



CasteWatchUK Conference Report

“Caste & Indian Christian Diaspora”

**Held on 21st March, 2009 - 10.00 to 16.30 hrs at
Conference Theatre, Saturn Facilities
101, Lockhurst Lane
Coventry CV6 5SF**

Presented by
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Introduction:

CasteWatchUK is an independent, voluntary organisation registered with the Charity Commission. Our main aims are to raise awareness of Caste discrimination in the United Kingdom (UK) and to strive for appropriate legal, social and democratic remedies. Since its formal launch in July 2004, CasteWatchUK 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 and made submissions to the Discrimination Law Review. We have also networked with a number of community groups, faith groups, human rights groups, academic institutions, trade unions, voluntary & statutory organisations and continue to raise the profile of Caste based discrimination and its impact on British society. We continue to lobby the social and political classes in the United Kingdom & provide a public platform to victims of Caste discrimination through personal contacts, educational institutions and community groups. We organised a number of conferences in various cities in this respect giving effect to concerns raised, including a conference called "Caste Discrimination & British Law" held in November the UK Parliament.

Caste Away Arts (www.casteawayarts.com) is the artistic wing of CasteWatchUK and has been an invaluable help in campaigning for equality, human rights and breaking down social barriers through theatre. They have successfully managed to shed light on issues that aren't normally talked about, particularly in the British-Asian community, by including true stories in their work. Caste discrimination in the UK can be seen in temples, schools, places of higher education, community centres, social clubs, places of employment and services in the UK where people from Indian and Pakistani Diaspora are working, resulting in caste based bullying, leading to inferiority complex and low self esteem in victims. This maltreatment prevents victims from achieving their full potential and making their due contribution to British society. Caste Away Arts has written a stage play called "The Fifth Cup" - based on true life experiences of caste discrimination collected from research conducted by CasteWatchUK and Caste Away Arts. The Fifth Cup has been successfully staged in London, Birmingham, Southall and Leicester. The performances with packed audiences were a clear signal of the power of the play in highlighting the devastating effect caste discrimination has on its victims and urgent need for finding solutions.

The purpose of the Conference with its respective theme of "Caste and Indian Christian Diaspora" was to provide an opportunity to the Indian Christian community in the UK to raise concerns that they have about how the Caste System affects their communities. Since the advent of CasteWatchUK and the subsequent public debate that we unleashed, the Hindus specifically have accused the Christians of proselytising a particular section of the Hindus. In each and every media broadcast, press releases and hurriedly conducted Caste Research Reports, the Hindus did not miss a single opportunity to bring this aspect to the forefront going to the extent of accusing CasteWatchUK of being manipulated by Christians for their conversion agenda. Hindus have now to thank themselves that Indian Christians have awakened to the ground realities of Caste. The community now feel that it should express its abhorrence of the Caste System and related prejudice. Indian Christians are converts from Hinduism. The community feels challenged by prevalence of Caste notions and wishes to air its grievances in a public forum. Being a secular organisation, CasteWatchUK has an overarching theme to raise awareness of Caste based discrimination. We are happy to provide a platform to any community that wishes to raise issues relating to caste without promoting a particular religion, sect or creed. The objective of the conference, unashamedly, was to mobilise communities so that the legal apparatus of this country does not lose sight of the prevalence of Caste prejudice and that Caste is seen as a menace to social harmony in Britain. The Indian Christian community has felt marginalised especially in the context of recent atrocities committed on Christians in India. This was an effort by CasteWatchUK to enable the Indian Christian community to raise Caste as an issue affecting the Christian Community and demonstrate its unequivocal abhorrence of Caste practices and Caste unacceptability in modern Britain.

