

## CERS Working Paper

### Race and Self-Definition in India

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Research for this paper began by asking the question, “Who is the Ideal Indian?” Searching for the answer to this question led to the discovery of the Ideal Indian School, established in 1985 in Qatar. Among the virtues instilled through this school, cleanliness & purity made the list. Other more conventional virtues included faith in God, punctuality, and discipline & confidence (Ideal Indian School, 2014). But a sense of wonderment and confusion has accompanied the author over how purity can be instilled. More importantly, what does purity mean? But the only way to come to such an answer, if there truly is any answer at all, is to return to the first question of what it means to be Indian.

The underlying question of this paper is, “who defines and who should define what it means to be or to be Indian?” Each section offers its own indications. The first section of this paper will be dedicated to the discussion of beauty in a modern Indian context, comparing that to ancient Indian notions of beauty, and ultimately questioning whether this obsession with beauty can truly be blamed on Westernization. The second and third sections will investigate how dominant groups in India, such as the government, are engaged in marginalization and racialization through the process of defining those belonging to the various Scheduled Tribes of Northeast India and the Dalits of the Mainland who constitute the Scheduled Caste category. The fourth section of this paper takes a more philosophical approach to the question of identity by looking at the benefits and the failures of India’s affirmative action program.

#### ***Gori hai sundar – White is Beautiful***

In order to examine beauty in an Indian context, we must seek a definition of modern beauty. Sumita Chakravarty (2011) notes, “beauty [in a media age] is something that is *done* to the body rather than [something that is] part *of* the body” (Chakravarty, 2011, p.2). If beauty is only possible through the accretion and use of outside products, then beauty is completely extrinsic. Accepting this, we can examine the two ways in which beauty functions in India. It is important to note that women are disproportionately affected by the beauty industry, so much of the discussion is focused around them.

Beauty, firstly, has something to do with being fair. The skin whitening market in India is one of the largest in the world, with a value around \$432 million in 2010 and continues to grow at 18 percent per year (Rajesh 2013). The most powerful company is Hindustan Unilever which makes the skin cream Fair and Lovely. Created in 1978, Fair and Lovely controls a majority of the skin whitening market in India (Karnani 2007) and has released other products of a similar in nature, including soap, lotion, and other gels. But there are a plethora of products available to Indian consumers. Some are as little as INR 78 or as expensive as INR 599 ([Eshna, 13 August 2013](#)).

Skin whitening has certain social implications. Marriage is a lucrative industry in India, totaling \$40 billion, second only to China ([Guha, 23 March 2010](#)). Newspapers have entire sections dedicated to wedding ads. In *The Hindu*, ads seeking grooms often mention the disposition of the bride, if she is fair. Alternatively, ads seeking brides used the word fairness both in reference to themselves (the grooms) and in reference to the bride-to-be ([The Hindu, 9 March 2014](#)). Job prospects are also affected by skin color. According to Gelles (2011), some employers ask for a photo along with a résumé while some jobs, such as flight attendant, screen candidates on appearance.

But skin whitening has its side-effects. Hydroquinone and mercury, present in all skin-bleaching products ([Ravichandran, 5 August 2013](#)), can be toxic. In fact, the European Union, Japan, and Australia have made it illegal to sell any product containing hydroquinone. The continual use of these products makes the skin appear patchy, leads to premature aging, and permanently alters the skin, making the body more susceptible to skin cancer ([Shome, 24 August 2012](#)).

