for discerning caste-based discrimination include the Hindu law codes, also called *dharmashastras*. Their infamous injunctions include the following prescribed punishments for Dalits who dared to move "out of place":

If he listens intentionally to the Vedas, his ears shall be filled with lead. If he recites them, his tongue shall be cut out. If he remembers them, his body shall be split in twain.⁹

While it is contested whether the above-mentioned texts are representative of the phenomenon that we now call "caste" or not, in terms of their interpretations and reception, they have provided religious and cultural sanction for the hierarchical division of society that B. R. Ambedkar, M. K. Gandhi's ideological opponent, has rightly called *graded inequality*.¹⁰

While the logic of caste is ancient, as we have suggested above, one must be careful not to locate the practice of caste only to ancient eras. Caste is current and is both durable and portable. It is relevant even in India's cosmopolitan cities and towns. This is a helpful reminder

⁶ Rig Veda 10.90.10-12. See James Massey, *Roots: A Concise History of Dalits*, 5th ed, CDS Pamphlet, no. 3 (New Delhi: Centre for Dalit Studies, 2004), 20. As Wendy Doniger (29) notes, "In this famous hymn, the gods create the world by dismembering the cosmic giant, Purusa, the primeval male who is the victim in a Vedic sacrifice." See her work *The Rig Veda: An Anthology: One Hundred and Eight Hymns*, Penguin Classics (New York: Penguin Books, 1981).

⁷ "Tribals" are communities that are increasingly calling themselves "Adivasis" ("first" or "original" inhabitants) and make up a little less than 10% of India's population. Like the term "Dalit," "Adivasi" is also a political self-ascribed term by indigenous communities that do not have a place in the four-fold division of society that continues to determine Indian societal relations. Of course, Dalit and Tribal/Adivasi communities don't always subscribe to this dominant etiological account of society's origin. They have their own myths of origin that affirm a sense of pride and dignity, and not one of humiliation as in the dominant model.

⁸ Cited in James Massey, ed., *Indigenous People: Dalits: Dalit Issues in Today's Theological Debate*, ISPCK Contextual Theological Education Series 5 (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994), 28.

⁹ *Gautama Dharma Sutra* 12: 4-7. See note 98 in B. R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, The Annotated Critical Edition (New York: Verso Books, 2014), 270. This legal injunction is often mistakenly attributed to Manu, the author of the *Manusmriti*. The editor notes that the *Gautama Dharma Sutra* (600 BCE to 300 BCE) predates the *Manusmriti*. The editor is dependent on Georg Buhler's 1898 translation.

¹⁰ Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar and Gandhi, *Annihilation of Caste: With a Reply to Mahatma Gandhi*, 2d ed, Tracts for the Times 2 ([Bombay: B. R. Kadrekar], 1937), 66.

to those Indians (both in India and the diaspora), who, after a lot of argument and persuasion, half-willingly admit that caste (a waning phenomenon, according to them) is perhaps present, but, as they are fond of saying, “only in India’s villages”. Among other things, such dominant caste perspectives do the cruel work of forgetting wrongs done against Dalits. One need only recall a sample of the contemporary horrors mentioned at the beginning of this essay to recognize the moral casuistry involved in relegating caste mentality to “the villages”.

While I could go on enlisting horror stories of crimes against Dalits, I want to turn the reader’s attention to the ordinary ways in which people contribute to caste-based violence. Most spaces in India reek with caste. Caste is ingrained into ordinary practices, both private and public. I cite Narendra Jadhav again:

The 3,500-year-old caste system in India is still alive and violently kicking. In cities, they will tell you, “The caste system is a thing of the past, it now exists only in villages.” Go to the villages and they will tell you, “Oh no. Not here, maybe in some other village.” Yet open the matrimonial section of any newspaper and you will find an unabashed and bewildering display of the persistent belief in caste and subcaste.¹¹

As Susan Bayly notes, “despite the great diversity of India's social and political experience since Independence, awareness of both ‘substantialised’ and ‘traditional’ jati and varna norms [in essence, the caste system] continues to be transmitted from one generation to another, subtly changing to accommodate new circumstances, and yet persistently recapitulating messages about the importance of preserving and perpetuating one's ‘community’.”¹²

Allow me to offer a few examples from advertisements for grooms and brides from India’s leading national daily, *The Hindu* [the equivalent of *The New York Times*]. Such mental entrapments with the logic of caste affect Indians across different religious affiliations. Compared to religion, another social phenomenon that binds, caste is often the stronger glue. Consider this advertisement for a bride that puts caste identity (“Vellalar Pillai” – a dominant caste in Tamil Nadu) before religious (Christian, in this case) identity despite the “Caste No Bar” disclaimer.