It is unfortunate that decades of exposure to British Values has failed to change the rigid caste prejudiced mind set of British Hindus. Community groups that are victims of caste discrimination, are disappointed with Hindu opposition to our campaign for rooting out caste discrimination from British Society. Instead of joining us in promoting social equality and community cohesion, Hindu organisations have published fabricated reports suggesting that Christians are responsible for stirring up the caste problems in UK. Reluctance to accept their social responsibility and denial of caste discrimination practices, which even their reports suggest go on in the UK, aggravates the seriousness of the situation. **Change in the "Anti Discrimination Law" by inclusion of "Caste" in the Single Equality Bill is the first step and the only sure way of ensuring that human rights of British Citizens are not undermined by undesirable elements in the British Society.**

Conference Programme:

Conference Chairman: Mr Ramesh Alexander

- 10.00 to 10.30** **Conference Registration, Tea & Coffee, Video film “London Protest March”**
- 10.30 to 10.35** **Welcome by Davinder Prasad , General Secretary, CasteWatchUK**
- 10.35 to 10.40** **Introduction by Conference Chairman Mr Ramesh Alexander**
- 10.50 to 11.00** Mr Samuel Masih, General Secretary, Indian Christian Concern (UK)
- 11.00 to 11.10** **Mr Rob Marris MP**, Wolverhampton South West
- 11.10 to 11.20** **Mr David Webb**, Ex Chairman, Community Relations Council, Birmingham
- 11.20 to 11.30** **Dr Charan Bunger**, Founder Trustee, GREAT
(Guru Ravidass Educational Assistance Trust)
- 11.30 to 11.40** **Councillor Elias Mattu**, Labour, Wolverhampton City Council
- 11.40 to 11.50** **Mr Virender Sharma MP**, Member of Joint Committee on Human Rights,
UK Parliament
- 11.50 to 12.00** **Mr Michael Poselay**, Barrister and Prison Governor
- 12.20 to 12.30** **Mr Moses Parmar**, All India Christian Council (India)
- 12.30 to 13.10** **Lunch break in Pandora Suite**
- 13.10 to 13.20** **Dr William Sidhu**, Chairman, Asian Christian Fellowship, Coventry
- 13.20 to 13.40** **Professor Bipin Kumar Jojo**, Centre for Social Justice and Governance,
Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai, India
- 13.40 to 13.50** **Mr Eric Masih**, Seventh Day Adventist Church, Bedford
- 13.50 to 14.00** **Councillor Jas Parmar**, Conservative, Kempton South, Bedford
- 14.00 to 14.10** **Mr Gian Chand Ghaiwal**, Central Valmik Sabha (UK-International)
- 14.10 to 14.20** **Mr Joel Masih**, Evangelist, Global Ministry of Christian Faith, Bradford
- 14.20 to 14.30** **Mr M J Alam Shah**, President, Coventry Asian Christian Association and
Vice President, Federation of Pakistani Christians (UK)
- 14.30 to 15.00** **Tea Break in Pandora Suite**
- 15.00 to 15.50** **Question and Answer Session.** Panel discussion with
Councillor Elias Mattu, Samuel Masih, Davinder Prasad, David Webb
- 15.50 to 16.00** **Vote of Thanks** by Mr Davinder Prasad, General Secretary, CasteWatchUK
- 16.00 to 16.30** **Networking**

Welcome : Davinder Prasad, General Secretary, CasteWatchUK

Davinder Prasad extended welcome to the guest speakers and the delegates. He pointed out that a published programme and Press Release for the conference were in the welcome pack of all the delegates. Health & Safety announcements were made and emergency procedure for evacuation in case of fire or any other incident were read out to the delegates. He also mentioned that Mr Satpal Muman, Chairman of CasteWatchUK had to be in India on an important personal business and invited Mr Jagdish Rai, Vice Chairman to the stage. He then introduced Rakesh Alexander and said that CasteWatchUK has requested him to be the Conference Chairman. Rakesh was invited to the stage and was requested to commence the proceedings of the conference.

Conference opening: Ramesh Alexander

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. My name is Ramesh Alexander and I am the chairman of this conference. On behalf of Caste watch UK and Indian Christians I would like to welcome you all. My special thanks go out to our guest speakers who have taken time out of their very busy schedules to be here.

