

Living In Fear

In this interview, we will be discussing the current situation in Kolkata India. There have been several murders that have targeted the homeless.

Lakshmi is a 14-year-old girl who has agreed to be interviewed. Lakshmi is currently homeless and works as a street sweeper. She is considered to be a part of the Dalit caste system. Following my interview, I have provided helpful background information about the caste system, gender inequality, and info about the murders.

Ms.Evans: Thank you for meeting with me today.

Lakshmi: You're welcome.

Ms.Evans: If it's okay with you I would like to ask you a few questions?

Lakshmi: yes, go-ahead.

Ms.Evans: How are homeless people feeling right now?

Lakshmi: I am afraid, we are easy targets because no one cares about us. No one will check on us.

Ms.Evans: What are your thoughts about the murders mostly happening to homeless people?

Lakshmi: It's terrible. Innocent people sleeping are being attacked and the police have found no one.

Ms.Evans: Why do you think the police are having such a hard time finding the killer?

Lakshmi: I think there is no desire to help Dalits. The only thing we are good for in their eyes are the dirtiest jobs. One less untouchable in India means nothing.

Ms. Evans: What does the caste system mean to you?

Lakshmi: If you ask a wealthy person in India if it exists they will say no. If you ask a street sweeper they will say yes it is very much alive. It's unfair and it makes having a better life very hard.

Ms.Evans: Have you ever tried speaking to the police about your safety concerns?

Lakshmi: No it would be a waste. I am a street sweeper and a women I have no voice in India. I can't even vote.

Ms.Evans: Do you have any idea who the murderer is?

Lakshmi: I have heard that he may be a Tantrik... a death sorcerer.

Mr. Evans: What are you and the street people of the city doing to stay safe and survive

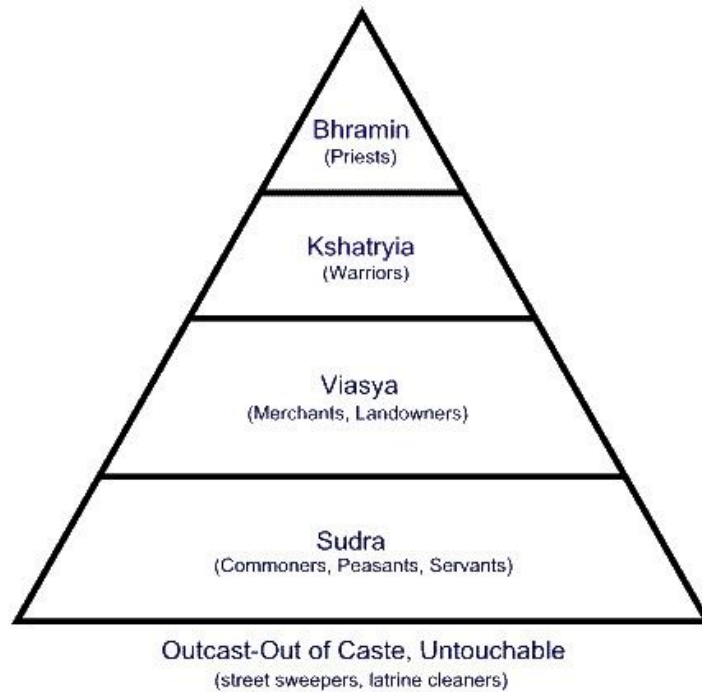
Lakshmi: For now we are staying in groups and we sleep in shifts. Some of us are always standing guard. We have no choice. We have no other home to go to.

Ms.Evans: Thank you for your time, Lakshmi.

Lakshmi: You're Welcome.

The Caste System

According to an ancient text known as the Rigveda, the division of Indian society was based on Brahma's divine manifestation of four groups. Priests and teachers were cast from his mouth, rulers, and warriors from his arms, merchants, and traders from his thighs, and workers and peasants from his feet. In ancient India, the occupational groups were called varnas. The hereditary groups within the varnas were called jatis. Varnas are nonracial groups but classes. People were expected to not marry or socialize outside of their class. Four categories were created to organize society by money and occupation.



In addition to the varnas, there is a fifth class in Hinduism. The outcasts who, literally, did all the dirty work. They were referred to as "untouchables" because they carried out the miserable tasks associated with disease and pollution, such as cleaning up after funerals, dealing with sewage, and working with animal skin.

Brahmins were considered the embodiment of purity, and untouchables the embodiment of pollution. Physical contact between the two groups was prohibited. Brahmins adhered so strongly to this rule that they felt obliged to bathe if even the shadow of an untouchable fell across them.

The Indian government has officially outlawed caste discrimination and made widespread reforms. Mohandas Gandhi fought for the equality of all citizens. Gandhi renamed the untouchables Harijans, which means "the people of God." Adopted in 1949, the Indian Constitution provided a legal framework for the emancipation of untouchables and for the equality of all citizens. In recent years, the Untouchables have become a politically active group and have adopted for themselves the name Dalits, which means "those who have been broken." My interview will be with a Dalit. I want to show how the caste system plays a part in these murders.

Gender Equality

Gender inequality in India is a major issue. This discriminatory attitude has been around for generations. In many parts of India, a female child's birth is not welcome. India has a highly skewed sex ratio because of this. For every 1000 boys, there are only 908. Many girls are forced to drop out of school and are seen as an unwanted burden. Some startling statistics are listed below.

42% of married women in India were married as children

1 in every 3 child brides in the world are from India

Even though women in India make up 48% of its total population

Only 1/4th make up the workforce

Women make almost 25% less than men in India

The Stone Man Murders

The stone man murders occurred in Kolkata India in 1989. The murders targeted 13 homeless people in the city. Similar murders occurred in Bombay from 1985-1989. Overall 26 murders were committed. These cases remain unsolved. The homeless victims were pavement dwellers, that slept on the street. None of the victims were identified no family came forward to claim the bodies. The murderer killed victims by dropping heavy stones or concrete slabs on victims' heads.