Physique is an equally important part of beauty. Historically, Hinduism was concerned not with the body but with the spirit, so physical fitness was not of great importance (Dalleck and Kravitz, 2002). The exception to this general idea was yoga, which focused on “physical suppleness, proper breathing, and diet” (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 1999, no pagination). The goal of yoga, however, was to “control the mind and emotions” as well as lead to greater religiosity (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 1999, no pagination). In terms of physical appearance, ancient images from the Kushan Empire, the rulers of ancient India, reveal beauty to be equally unrealistic. Women were expected to have large hips and breasts, and thin waists (Bracey, no date). Art of a slightly later period depicts women posing in an S shape, with unrealistic proportions, including strange placements of the eyes on the head. Bracey (no date) compares this form of the female body to the female heroines in American comic books of the 1980s and 90s; they are an idealization. Similarities appear in the descriptions of goddesses, particularly Parvati. She has a “moon-like face”, “comely hips” and lips red like a bimba fruit (Dehejia, 1999, cited in Gelles, 2011, p.9). Marriage ads of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century also place an emphasis on a medium complexion, as well as a “glistening dark complexion” meaning a “lightness of color”, though not necessarily fair (Majumdar, 2004, cited in Gelles, 2011, p.10). Munshi even claims that up until the 1980s, “it was fine to be well-rounded and even voluptuous” (Munshi, 2001, p.85). Gelles (2011) concludes that Indian conceptions of beauty remained relatively stable over hundreds of years, with emphases on the features mentioned.

Yet the modern conception of beauty in India has changed. Few examples are as ample as international beauty contests. In the last 20 years, six Indian women have won the Miss Universe and the Miss World contests. Preparation for these events has grown into an industry all its own, employing “nutrition experts, yoga teachers, language and diction coaches, modeling specialists, fashion designers, cosmetics consultants, and former beauty queens” (Parameswaran, 2004, p.354). The beauty queens are put under intense workout regimens, sometimes focusing specifically on areas like the hips and the bust (Munshi, 2001; Abreu and Baria, 20 December 1999). If exercise is not enough, surgery is employed, from liposuctions to plastic surgery, Botox to nose jobs (Abreu and Baria, 20 December 1999).

But each beauty queen must be tall. Noses and chins can differ, but height must not be compromised. As Munshi (2001) notes, the “prerequisites [for beauty contests are] to be reasonably pretty and taller than average” (Munshi, 2001, p.85). This is corroborated by fitness expert Rama Bans, who was quoted in India Today as saying, “Today all a girl needs is a good height and a reasonably pretty face...we can do the rest” (Abreu and Baria, 20 December 1999, no pagination). This image of beauty is one of a tall, fair woman with a perfectly sculpted body. But, as both Munshi (2001) and Charkravarty (2011) note, this is not the standard Indian woman. According to Raaj (2008), the average height for women in 2005-06 was 152 cm. Yearly gym memberships can also be expensive, allowing only a certain group of wealthier Indians to join.

Many authors want to blame this new obsession with fairness and slim physique on the invading Western influences. In some sense they would not be wrong to do so. As Munshi (2001) notes, due to the creation of privately owned television channels as well as the general tidying-up of India’s media, there was an influx of programming and advertising for Western companies, ideas, and products (Munshi, 2001, pp.79, 85-86). Parameswaran (2004) discusses how the Indian media portrays global beauty queens through specifically Americanized values of hard work, patriotism, and social mobility. Through the portrayal of beauty queens as social climbers, the articles tend to belittle Indian culture, even pointing out how one queen, despite “speaking Hindi till so late in life”, is now “intelligent, polished, and sophisticated” (Parameswaran, 2004, p.359).

Yet to place blame on the West unequivocally is hasty and ill-informed; for experience would dictate that invading images and ideas can only take root if conditions for its conception are present. The idea of purity is this pre-condition. Pure, by its very definition, indicates something that is not concealed or mixed or polluted by any other matter. A soul that is clean is one that is always properly directed, not wayward or fanciful. A clean body is one that is not covered in dirt or polluted by grime. Purity is clearly of importance within India. The West associates purity with whiteness; the virgin bride wears a white dress, the fresh fallen snow accompanies the white baby in the Nativity scene, the white dove finds the olive branch. It can very well be argued that these inconspicuous, symbolic images of whiteness, which are all notably Christian, were absorbed into the already prevalent and malicious idea of purity within Indian society. As for physique, well, there may be no way that the West can avoid blame for that.

## **Across the Siliguri Corridor: Northeast India and Problems of Haphazard Grouping**

Northeastern India is hard to categorize. The area is made up of eight states including Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura, Nagaland, and Mizoram. Each state is populated by a distinct group of people, most states having multiple groups, each with their own traditions, histories, and societal structures (IGNCA, 1999d). This simple fact, as we will see, is what is often ignored in India's perception of the Northeast.