Christianity was introduced in South India, in the first century by St. Thomas. My research has led me to believe that he went there because of the Jew traders, but while he was in India he converted people from the low caste groups into Christians. However, in North and Central India, Christianity was introduced by the British Raj and Missionaries. Many of the people who were converted were victims of the caste prejudice and were called untouchables. This was their way of escaping Caste discrimination, allowing them to be financially better off, gaining free education and enabling them to gain a higher status within the society prevalent at the time of British Raj.

I came across a story where a British officer was stationed in North India with his family and who was assigned to do a survey on how the people who work for the British feel about the conditions. A young Indian Christian called Tajo, who was 25 & worked for this British officer was always happy. The officer decided to ask him how he felt about working for the British. He was asked to write a diary, and in this diary it talks about how he felt working for the British. Teju wrote about how he felt free and the officer asked "what do you mean by free?" He said "Sir, I am an Untouchable and my family for centuries could not go into the temples, we were not allowed access to education, we had no human rights, and we were given the name "Untouchables" and nobody wanted to come into contact with us. However, since I started working for you I could eat with your family, I could drink from the same drinking vessels, I could send my children to English schools, and could actually go to the place of worship where the people who ruled the country go to worship. I felt for the first time that I was also human and did not feel discriminated, or feel that I was an Untouchable, and that is the reason behind saying that I was happy and free."

In the Christian religion there is no Caste system. Therefore, many Christians may agree with the fact that the Caste system is not an issue for them. Although we are from a number of generations of converted Christians, we are still seen as untouchables by the High Caste people in India. We migrated to Britain in the 50's and 60's from India. However, we had many problems in the early 70's regarding racial discrimination. The British Government bought out legislation in order to protect us from Racial discrimination, but the Caste discrimination within the Indian Community has been more or less brushed aside and authorities have conveniently turned a blind eye. To see the sole presence of the Caste system working in Britain today, you only have to listen to Bhangra music to see how it is working.

Britain has fought two world wars so that men can be free and treated equally without persecution and free to practice their faiths. Although we live in a multicultural society, even today there is a very strong presence of Caste discrimination in this country. It does not matter whether Caste discrimination affects one person, or a hundred thousand people, the government has a duty to protect them. This is why I believe that the single equality bill should include Caste discrimination. **In modern Britain, there is no room for Caste discrimination.**

Conference Speeches by Guest Speakers :

Councillor Ram Lakha:

Councillor Lakha was the Deputy Lord Mayor in 2004 when he was the Chief Guest and Launched CasteWatchUK in the inaugural conference in July 2004 at St Mary's Guild Hall in Coventry. Councillor Lakha served as Lord Mayor for City of Coventry in 2005-06 and he made peace and equality as the main theme for his Mayoral year. He and worked hard to promote equality, peace and social harmony in the City of Coventry. He has personal experiences of caste discrimination in India and again in the UK and his speeches and his proposed solutions are based on his real life experiences.

Key points from his speech:

As Ex-Lord Mayor of Coventry, he extended welcome to all the invited guests to the City of Coventry. Mr Lakha also experienced caste discrimination in his political career in the UK and with his sheer determination he managed to deal with this issue and served as Lord Mayor of Coventry in 2005. Councillor Lakha spoke about history of caste discrimination which was there in India from pre-historic times. **No matter where the "Indian Culture" is, the problem of caste exists.** No matter which religion is linked with Indian culture, caste problem chases that society. Indian Christians are also the victims of this cultural problem. We know that BNP is still active here on similar but modified lines. So is the caste problem. It is the power struggle by using **the concept of superiority and inferiority** on the basis of birth, colour or even faith inheritance which is a problem. **For a better future, we must oppose that concept with full vigour for the development of equal respect and equal opportunities for all.** I hope the new Equality Bill will be able to address all kind of problems to eradicate discrimination here in Britain and will make it ever Greater.

