

Rampant caste-based harassment means Dalits like me are silenced on social media | Rest of World

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My first brush with social media was in 2012, when I was in 11th grade and Facebook was all the rage among my peers in Delhi. One day after school, I logged into the website and started browsing the posts that some of my classmates had put up. One comment on a post by a classmate left me stunned for years to come.

“Dhobi ka baccha hai kya?” he had written in Hindi. Translation: Are you a Dhobi’s [washerman’s] kid? The comment triggered years of internalized shame and abuse in me.

Dhobis are members of the Dalit community, who fall on the lowest stratum of the caste system, the longest-running social hierarchy system in the world. The community has been intergenerationally marginalized.

I am a Dhobi. Growing up, my parents were very clear that I could never reveal my caste identity to anyone. *“Log chhi chhi karenge,”* they told me. People will express disgust at you. But the concept truly hit home the day I saw that comment. I knew I could never reveal my identity to anyone — offline or online.

[...]

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