The northeastern region was forcefully incorporated into India by the British Empire sometime in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the land was used for the tea cultivation, this being especially so in Assam (Misra & Misra, c, eg c1996). Consequently, most British interests in the Northeast were economic; areas of lesser monetary value were not developed. As a result, many of these areas are impoverished and underdeveloped (Misra & Misra, c, eg c1996). In 2006-07, Northeasterners per capita received Rs. 2574.98 in central assistance, while the average for India was Rs.683.94 per capita (Planning Commission, 2007). The northeast is also known to have a poor infrastructure, with roads in need of repair and outdated rail systems (Planning Commission, 2007).

The way that mainland Indians view Northeasterners is influenced mainly by cultural differences. The Northeast is seen as foreign land; as McDuie-Ra (2012) and Vadlamannati (2011) indicate, the Northeast has never viewed itself as part of the Mainland and there are feelings on both sides suggesting that they never will. One main cultural difference is that of religion; Vaishnavism (IGNCA, 1999a), Hinduism, Christianity (IGNCA, 1999c), Paganism, and Buddhism (IGNCA, 1999a) are all practiced in various states. Some differences are societal; Meghalaya is a matrilineal society (IGNCA, 1999c); in Manipur, women share the responsibility of earning and are not expected to maintain the household (IGNCA, 1999b); among the Lhota of Nagaland, polygamy is practiced (Every Culture, 2014).

The population of Northeastern India makes for one of the starkest differences; the area has the highest concentration of STs anywhere in India (Planning Commission, 2002). The stigma of backwardness, which accompanies all protected groups, is seconded by the notion of savagery which is uniquely attributed to the Northeast and STs. Discussing the presentation and presence of the Northeast in mainland Indian media, Sen (2011) emphasizes an image of a "wild frontier" (Sen, 2011, p.6). This wild frontier is home to monkey eaters and cannibals and passing through Nagaland, one reporter for New Delhi Television felt as though "civilization as [she] knew it was being left behind" (Sen, 2011, p.7). Unless an extremely rare or uncharacteristic event occurs, the Northeast is chronically ignored by Indian media.

The image of savagery is exacerbated by the violence that has plagued the Northeast over the last 60 years. Much of this violence is due to rebellions, which seek to self-determine but often suffer from conflicting ideas and internal disharmony. But much of the violence stems from antagonistic feelings towards the government of India. Vadlamannati (2011) notes that these feelings of animosity grew after Independence, when the government "ignored local grievances and wishes" inadvertently fostering a desire for secession (Vadlamannati, 2011, p.606).

One final and key stereotype about Northeasterners is that they are promiscuous and immoral. These notions may come partially from the fashion scene, where Northeasterners fuse Western and other Eastern styles. The result is a clothing line that is distinctly unconventional and less conservative (Merelli, 2011). This is a general theme among many of the Northeastern states. These images, ideas, and more go into forming the stereotypes held about Northeasterners and, as this section hopes to highlight, why Northeasterners are victims of racial hostility and discrimination in Delhi, the capital of India.

Every year, about 15,000 young Northeasterners flock to Delhi to further their education or find work (Bhowmick, 2 February 2014). A study by McDuie-Ra (2012) looks into the growing marginalization of Northeastern workers in the burgeoning middle class malls of Delhi. At these malls Northeasterners work in restaurants, clothing stores, spas, and cosmetic stores. Their roles within these jobs are often racialized; in restaurants, Northeastern women wear Asian-style clothing while

spas often play to the “loose” stereotype of Northeastern women by having them wear tight clothing and heavy makeup. Workers felt that they were hired to give stores a more exotic feel. Although some expressed discontent with the clearly racialized hiring system, others recognized that the money made was necessary (1630-31) and that there were certain benefits to working in the malls, especially “[protection] from harassment” (McDuie-Ra, 2012, p.1631).