Samuel Masih:

Samuel Masih is General Secretary of a very important Indian Christian organisation called "Indian Christian Concern". In 1998, the atrocities on Indian Christians in Orrisa came to the attention of International media and the whole world was shocked at the uncivilised behaviour of right wing Hindu Fundamentalists in India. Indian Christian brotherhood in Great Britain united in condemnation of this barbaric treatment of innocent victims from Indian Christian community in India. Samuel along with other leaders founded "Indian Christian Concern" to deal with issues related to caste atrocities. There has been a repetition of atrocities on Indian Christians in Orrisa in 2008 and "Indian Christian Concern" organised a peaceful demonstration in London in which several thousand people took part. Memorandums and Signed petitions were handed over to Prime Minister Gordon Brown at 10, Downing Street and also to Indian High Commissioner in London.

Key points from his speech:

Samuel pointed out that Indian Caste System has five categories and not four as people are generally told. The fifth and the lowest category is called Untouchables and they have been victims of caste prejudice for centuries. RSS and other fanatic organizations are continually committing atrocities against Christians In India, particularly targeting those who converted from lower castes. Caste System is the cancer of Indian society and the only way to cure cancer is to remove it. People from low castes must be acknowledged as individuals and not as pollutants to the society. Indian Christians have discarded Hinduism as it had nothing but hatred and contempt for people from low castes. They have found equality in worship, feeling that they are valued and sense of pride and dignity in Christian Faith. Although Indian Christians have left Hinduism behind but they are still being victimized by Hindu Fanatics in the UK. Hindus are trying to

attach the stigma of low castes to Indian Christians and they also have to suffer from caste discrimination in the UK, which is totally unacceptable as we now live in Christian country. Even Sikh Community openly practices the caste discrimination in the UK. Samuel urged all the community groups to unite and take necessary steps to root out caste discrimination from the British Society before it is too late. He also urged British Government to take steps to root out caste discrimination from British Society by inclusion of "Caste" in the forthcoming Single Equality Bill.

Rob Marris MP:

Rob is Member Parliament from Wolverhampton South West and truly represent the people in his great city that has a significant presence of people who are victims of caste prejudice. He is a very close friend and political mentor of Councillor Elias Mattu and therefore has a firsthand knowledge of how caste is affecting people in the UK. Rob has always been a keen supporter of CasteWatchUK and the cause that we are dealing with. He helped CasteWatchUK to organise a conference at the House of Commons in November 2007 in which various community groups highlight existence of caste discrimination in the UK. This conference brought our issues to a head with Hindu Fundamentalists who tried to put obstacles in our way by bringing out two hurriedly prepared research reports opposing our work.

Key points from his speech:

Rob started his speech by saying that Dalit Solidarity Network UK, of which he is a trustee, has started a new campaign to put pressure in Indian Government to stop "Manual Scavenging work" in India. This work was made unlawful in India many years ago but the laws in India do not get enforced. India is aspiring to become a member of UN Security Council but how can it be allowed when there are blatant violations and disregard of basic human rights of its citizens. Here in the UK, fanatical Evangelical Christians are being blamed for stirring up caste problems due to a conversion agenda. We all know that caste discrimination goes on in the Indian communities and it is sad to see that "Caste" is not in the Single Equality Bill. I suggest that you should all write to your MP's to put pressure on the Government to include "Caste" in the Single Equality Bill. Laws in a country define the acceptable standard of behaviour and social responsibilities. Slavery does not exist but it is against the law to practice slavery. Similarly, caste discrimination should also be made unlawful.

David Web:

Ex Police Superintendent from Birmingham and author of a book called "Policing the Rainbow". David was also President of the Rotary Club in Birmingham and Ex-Chairman of Birmingham Community Relations Council and made an excellent contribution in challenging Institutional Racism in the British Society. He is now a member of CasteWatchUK and is committed to root out this social evil from British Society before it is too late

Key points from his speech:

People from India came in early sixties and there was no caste discrimination. People worked very hard to establish themselves in this country. There was institutional Racism and I worked very hard alongside Indians to campaign against racism. Racial Equality Act was passed and over a period of time, racism has come to be seen as anti-social Behaviour in this country. I worked as Superintendent Police and also as Chairman of Racial Equality Council in Birmingham. I know that caste prejudice and caste discrimination goes on this country in the Indian community. I took part in the campaign against racial discrimination because in my view it was unfair to treat people badly on the basis of race. I have now joined CasteWatchUK to campaign against caste discrimination because it is disgraceful to see that those who

have experienced racial discrimination before, are now quite happy to practice caste discrimination which I find as extremely hypocritical. In the UK, Caste discrimination is beginning to take roots but there should be no place for it in the British Society. People from all castes have worked hard and whatever level they have reached, they have achieved on the basis of their own merit. I am convinced that unless law is brought in as a deterrent, like it was done for racial discrimination, Caste discrimination would not stop. It is important that "Caste" is included in the Single Equality Bill.

Dr Charan Bangar:

Dr Bungar is an academic from Ravidassi community and was an inspirational leader in the early Years of this community group in the UK. Dr Bungar strongly believes the only way caste discrimination can be rooted out is by empowering the victims with education. Dr Bungar is the founder trustee of a charity called GREAT - Guru Ravidass Educational Assistance Trust. This charity funds the higher education for those who have the abilities but cannot afford the education.

Key points from his speech:

Caste system that we observe and face in the UK was an innovation of Aryan invaders many centuries ago back in India. Caste discrimination against untouchables is a reflection of the fear that untouchables may rise above the people from higher castes. Conversion to a different religion just to escape from caste discrimination would not solve the problem. Dr Bungar said that he suffered caste discrimination in India but did not find caste prejudice in Sikh religion. On his arrival in the UK, he had to live in Birmingham where there was a very significant presence of people from India. Caste discrimination was rampant it was very demoralizing. He had to acquire higher education to overcome the caste prejudice. His education empowered him and his family. Dr Bungar realized the importance of education as a tool of empowerment and started a charity called "GREAT" - Guru Ravidass Educational Assistance Trust. Education can empower people and is the only sure way of eradicating the caste discrimination in ones life. Dr Bungar emphasized that all the organization should unite and put pressure on the British Government to include "Caste" in the single equality bill. People who believe in the caste system are the lowest of the low.

Councillor Elias Mattu:

Councillor Mattu is a Labour Councillor in the City Council of Wolverhampton and has always taken keen interest in the service of his constituents irrespective of their race, religious beliefs or caste backgrounds. He has personally seen caste discrimination practices in employment and recently dealt with a case involving Caste Discrimination. He has personally experienced caste discrimination in India and again in the UK and therefore speaks on the basis of his personal experiences.

Key points from his speech:

It is our duty to protect our basic human rights in this country. It is extremely important that we stop caste discrimination from taking roots in this country. People are treated as less than human in the caste system. I know that it is difficult to change things back in India but it should be possible for us to do something in the UK. I know that people are suffering from Caste discrimination and it needs to be stopped. People who want to find evidence of caste discrimination in the UK; I invite them to come to Wolverhampton. It is taking place in employment and everywhere. It is happening but it is only noticed by those who suffer from it. Caste prejudice is in the DNA of Indians and they carry it with them wherever they go. Sangh Parivaar in India and their members here in the UK are promoting the caste system and it is important that they are exposed. I am proud to be a Christian but I also respect people from other

faiths. There is no room for anyone to bring their bad way of life into Christian way of life. Churches should be alerted against Christian converts from upper castes because they need to be clearly educated about the concept of equality, irrespective of caste. I have no doubt that 21st century is going to be the one to put an end to caste system.

Mr Virender Sharma:

Although Mr Sharma is from Brahmin background, his family has a fantastic history of taking active part in liberation movement in India – Liberation not only of the rich high caste people but the real liberation of real people irrespective of their religion or caste. He has continued with his family commitment to the deprived and needy people by joining labour party in the UK, taking very active part in fighting institutional racism in British Society and now he has joined us in fighting institutional Casteism in the British Society. Mr Sharma is a member of Joint Committee for Human Rights and we know that he'll do whatever is possible to get caste included in the Single equality bill.