Vellalar Pillai, Christian (Caste No Bar), 35/171, Communication VP, International Bank, Singapore. (Native Tanjore), Tamilnadu. Salary above 5 lakhs pm, Clean Habits boy. Seeks Educated girl. (Must Health Conscious) Ct: 9500646022. positive.mind.succeeds@gmail.com (Published on May 17, 2015).¹³

As one may notice, sometimes people do say “Caste No Bar.” But that continues to be the exception. Some of the following examples are also revealing as they show the durability and portability of caste even in the diaspora:

VADAMAL REVATHI 39/180, BBA,PGDCA, Employed Liberia West Africa,1.5L pm seeks suitable Bride. 09840868223 (Published on May 17, 2015).¹⁴
BRAMIN ASTASAGASRAM Sadayam 31/168 BE MS MBA (US) Project Manager in MNC Massachusetts (US) Left hand after wrist limb palm and fingers accident. No problem car self

¹¹ Jadhav, *Untouchables*, 3.

¹² Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 335. <http://universitypublishingonline.org/ref/id/histories/CBO9781139053389>; accessed on May 6, 2015.

¹³ <http://www.thehindu.com/classifieds/matrimonial/>; accessed May 20, 2015.

¹⁴ <http://www.thehindu.com/classifieds/matrimonial/?list1=brides&pageNo=6>; accessed May 20, 2015.

driving, seeks broad minded UG/PG employed (USA) Brahmin bride. Email: srsmani43@gmail.com 044-22237736, 09176641005. (*Published on May 17, 2015*).¹⁵
WELL ACCOMPLISHED Groom with Christ centred upbringing below 28 in India or abroad for brilliant MBBS girl 165/23 fair beautiful from highly respected Tamil Vellala CSI Christian family. Contact with recent photo(returnable) and full details at first instance. Box No-HB-3076, THE HINDU Chennai-600002 (*Published on May 17, 2015*).¹⁶
MUDALIAR 23/165cm B.Tech from Australia seeks boy from UK/ USA/ Aust. Ct 9962921669, punigiri@yahoo.co.in (*Published on May 17, 2015*).¹⁷

Marriages often occur within the same caste group and marriage prospects bring out caste prejudices. It is almost as if one has to bare one's social location in terms of caste before both partners can take the relationship to the "next" level. Consider this exchange between Omprakash Valmiki (a Dalit who is mistaken for being "upper caste") and Savita (a Brahmin) that Valmiki narrates in the novel *Joothan*:

After Savita left, I told Patil that I was going to let Savita know everything. Patil tried to stop me; he said, 'No, don't do that. It will cause a storm.'
But I had come to a decision. Things should be cleared up. I would face whatever happened. Savita met me near the Upkar restaurant at the Ambernath train station. She wore a white skirt and blouse outfit which greatly suited her milky-fair complexion. Her eyes were sparkling and her walk had a spring in it. She talked non-stop as usual. I was replying briefly with 'ohs' and 'yeses.' I did not know how to tell her, where to begin.
Suddenly Savita made out as though she had remembered something. 'Oh, I had almost forgotten, weren't you going to tell me something?' Her eyes grew large as she gazed at me steadily. For a moment I felt I wouldn't be able to do it.
Gathering my courage, I said, 'That day when Professor Kamble came to your place...'
Before I could finish Savita interrupted with, 'That Mahar¹⁸...SC¹⁹?'
The way she said it made me flush with anger, 'Yes, the same...' I replied bitterly.
Surprised, Savita asked, 'Why are you thinking of this today?'
My voice hardened, 'You had given him tea in a different cup?'
'Yes, the SCs and the Muslims who come to our house, we keep their dishes separate,' Savita replied evenly.
'Do you think this discrimination is right?' I asked. She felt the sharp edge in my voice now.
'Oh...why, are you mad? How can we feed them in the same dishes?'
'Why not? In the hotel...in the mess, everyone eats together. Then what is wrong in eating together in your house as well?' I tried to reason with her.
Savita defended the discrimination as right and justified by tradition. Her arguments were infuriating me. However, I remained calm. According to her, SCs were uncultured. Dirty.
I asked her, 'How many SCs do you know? What is your personal experience in this regard?'
She fell silent. Her bubblyness subsided. We kept sitting on the ledge for a while. Then I asked her, 'What do you think of me?'
'Aai and Baba²⁰ praise you. They say you are very different from their preconceptions about U.P. people,' Savita cooed.
'I had asked for your opinion.'
'I like you.' She leaned on my arm.
I pushed her away and asked, 'Ok...would you like me even if I were as SC?'