The money made is spent on education, familial support, and rent (McDuie-Ra, 2012). But housing discrimination is prevalent as well. A large number of Northeasterners live in the Manirka village, where the rent is reasonable and close to the local universities. Some non-Northeastern residents of the area complain that Northeasterners “consume alcohol, stay out late at night and pick fights” (Dutta, 20 February 2014, no pagination). After tricking Northeastern migrants into paying higher rents by taking advantage of their inability to speak Hindi, landlords will often justify these higher rates by referencing the complaints of those non-Northeasterners and claiming the need for compensation for having to deal with such complaints (McDuie-Ra, 2012).

No discussion of the racialization of the Northeasterner in Delhi is complete without reference to the Delhi Police’s safety guidebook for Northeasterners, *Security Tips for Northeast Students/Visitors in Delhi*. The booklet advises that Northeastern women dress “according to [the] sensitivity of the local population” (Dholabhai, 10 July 2007, no pagination) and that cooking bamboo shoots, Akuni, “and other smelly dishes” be done without causing a “ruckus” (Hindustan Times, 15 July 2007, no pagination). The book, more explicitly than was likely intended, seems to put fault onto the Northeasterners for carrying their culture with them rather than assimilating. However, true assimilation is hardly possible with the constant use of the racial epithet “chinky”, which describes Northeasterners’ oriental features (Sen, 3 February 2014).

And then there is racial violence. This topic was brought to a point again this year with the death of Nido Taniam, who died from extensive head and lung injuries (DNA Correspondent, 11 February 2014) after he was beaten by two local shopkeepers who reportedly made fun of his “hair colour and looks” (DNA Correspondent, 1 February 2014, no pagination). Livid over the mockery and racist remarks, Taniam “smashed the shop’s glass counter” (DNA Correspondent, 1 February 2014, no pagination) starting the brawl. He was beaten with iron rods. Less than two weeks after Taniam’s death, two Manipur natives were attacked in South Delhi. A Manipuri girl was raped in between these two incidents (DNA Correspondent, 11 February 2014). In 2009, Ramchanphy Hongray, a Nagaland teenager, was murdered, burnt, and, as one report claims, raped (Golmei, 2013) by a 34-year-old India Institute of Technology (IIT) PhD student (Times of India, 26 October 2009). That same year, an eight-year-old girl was raped and murdered by a 21-year-old with an extensive criminal record (Golemi, 2013). The incidents are too many to list here and, of course, are many more than reported.

Much of this paper has been spent referencing Northeasterners, as if they are one large collection. This is incorrect. The absurdity of such clumping and categorizing is made visible in Karlsson (2013), who looked at the growing tension in Meghalaya over the indistinctive title of Scheduled Tribe. The Khasi of Meghalaya are now calling for the creation of a new category, indigenous tribe, in order to differentiate themselves from other STs in the state. But, as mentioned earlier, many of the fiercest self-determination movements, especially those in Nagaland, have been internally dismantled. It seems, then, that the people of these states cannot find enough common ground to define themselves. The only solution then, in this cyclical, self-defeating problem, is governmental definition. Yet ignorance about the Northeast, which has been brought on by lack of media attention, equally influences the perceptions of government persons and the situation is left evermore pressing. Perhaps this is simply the natural result of trying to make sundry groups nominally the same.

### **Further Divisions: Is Caste Racist?**

To think of caste is to think of India. This association may not be proper or correct; other countries, including Sri Lanka (IDSN, 2014b), Nepal, and some areas of Africa (IDSN, 2014a) also have caste systems. Caste in India, however, is certainly the most widely discussed and one of the oldest caste systems in the world. The caste system is split into the four *varnas* of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras (Vaid, 2012). These divisions were said to have come from Brahma during

creation, Brahmin coming from his mouth, Kshatriyas from his arms, Vaishyas from his thighs, and Shudras from his feet (USHistory.org, 2014). Traditionally, these castes were associated with certain occupations; “priests and teachers...rulers and warriors...merchants and traders...and workers and peasants” respectively (USHistory.org, 2014). Outside of this configuration are the people historically known as the “untouchables”, now *dalits*, which means oppressed or broken (Narsavjan, 2009). Within the Dalit caste, sub-castes exist, with the lowest members performing undesirable tasks such as sewage cleaning and the removal of dead animals (Narsavjan, 2009). To complicate things further, each of the varnas are further divided into *jatis* which are “interdependent, hierarchically ranked, birth ascribed groups” (Berreman, 1972, p.389), although some have argued that jati is completely ambiguous and ubiquitous, applicable differently in any number of situations (Chatterjee, c. 1996).

