

# India today: black magic, penis size and poverty

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I'm still in Delhi for the LSE Asia Forum and enjoying a rich diet of Indian news. Three fascinating stories this morning, all of which remind you that there is a darker side to modern India. The first is a blow against Indian male pride. Scientists have been measuring male members across the nation to see if the standard size condoms actually fit the average Indian penis. This matters because India has a serious AIDS problem and a 20% condom failure rate. The explanation appears to be that the condoms are 5cm bigger than Indian willies – so they keep falling off....

The other weird story is the rescue of 7 beautiful and rare horned owls from an illegal animal dealer in the picturesque area of old Delhi around the Jama Masjid mosque. It seems they were caught by villagers who sell them for as little as 100 rupees (about £1) to middle-men who flog them on for as much as 5,000 rupees to 'godmen' who use them in black magic rituals.

But the serious story that caught my eye this morning was a study which found that the Dalits – India's most 'backward' caste – are still mired in poverty despite India's economic boom and despite the fact that Dalits have made bigger educational gains in the last 30 years than any other social group. Dalit literacy growth has been twice that of the rest of India. But they remain 50% more likely to be at the bottom of the economic heap. It seems that education is not the way out of poverty for a whole social group because of the continuing prejudice in other areas such as politics and business. India has a fascinating approach to breaking down its caste system, including a complex system of positive discrimination through job quotas. It's obviously not working.

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