¹⁵ <http://www.thehindu.com/classifieds/matrimonial/?list1=brides&pageNo=6>; accessed May 20, 2015.

¹⁶ <http://www.thehindu.com/classifieds/matrimonial/?list1=bridegrooms&pageNo=2>; accessed May 20, 2015.

¹⁷ <http://www.thehindu.com/classifieds/matrimonial/?list1=bridegrooms&pageNo=4>; accessed May 20, 2015.

¹⁸ "Mahar" is the name of a Dalit community in north India.

¹⁹ "Scheduled Castes" (SCs) is the name given to Dalit communities by the Indian government for purposes of classification and affirmative action.

²⁰ "Aai" and "Baba" stand for "mother" and "father" respectively.

‘How can you be an SC?’ she laughed.
‘Why not, what if I am?’ I had insisted.
‘You are a Brahmin,’ she said with conviction.
‘Who told you that?’
‘Baba.’
‘He is wrong. I am an SC.’ I put all my energy into those words. I felt that a fire had lit inside me.
‘Why do you say such things.’ She said angrily.
‘I am telling you the truth. I won’t lie to you. I never claimed that I am a Brahmin.’
She stared at me, totally shocked. She still thought I was joking with her.
I said plainly as I could that I was born in a Chuhra²¹ family of U.P.
Savita appeared grave. Her eyes were filled with tears and she said tearfully, ‘You are lying, right?’
‘No Savi...it is the truth...you ought to know this.’ I had convinced her.
She started to cry, as though my being an SC was a crime. She sobbed for a long time. Suddenly the distance between us had increased. The hatred of thousands of years had entered our hearts. What a lie culture and civilisation are.²²

The encounter between Omprakash Valmiki and Savita reveal several key elements about the logic and practice of caste. They include the Indian invasive curiosity about people’s social locations often gathered through last (caste infused) names (“That Mahar...SC?”); caste-specific hospitality that is really hostility (“How can we feed them in the same dishes?”); prejudices about the “other” and the resulting invocation of stereotypes (“According to her, SCs were uncultured. Dirty.”); and the despair that ensues when the veil of innocence is lifted and the reality of cruelty appears (“She stared to cry, as though my being SC was a crime.”). Caste-based discrimination, unfortunately, is not a thing of the past and caste is a cruel reality that pervades almost all aspects of collective social life in India. I elaborated on just one aspect of Indian life—marriages—to offer the reader an insight into the importance of Dalit History Month.

Caste conflict “is no mere orientalist fantasy.”²³ This is important to note especially in light of dominant caste articulations that falsely argue that cases of caste-based discrimination and conflict are being “produced” by Dalits for consumption by curious and condescending Western readers.

Allow me offer a last example because of the impact it has had on my own experience in the United States at Princeton. On September 29, 2006, four members of a Dalit family were murdered in broad daylight in Khairlanji²⁴ in the north Indian state of Maharashtra. Surekha Bhotmange and her daughter Priyanka Bhotmange were stripped, paraded, raped and murdered. Surekha's sons were lynched by a violent mob. The murdered bodies were dumped into a canal. Local dominant castes tried to cover up the wrong and the news media did not pick up the story. It was the political agitation of Dalit communities and activists that brought the issue to national and international attention.

In March 2011, I attended an event that was organized by the Religious Life Office’s Coordinator for Hindu Life, which took place at the Friend Center at Princeton University. The event was disturbing for many reasons. It hosted Rajiv Malhotra, co-author of the book *Breaking India* that blames Dalits for “breaking India” along caste lines, among other things. During the Q&A session, a Dalit activist mentioned Khairlanji as one example of the persistence of wrongs against Dalits in India and rightly called into question the irresponsible and false claim that

²¹ “Chuhra” is the name of a Dalit community in north India.