Key points from his speech:

In 21st century, our commitment should be for a casteless society. We need to deliberate on what strategies we need to make this possible. I support that "Single Equality Bill" should include an additional clause - Caste. It is an evil where a society is divided from birth of an individual in a family. The situation is different in the UK because here a Brahmin can be a sweeper and a Jaat can be a carpenter. We need to have a fresh look at the caste system. We need to build trust and we need to have people to join us in fighting this evil. Sikh Gurus gave a new way of life and Sikh faith believes in equality. However, in modern times, even people from Sikh faith have a sectarian approach to life. I come from a family where I was taught that all human beings are equal and everyone in the society should be valued. I want to say that CasteWatchUK is doing a great job by raising public awareness about caste discrimination in the UK. CasteWatchUK has created a movement that would be remembered for rooting out caste discrimination from the British Society.

Michael Posely:

We first met Mike at Leicester during the performance of "The Fifth Cup" and he was inspired and agreed with the reality that play was trying to highlight. He came and offered to help CasteWatchUK with our campaign because he believes that there should be no place for caste discrimination in British Society. Mike is a Barrister and a Prison Governor.

Key points from his speech:

Caste discrimination in the UK is real and needs to be rooted out before it is too late. There are three main culprits in the world of caste discrimination : 1) **Oppressor:** who have perceived power which they are reluctant to let go. 2) **Victims:** who fail to stand up and challenge the oppressor. 3) **Law Makers:** Who are reluctant to address the problem.

There are two types of people who can engage in irresponsible social behaviour - ignorant and bigots. People who are ignorant do not know what they are doing and do not understand the implications of their behaviour. Bigots are the people who know exactly what they are doing and they intend to cause harm and pain to people and create problems in the society. People who practice caste discriminations are bigots and only change in the law can stop these people from causing pain to the victims of caste discrimination. Government should take side of the victims and address the problem of caste discrimination.

Moses Parmar:

Moses Parmar leads over 1,000 people engaged in humanitarian and charitable work across North India. Projects include 31 schools which primarily serve Dalit children, seminars for women on their legal rights and empowerment, and dozens of micro-enterprise initiatives. During his extensive international travels, Mr. Parmar has captured audiences ranging from 50 to 50,000 people with his riveting and articulate stories about the transformation of communities. As a Dalit who hails from Gujarat state, Mr. Parmar talks about the power of knowledge and education – both formal and informal – in bringing true freedom, equality, and peace. Mr. Parmar has more than 25 years experience in holistic, transformational work and currently directs multiple organisations in India.

Key points from his speech:

Moses expressed concerns about how High Caste establishment in India is using state machinery to humiliate minority communities just because they are converts from low castes. The atrocities in Orissa against Christian community and violence against Muslim community in Gujrat are examples where law enforcement authorities were a silent witness to the crimes against converts from low castes. Babri Mosque case is also another example when violence, killings, raping and burning took place in the presence of Police. Argument of conversion is used to counter Christianity. High caste Hindus are unashamedly pursuing the Hindutava Philosophy not only in India but globally, which promotes the supremacy of higher castes Hindus. Only those who have converted from low castes, Christianity or Islam, are singled out for humiliation and attacks. A new strategy of turning Dalits and Tribal people against one another and make them kill one another is working very effectively. The media and Government forces are under the control of High Caste establishment and it is not very difficult to cause misunderstandings and division amongst members of Dalit communities. Moses proposed three action points :

- 1). Unite as many community groups as possible in the UK to start a movement to end caste discrimination.
- 2). Fight Hindutava forces in the UK who are trying to establish Hindu supremacy in this country as well.
- 3). Do not forget to get involved in India. You do not have to be a Christian to take part in supportive action.

I cannot understand what is stopping British Government from providing protection to its citizens from Caste discrimination which everyone knows goes on here.

Dr William Sidhu:

Dr Sidhu is Chairman of Asian Christian Fellowship in the UK and has supported the work of CasteWatchUK since its formation in 2004. He strongly believes that people should have to chose the religious faith they feel happy with and no religious community should be allowed to engage in maligning the religious beliefs of other faiths. Dr William has strongly condemned Hindu Fundamentalist propaganda of blaming Christian missionaries for the forced conversion of people from low castes. In his view, his ancestors did not find any sense of dignity, respect, love or belonging to Hindu religion and as a result they converted to a faith that gave everything that Hinduism was not capable of giving.