Dalit is synonymous with scheduled caste (SCs), which means Dalits are eligible for affirmative action programs. The program has made great strides for Dalits; for example, Nanda K.K., a Dalit, is now a doctor and manages a hospital that he helped to create. He says that he is a “pure product” of the affirmative action system. The same might be said of Ashok Kamble, now the CEO of his company Future Constructions, with revenues of 10 million euros per year (Jacquelot, 28 December 2011).

But these success stories should not be read as ubiquitous; 60% of the sweepers employed by the central government are SCs (Desai and Dubey, 2012); higher castes are overrepresented in high and low professional fields, such as medicine, engineering, and public office (Vaid, 2012); 19 percent of Tata Steel employees are SCs and STs, but none are in higher up positions (Jacquelot, 28 December 2011). SCs and STs were also unlikely to move past their low origins (Vaid, 2012). Dalits and adivasis tend to have fewer years of education, lower salaries, and fewer social network connections. Interestingly, caste related inequalities are lowest in big cities and highest in rural villages (D&D, 2012), which could be used in favor of an argument claiming that capitalism will trump the caste system; but that is not the focus of this paper.

Statistics can only tell half the story, however; interestingly, affirmative action has indirectly influenced the perception held of Dalits by other groups. In her paper, Still (2013) studied the community of Nampalli and the ways in which outside groups perceive Dalits. She found that preconceived stereotypes and notions of Dalits were enforced and strengthened by affirmative action. Dalits are still borne down by that most vicious stereotype, that of dirtiness. This intrinsic layer of dirt is seen to affect their morals, virtues, priorities, and their hygiene. One man complained that Dalits wear slippers while defecating in the road then wear those slippers into their house; another complained that Dalits spend all their money on lavish dinners and alcohol; Dalits working as farm hands, another complained, simply “sit about smoking” after having been asked to come and work (Still, 2013, p.73). Dalits are also considered proud, intemperate, and lazy, all of which are thought to be worsened by the affirmative action system (Still, 2013).

Discrimination and segregation in the fields of health care and education are the direct effects of this belief in dirtiness. Not only is access to affordable health care limited (Dalit Solidarity, 2009), but some villages deny the Dalits access to health centers, with some health workers refusing even to visit the area (Human Rights Watch, 2007). A UNICEF study found that when Dalit children were given treatment at home, they were given less time with the provider and they were not touched (Acharya, 2010). Midwives and other lower end providers were the most discriminating, often visiting Dalit children last and refusing to enter the house (Acharya, 2010). In a similar way, Dalit children are discriminated against in school. Accounts differ from school to school, with some reporting having to clean up toilets and excrement while others were forced to the back of the class and kept unengaged (IDSN, no date). This sort of treatment may explain why the difference in dropout rates between Dalits and other Indian youth quadrupled between 1989 and 2008 (IDSN, no date).

Dalits are also subject to violence and subsequent failures of the judicial systems. Violence is common and usually gruesome; Dalit women are often victims of sexual violence, in the forms of rape or gang rape; men and women suffer from beatings, public shaming (which includes the eating of feces and drinking urine), and the destruction of their homes and villages (Human Rights Watch, 2007b). Many of these crimes go unreported due to inadequate registration of crimes by police officers (Human Rights Watch, 2007a). In the courtroom, Dalits continue to face discrimination on

the part of judges (Human Rights Watch, 2007b), and a disproportionately high number of serious cases end in acquittal (Human Rights Watch, 2007b).