²² Omprakash Valmiki, *Joothan: A Dalit’s Life* (Kolkata: Samya, 2007), 97–98.

²³ Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*, 345.

²⁴ See Anand Teltumbde, *Khairlanji* (New Delhi: Navayana Publishers, 2008).

Dalits are responsible for breaking India. A member of the audience heckled the Dalit activist by loudly asking, “Where is the evidence?”²⁵ Many in the audience joined the heckler and the microphone that was in the hands of the person speaking about Khairlanji was wrested as he was still speaking. The heckled member shouted (rightly so!) after the microphone was wrested away from him, rushing out of the auditorium, using his body to gesture his distaste and disagreement with the proceedings of the meeting.

I take the use of one’s body and voice to protest and educate as emblematic of what we are trying to do with #DalitHistoryMonth. Dalit History Month educates, inspires, protests, and importantly also celebrates the life and resilience of Dalit communities. I briefly alluded to the debate between B. R. Ambedkar and M. K. Gandhi and it is perhaps a fitting conclusion to end by giving flesh to that debate as a way of underscoring the significance of Dalit History Month.

Most readers (especially Western ones) would be familiar with the name Gandhi. His name has frequently been invoked in homes, institutions, and politics in reference to Indian affairs. As India was on the verge of gaining its political independence from the British Empire in 1947, Gandhi was in a debate with another equally prominent national leader, B. R. Ambedkar. Ambedkar, who represented the Dalit perspective, argued that social reform, in essence, the dismantling of the discriminatory practice of caste, should precede political reform. Gandhi, on the other hand, argued that social reform would follow political reform. Sociologist Gopal Guru succinctly summarizes the debate: “The Dalit response to Indian nationalism also differs from the mainstream notion of nationalism in another important respect. While the mainstream nationalist imagination draws its emotional power from the register of collective pride and humiliation, the Dalit response puts *Swabhiman* (self-respect) before *Abhiman* (pride) of nation.”²⁶ It is for this reason that some of the women mentioned in the first paragraph were part of *Dalit Mahila Swabhiman Yatra* (Dalit Women’s Self-Respect Walk) that continues to travel across India.²⁷

Guru rightly argues that “During the anticolonial struggle, a segment of the upper-caste population was violently opposed to social reforms, thus raising doubts in the minds of the Dalit (led by Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar) about the nationalists’ sincerity when it came to resolving the caste question.”²⁸ What Ambedkar feared continues to be largely true in India even after 60 years of independence. Socially dominant (“upper-caste”) constituencies continuously try to “manipulate liberal democracy in order to consolidate and expand their own power through the reproduction of the old hierarchical order that placed Dalits at the bottom.”²⁹

Dalits continue to argue that liberal democracy is only an “initial condition” and *not* a “sufficient condition” for achieving dignity and freedom for all, especially for the most vulnerable and historically disadvantaged.³⁰ As evidence in support of his argument, Guru notes how the judiciary—“who are responsible for impartial delivery of legal justice,” unfortunately,

²⁵ For context and further analysis of how Dalit issues affect educational politics in the United States, see Richard Fox Young and Sunder John Boopalan, “Studied Silences? Diasporic Nationalism, ‘Kshatriya Intellectuals’ and the Hindu American Critique of Dalit Christianity’s Indianness,” in *Constructing Indian Christianities: Culture, Conversion and Caste*, ed. Chad M. Bauman and Richard Fox Young (New York: Routledge, 2014), 215–38.

²⁶ Gopal Guru, “Liberal Democracy in India and the Dalit Critique,” *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 78, no. 1 (2011): 100.

²⁷ For a helpful write-up about one such walk that happened recently, see <http://www.dalitweb.org/?p=2768>; accessed May 21, 2015. For such and more informed Dalit perspectives from India, see <http://roundtableindia.co.in>.