Key points from his speech:

Dr Sidhu pointed out that India outlawed Caste discrimination in 1947 by making it unlawful. UK Government is now trying its best to outlaw all forms of discrimination through Single Equality Bill. Caste discrimination is practiced vigorously in India and now it is showing its ugly head here in the UK. Some people only want to show that they are superior. It must not be allowed in this country but unfortunately Government has chosen to turn a blind eye to the problem. Perpetrators of caste discrimination are being asked if they practice caste discrimination. The pleas and representation from the communities that are victims of caste discrimination are being totally ignored. Dr Sidhu emphasized that education is one way of ending the disadvantage. Caste discrimination must be fought at every level of the society as we live in a Christian country and there is no room for caste prejudice in our faith. God made every human being as his true image and all of us are equal in the eyes of God.

Professor Bipin Kumar Jojo:

Professor Jojo is an eminent academic from our communities and an expert in Communities' Informal Care and Welfare Systems, governance, participatory development and with a special interest in Tribal issues in India. (*Currently: Commonwealth Fellow, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*). He has done a lot consultancy work with Maharashtra Government, Orissa Government - where all these atrocities on Christian took place, and also Government of India on various issues related to Equity and empowerment of people that are victims of caste and other prejudice in India.

Key points from his speech:

All Christians in India are converts from Hinduism. According to the National census, the figures show that Christian population in India is declining. Therefore propaganda about conversion agenda issue is not really valid. Christians Dalits in India are being victimized on two fronts - caste discrimination as well as religious discrimination. Dalit Christians are now asking for changes in the law through affirmative action. Awareness about human rights is growing amongst Dalits and Adivasis in India through education and they are asserting their rights. Despite the fact that Hindu Temple entry law was passed back in 1947, still many temples do not allow Dalits to enter their premises. Previously Muslims were the target of Hindu violence but now issue of conversion is being given prominence and Christians are coming under attack in India by right wing Hindu Fundamentalists. State machinery is being used in India to commit these atrocities and the culprits are never caught and brought to justice. In the UK, State machinery is approachable and therefore role of political engagement is very important. Unless steps are taken to eradicate the problem, Right Wing Hindu Fundamentalist forces would succeed in establishing High Caste Hindu supremacy in the UK as well.

Councillor Jas Parmar:

Councillor Parmar from Bedford City Council is from Conservative party. He is expected to stand in the forthcoming election from West Midlands and has always taken keen interest in struggle against racial discrimination.

Key points from his speech:

Caste System comes from people who suffer from bigotry. It is a human thing and for centuries we have witnessed the problem but have done nothing about it. Obviously the perpetrators are going to deny this. How many times criminals accept their crime without investigation and trial. The victims also need to stop playing the victim card and need to do urgently do something and challenge the caste discrimination. Unite, educate yourself and fight for equal rights. Only two types of people can practice caste discrimination - bigots or nutters. In my experience, nutters do not know what they are doing whereas bigots know exactly what they are doing. This problem of caste discrimination in the UK is real and is not going away easily.

Mr Gian Chand Ghaiwal:

Gian Chand Ghaiwal is the founder of Central Valmik Sabha (UK International) and one of his greatest contribution to Valmiki Community is the foundation of first Valmiki Temple in Europe located in this city of Coventry. Gian has done an excellent work in getting Valmiki community united globally and they are now fighting right wing Hindu Forces in India who are stopping them from building a Valmiki Temple in Amritsar that would be the main centre of pilgrimage for the Valmiki community throughout the world.