It is clear that Dalits are victimized within their society; however, this does not necessarily imply racism. Certainly Dalits are categorized and stigmatized, linked to certain occupations and associated with a certain kind of uncleanliness. This idea of dirtiness affects the way Dalits are viewed in all aspects of their lives. Worse than this, uncleanliness is inherited and thus inescapable. But perhaps a distinction should be made, a distinction between caste and race and the caste system and racism. Dalits are not a race; they are a caste. Both are groupings, but race generally references phenotypical differences which do not appear between Dalits and Brahmins. But racism is an operating system; it categorizes, stigmatizes, and marginalizes groups of people based on a set of societally inherited myths, stereotypes, capabilities, and looks among other things (Law 2010). The caste system operates almost synonymously. The caste system, then, is racist, but *spiritually* so; it sees an irreparably damaged soul. And this irreparable damage is manifested physically; the “dirt”, which seems, from the outside, to be metaphorical is actually seen as a distinction, a layer of skin. So the caste system is dualistically racist and in some ways cyclical because the body is prenatally dirtied by the soul and the soul, throughout life, is further dirtied by the body, creating an individual who, according to the caste system, is distinct and undesirable.

### **Affirmative Action and What it means to be Backwards**

There are few areas in which the question of identity is more pertinent than in India’s affirmative action program. So too is there no better collision of the identity crises of Northeasterners and Dalits than in affirmative action.

Affirmative action is an old system in India, dating back to the colonial period (Shah and Shneiderman, 2013). The system today, which is codified in the Indian Constitution, helps position Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backwards Classes (OBCs) within universities, official offices, and other government jobs. Before 1980, 15 percent of government jobs and 7.5 percent of university seats were reserved for SCs and STs (Shah and Shneiderman, 2013). The Mandal Commission both refined and broadened what it meant to be protected by the government. Using 11 criteria which were split into the three categories of social, educational, and economic and assigned a certain number of points (3 points for a social criterion, 2 for educational, 1 for economic), “the commission identified 3,743 caste groups as other backward classes” (Ramaiah, 1992, p.3-4). All of these groups scored more than 11 points. Based on these recommendations, the government extended reservations, making the total reserved jobs around 49.5 percent (Shah and Shneiderman, 2013). There are meant to be no reservations greater than 50 percent, neither in business nor education (Harris, 7 October 2012).

Affirmative action, by its very nature, requires definitions. But how are these groups defined? STs and SCs are straightforward; the first refers to adivasis, the tribal people of the forests and jungles, a majority of whom live in the Northeast, while the second refers to Dalits. OBCs, however, are the ambiguous bunch. Among the criteria previously mentioned, “social” should give the reader the most pause. Economic and educational backwardness are somewhat predictable; things such as lower than average incomes and higher than average dropout rates define these categories (Ramaiah, 1992). Social backwardness seems to focus on the perceptions of outside parties; the first criterion reads, “castes/classes considered as socially backward by others” (Ramaiah, 1992, p.3). This criterion is followed by three others which cite dependence on manual labor, higher than average rates of young marriages, and above average female employment as signs of social backwardness (Ramaiah, 1992). These criteria are highly paternalistic. There are no persons named, no culprits identified, to tell us *who* exactly had the power to define backwardness; however, one cannot help but feel that these invisible, unidentified definers were likely members of the government. Regardless of whether or not this is the case though, the word choice and the sentence as a whole leaves the reader with a picture of not only an “us” and a “them”, but with an understanding of a proper life as meaning one that is profitable, advanced, and, even more so, *civilized*, whatever that can be said to mean.

Difficult questions arise from this idea; primarily one must wonder whether the government can be said to have objectively rated the groups in question. Were they looking at hard facts or were they

playing off the stereotypes inbred by society, by history? In considering new groups for OBC status, does the government look more thoroughly at their educational and economic situations or does it base its decision on the complex history of the group and whether or not they can be “considered” backwards? The two are distinct, one relying on poverty of opportunity and the other on poverty of subjective normalcy.

