

30th November 2009

Rt. Hon. John Bercow MP
Speaker's House
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Mr. Speaker

Subject: Single Equality Bill and Caste Based Discrimination

We are aware that the Single Equality Bill (SEB) comes up for its third reading on 2nd December 2009. In this connection, we wish to place before you our concerns in relation to Caste Based Discrimination (CBD) now establishing roots in Britain amongst the Asian Diaspora.

As migrants from the Indian sub-continent settle into Britain, a cultural baggage of Caste has also travelled with them like a pernicious disease!

Caste based practices are intrinsically linked with some faith based communities and therefore become a challenge to deal. The affected communities have now spoken with a single voice to rid of the anachronistic system of Caste before it does a lasting damage to British society.

As per 2001 census, among other faiths the largest groups are Pakistani Muslims (686,000) and Indian Hindus (471,000) followed by Indian Sikhs (307,000), Bangladeshi Muslims (261,000) and White Jews (259,000). The Indian group is religiously diverse: 45 per cent of Indians are Hindu, 29 per cent Sikh and a further 13 per cent Muslim. In contrast, the Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups are more homogeneous, Muslims accounting for 92 per cent of each ethnic group.

(These numbers have now increased significantly over the last 10 years, thereby compounding the scale of caste related issues).

Background

Since its formal launch in July 2004, our organisation has worked on a broad front to raise awareness of caste-based discrimination in the UK. We sought consultation with the Department for Education & Skills; provided input into consultations on the Home Office's White Paper *Strength In Diversity*; provided feedback to the government's Community & Faiths Unit; made submissions to the Discrimination Law Review. We held a number of conferences to highlight the plight of victims. At each conference new testimonials were heard from victims who were able to speak of their experiences and the blighting effect upon their lives. Each conference brought together academics,

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politicians, community groups, community leaders and many others interested in the promotion of Human Rights.

In July 2007, the Sandwell conference was held in West Midlands under the theme of Fighting Caste Discrimination in the UK. Conference topics covered Caste and Community Relations, Caste and British legislation, Caste and Globalisation, Caste Discrimination and Challenges of Multiculturalism, Caste Dynamics amongst the Indian Diaspora, Caste Discrimination in the Work Place and Caste Psychology. In November 2007, a conference held at the Palace of Westminster addressed the theme of Caste and British Discrimination Law. Topics covered were Caste and Identity and British Discrimination Law. In August 2008, we held a conference at the University of Aston under the theme of Caste and Social Cohesion, Community Engagement and Mobilisation. In March 2009, we held a conference in Coventry under the theme of Caste and Indian Christian Diaspora which explored how caste continues to affect Indian Christians in the UK.

Single Equality Bill and CBD Evidence

We have networked with a number of organisations and continue to raise the profile of Caste based discrimination and its impact on British society. During the SEB journey many organisations submitted papers, reports and evidence at various stages of the passage of the Bill. Our latest submission was made to the SEB Scrutiny Committee that presented a case history of individuals affected by CBD.

Eastern Eye (an Asian newspaper dated 27th November 2009) recently reported the results of CBD survey and found “the caste system is still widespread and affects people in the workplace and the classroom. Fifty-eight per cent of the 300 people surveyed said they had been discriminated against because of their caste, while 79 per cent said they did not think the police would understand if they tried to report a caste-related “hate crime”.

Almost half of those surveyed (45 per cent said they had either been treated negatively by co-workers or had comments made about their caste. Nine per cent felt they had been passed over for promotion, and 10 per cent said they had been paid less. Almost 71 per cent of those questioned identified themselves as *Dalit*, formerly known as untouchables and sometimes referred to in a derogatory way using caste names *chuhra* and *chamar*. “Such names are as derogatory as calling a black person a ‘n****r’ or anyone from the subcontinent of Indo-Pakistani diaspora a ‘paki’.

Over the last few years, our campaign has informed politicians of all the parties and various Government agencies of the blighting affects CBD on affected communities and the need to address the menace of caste in law. Despite our efforts it has been declared by the cabinet office that the evidence thus far presented has not been strong enough therefore does not justify a legal remedy. When considering the caste related issues the Cabinet Office argued that legislating to prohibit CBD may pose a threat to community cohesion and undermine religious and cultural sentiments of ethnic communities in Britain.

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We believe that the above sentiments clearly misunderstand and under-estimate the devastating affects on victims of CBD (who suffer in silence) and underplays the divisive and destructive nature of caste. It is our submission that CBD is a far greater threat to community cohesion and civil society as proven by many findings laid before Government's Equalities Office. Adopting legal measures and prohibiting CBD is a sure way to make the perpetrator think twice before they act.

We endorse the proposed amendment to the SEB by Jeremy Corbyn M P and Rob Marris MP, namely to move the following Clause:—

(1) Caste includes—

(a) jati;

(b) biraderi.

(2) A person has the protected characteristic of caste if the person is a member of a caste group found within a hierarchical group-based system of social stratification, where both membership and group and individual status are hereditary, ascribed, and permanent.

(3) In relation to the protected characteristic of caste—

(a) a reference to a person who has a particular protected characteristic is a reference to a person of a particular caste group;

(b) a reference to persons who share a protected characteristic is a reference to persons of the same caste group.

(4) The fact that a caste group comprises two or more distinct caste groups does not prevent it from constituting a particular caste group. '

We appeal to you that during the third reading of SEB on Wednesday 2nd December 2009 to allow the CBD debate on the floor of the house and declare Caste a protected category before the SEB is allowed to progress to the House of Lords.

We urge parliament to take the first legal steps to incorporate the aforementioned amendment and demonstrate to the country that CBD has no place in British society and that Justice, Equality and Fairness will continue to remain the cornerstone of British democracy and British Society.

As Speaker, we appeal to your just and fair minded spirit that you will not allow this opportunity to be missed and heed our just appeal to allow the debate to take place on the floor of the house and save the suffering humanity from Caste Based Discrimination.

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Looking forward to hearing from you

Yours Sincerely,

Sat Pal Muman

Chair, CasteWatchUK

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PS Please refer to our website www.castewatchuk.org to obtain background information about our organisation.

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