

Caste system

Hi, my name is Dayita Badgeaway. I am fourteen years old and I am in the contemporary Vaisyas caste in India. I was born into a trading family. And was raised a Hindu along with my six brothers and sisters. I live in a small run down house that my papa built. It is big enough for two people, but we keep nine people there. We also have very limited clothing. I own two full outfits. One is for everyday wear, and the other is for fancier occasions. Most of the time I just wear billowy cotton dress and scarf. My fancier dress has golden embroidery in it, and a beautiful red pattern. Both of my dresses were made by my mummy.



The food I eat isn't the best, but I guess it's pretty good. For breakfast lunch and dinner, I eat roti, (a flatbread) with rice and curry. My mummy makes big batches of it and serves it to my family.



Being in the Vaisyas caste isn't easy. I know I have many privileges compared to the Sudras and the Untouchables, and I've heard that Vaisyas are one of the most important castes in society, but I'm in a spot that's right in the middle. I am the lowest level of "twice born" which means I have had a second spiritual birth. Because of that, I participate in a sacred ceremony with the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas. The ceremony is called Yajnopavita or Upanayana.

Upanayana is a ceremony that accepts a boy in the Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaisyas caste into Hinduism. This ritual can happen for boys between five to twenty four years old. They do this ceremony by bathing the person. Once they do that, they take the boy to the guru. Guru is another word for spiritual teacher. The guru then dresses the boy in deerskin, and gives him a staff. To finish the ceremony, they place sacred thread called Upavita over the boys left shoulder and onto the right hip. It has three symbolic knots tied in it and it is changed regularly, as it is worn your whole life. The string symbolizes education and being "Twice born".



My education is not very good. I do go to school every opportunity I get, and when I do go, I bike. That takes two hours! I only go to school about once a week. Sometimes more, but most of the time I'm at home taking care of the house while my brothers are at school.

Being a girl at school is hard. When I walk to school, the boys in the upper my castes tease me. They say that I don't deserve to have an education. When I told my mom, she banned me from school because she didn't want me to be hurt or discouraged. Not only are the boys annoying, but the classroom itself is really dirty. The pencils are nothing but inch-long stubs, and the bathroom is disgusting. My teacher won't even go in it.



It's all unfair to me. Why can't girls go to school as much as boys can? Why are the schools for each caste different? I hope when I'm married I can have a Arya (Arya is what some Indian women call their husband) who supports my dreams of equality.

Thank you for letting me share what it's like to live in the Vaisyas caste in contemporary India, my biggest hope is to spread awareness about girls education. And gain equality.

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