For these and other reasons, affirmative action has somewhat of a mixed reputation in India. Some groups, like the Gujjars of northern India, demonstrated to be granted ST status; their protests ended in violence and death (Moodie, 2013). Recall the Khasi in Meghalaya, who now wish to be known as an *indigenous tribe* (Karlsson, 2013). Still others, like one man interviewed by Still (2013), suggests that the continued protection of SCs is a ploy by politicians to gain voters.

But aside from this sort of grumbling dissent, the affirmative action system has, in some respects, created a dangerous state. In Tamil Nadu, for example, 80 percent of government jobs and 69 percent of university seats are reserved (The Economist, 29 June 2013). Most of the students filling these spots are the children of “doctors, lawyers, and high-level bureaucrats” (Harris, 7 October 2012). But the common criticism is that affirmative action has created a system that is internally unsound, one that is focused solely on quotas rather than competence. And this insistence on quotas is damaging to those it was intended to help; one study done by Pennsylvania State University found that affirmative action students admitted into selective fields within selective universities fared far worse than their peers in less selective majors as well as non-affirmative action students (Smith, 2012). In a similar vein, Higham and Shah (2013) found the difference in the literacy rate of adivasis and other groups remained the same over the fifty year period between 1951 and 2001. As some research notes, poor scores in university may very well indicate poor secondary education, which is another problem altogether (Jeffery, Jeffery, & Jeffery, 2008, cited in Higham & Shah, 2013, p.82).

The reservation system has now become another mode of differentiating; instead of seeing the backwards groups as deserving of reservations, the protection given by this program has simply become another negative attribute. The process of raising high the previously low has tried to erase the borderlines between people by sardining them into the three categories of ST, SC, and OBC. And it seems to have worked for some like Ashok Kamble, who argues that capitalism can defeat the caste system (Jacquelot, 28 December 2011). But that’s a fairly shallow argument. Money talks but history cannot forget; secret, ancient grievances still lurk beneath the surface. Still (2013) notes how there is still a feeling among the forward caste groups in Nampalli that Dalits should respect their caste superiors. And that is because the reservation system is entirely focused on success, thriving on the theory that equality in education and job placement will lead to equality in the heart. But this has not proven to be so. Gandhi said that the only way untouchability could be eradicated would be if the hearts of the caste superiors were changed (Suresh, c, eg c1996); perhaps that is the only way to truly repay years of oppression. Affirmative action fixes the immediate problem of unequal opportunity but it does not bring the discussion of Indian identity any closer to a conclusion; for self-definition is far more intricate than a line drawn in the sand.

## **Conclusion**

This paper began with the question, “Who is the Ideal Indian?” How exactly do we measure and define ideal-ness? Each of these different areas of research contributes its own challenges and queries to this discussion; beauty asks, “What does the Ideal Indian *look* like?”; the Northeasterner wonders, “What is the culture of the Ideal Indian?”; the Dalit ponders, “What is the history of the Ideal Indian?” But these questions have not been answered; it is likely that they do not have an answer. What this paper has shown, in a subtle way, is the chaos that comes with trying to define any people, but especially with defining such a diverse and clearly disharmonious bunch such as Indians.

The Ideal Indian seems to be a series of contradictions. If we were to allow ourselves to be blindly led by the discussion of beauty, then we would believe that the Ideal Indian is fair-skinned and well-toned. As discussed at the end of the beauty section, these understandings of beauty are undeniably influenced by western culture. Yet we see that a greater acceptance of Western culture results in accusations of loose morals in the case of the Northeasterners. Finally, there is the question of purity, dripping from the lips of each persecutor of Dalits, which leads to questions of an altogether confounding nature because this notion is one of the oldest in India. Purity is of both spiritual as well

as physical cleanliness. But there are now a number of financially successful Dalits. They are surely no longer handling feces; why, then, was Dr. Vinod Sonkar, a law professor at Delhi University, told to clean his own teacup after telling the shop-owner he was a Dalit (BBC News, 27 June 2012)? Purity certainly cannot be instilled. The Ideal Indian is a conundrum because definitions don't seem to suit the Indian. Identity is simply a preference, a constructed vision that is held together by invisible boundaries called familial ties and borderlines. The Indian racializes and stereotypes, but how? He doesn't even know who he is.

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