²⁸ Guru, “Liberal Democracy in India and the Dalit Critique,” 100–101.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

remain closer to “their caste than to secular laws.”³¹ Guru refers to the case of a lower court judge from the state of Rajasthan who, while considering the accusation of rape lodged by a “lower-caste” woman, declared that “touching a lower caste is not in the culture of Indian society.”³²

Ambedkar’s “radical critique,” according to Guru, is one that points out how “liberal institutions cannot exorcise the ghost of caste.”³³ Because civil society is often not hospitable to democratic concerns,³⁴ Dalit History Month privileges the language of “rights.” Rights-talk arises out of this inhospitableness of civil society to democratic concerns that privilege dignity. Dalits have begun to assert their rights and their dignity. However, “claims for dignity,” as Guru helps us to understand, often do involve “a heavy price.”³⁵ Khairlanji, the woman who was cruelly treated by a caste-laden judiciary system, and even people simply seeking a spouse pay a price of humiliation common to Dalits who assert claims to dignity. And yet we continue.

“You can take our limbs, our lands, and our lives. But never our dignity.”³⁶

“Some say they come from God’s head, and other say they come from God’s arms, thighs and feet. But we Dalits, we come from where all human beings come from.”³⁷

See www.dalithistory.com for an excellent timeline that showcases important events and figures that are part of Dalit History.

Interrogating Caste Privilege—Ten Talking Points

1. Research Indian Last Names

Last names are often indicators of caste. “Patel,” “Reddy,” “Naidu,” “Tiwari,” “Deshpande,” “Grewal,” “Chivukula,” and “Arora” are only a few examples.

2. Question Food Habits

As a general rule of thumb, the greater the distance from meat the “higher” one tends to be in the hierarchy of caste. If an Indian says “We are vegetarian,” you have good reason to suspect a problematic entanglement with caste. Also remember that there are many Hindus who eat meat, including beef, as part of their culture.

3. Watch Reactions to Questions About Caste

If the first response to a question about caste is “Caste is a thing of the past,” it is often an indicator of caste dominance. Not talking about caste helps one to gain social mobility and respectability with other dominant caste Indians.

4. Interrogate Stories of Struggle

³¹ Ibid., 112.

³² Ibid., 112–113.

³³ Ibid., 117.

³⁴ Gopal Guru, “Democracy in Search of Dignity,” in *Human Rights and Peace: Ideas, Laws, Institutions and Movements*, ed. Ujjwal Kumar Singh, South Asian Peace Studies, v. 4 (New Delhi: SAGE, 2009), 74.

³⁵ Ibid., 75.

³⁶ One of the chants from the *Dalit Mahila Swabhiman Yatra*.

³⁷ A poem by the Dalit poet Gaddar. I quote this from memory; change in phraseology is unintentional.

The webpage of one US politician of Indian descent says that his family “rose from humble beginnings.” One does not need to despise such Brahmins, but to make the story of an “upper-caste” person a story of struggle is disrespectful towards Dalit and other communities who are humiliated on caste grounds everyday. To be “upper-caste” in India means “high beginnings.”

5. Are Indians “Shocked” at Racial Discrimination?

If Indians appear to be shocked at racial discrimination in the U.S.—as if they have encountered discrimination for the first time—it is very likely that they come from a dominant caste. Such Indians may never have had the “opportunity” to be shocked in India over caste discrimination!

6. Notice Anti-Black Talk and Logic

Indians generally gravitate towards “All Things White.” This often takes anti-Black positions and practices. Look out for these.

7. Analyze Friends Networks

Dominant caste Indians usually hang out with other dominant caste Indians. Birds of the same caste feather flock together. Indian hospitality is usually reserved for other Indians from similar caste backgrounds. Of course, if one is White, this rule does not apply.

8. Heroes: Gandhi or Ambedkar?

If an Indian is all about Gandhi, this is another indicator of dominant caste thinking, if not location. B. R. Ambedkar, Gandhi’s ideological opponent, was an equally influential figure and was the chairman of the committee that drafted the Indian Constitution. Ambedkar is also one of the most prominent Dalit icons. Ambedkar famously argued for *The Annihilation of Caste*, which is also the title of one his books.

9. Examine Indian Weddings: Reflections of Caste Reality

Most Indians marry within their caste groups. Ask Indians what caste their parents or spouses belong to and you will discern whether you are associating with dominant caste Indians or not.

10. Drop the word “Dalit”

Drop the word “Dalit” in a conversation and watch for Indian reactions. Do they evade or change the topic, or worse, call Dalits “rabble-rousers” and “anti-national”? If “yes,” that’s a good sign of caste privilege. If “no,” work your way from 1 to 9. Jai Bhim! If that last phrase does not ring a bell, ask a Dalit.