Key points from his speech:

It is always a difficult issue to discuss and deal with issue of caste discrimination, whether it is in India or here in the UK. Caste discrimination in the UK can be seen all around us. Hindu Fundamentalist forces are denying its presence in this country and it is sad to see that authorities in the UK find it convenient to agree with the perpetrators. It is not very difficult to work out that if you want to show the evidence, it'll only come from the victims. Hindu caste system is being propagated through the temples, it is being taught in the schools, children are bullied in schools and universities. We cannot wait for the world around us to become fair and equal. We'll have to unite and fight for our rights in this country. I urge the British Government to take the side of the victims and not the perpetrators who are so worried about inclusion of caste in the single equality bill because they know that the perpetrators would be punished if it made unlawful. It is important that we expose the right wing Hindutava forces taking foothold in the UK. How can BJP be allowed to establish itself and flourish in this country when the political establishment has banned its own similar right wing fanatic party BNP. It does not make sense. All kinds of atrocities are taking place in India every day. You just have to read the newspaper or go on the internet and people from low caste are mistreated and denied their rights. Houses get burnt, nuns are raped, religious places are destroyed and children are getting killed by the Right Wing Hindu Fundamentalists everyday and yet we are told by Hindu leaders in the UK that when these people arrive at Heathrow Airport, they suddenly become civilized. It would be a good reflection on these leaders if they just accept that problem of caste discrimination is unacceptable in British Society and needs to be rooted out. I have this newspaper with me and there is a story of Mr Davender Ghai who is campaigning for rights of Hindus to die with dignity. I would like to ask Mr Ghai what has he ever done for Hindus from low castes who are campaigning for their human rights to live their lives in the UK with dignity.

Mr Joel Masih:

Mr Joel Masih is an evangelical preacher from Indian Christian community in Bradford. He has worked hard to mobilise his community and preach the message of Bible to those who have converted from

Hindu faith. According to him, it is not only people from low castes but many Indians from high castes have also converted to Christianity particularly in the UK.

Key points from his speech:

People from low castes are called by derogatory names like “Chura” & “Chamaar”. The word “Chura” in Hindi is called shackle worn on the feet which signify slave identity. People from low castes were actually slaves and have lived the life of deprivation and indignity for centuries. Hindus are hypocrites because they worship “Ramayan” but they hate people who are from Valmiki community. Dr Ambedkar was also from low caste but through education he rose to great heights and wrote the constitution of India. I am from Bradford and when Indian people go to work, they want to know what caste are you from. If they find out that you are from low caste, they start a hate campaign and make your life very difficult. People who suffer from caste discrimination should unite and put pressure on the Government to change the law and make caste discrimination unlawful. People from Hindu community are right wing fundamentalists and they do not want people from low castes to be liberated. Christianity teaches that God loves everyone equally. President Obama in USA has proved that Black community has overcome the disadvantage. I have no doubt that our communities can also fight and overcome the disadvantage because of caste.

Mr M J Alam Shah:

He also represents the interests of Pakistani Christians who, like in India, are always being victimized by Muslims community in Pakistan. Mr Shah is one of the first generation Pakistani Christians who came from a very educated and privileged background and has been very active in the Christian community in Coventry and also at a national level in the UK. Pakistani Christian community is a very effective and influential group and have always worked and worshipped together with Christians from India and showing to rest of the world that faith can demolish hatred between India and Pakistan.

Key points from his speech:

I am a Christian from Pakistan and there are Hindus there as well. I know that caste prejudice is in the social fabric of Hindus where ever they are and they take the caste system with them wherever they go. In Pakistan, it is not easy to be a Christian who are not treated with dignity and respect. I sometimes think that if I could, I would ask God why he made me a criminal before even I was born. Here in the UK, caste discrimination is everywhere. I read the newspapers and many times I come across articles and comments from Hindu Leaders, particularly Mr Jay Lakhani. He is always trying to deflect attention from Hinduism by pointing finger at Christians for their conversion agenda. I am not aware of any such conversion program to turn people against their religions in the UK or anywhere else. If people are not treated with respect and only experience hatred in a religion, they are bound to seek these things from somewhere else. Mr Lakhani is ignorant about the sacrifices one has to make to change one’s religion. It is not easy to convert. I have one message for Mr Lakhani that we were not invited by Her Majesty the Queen to come to this country. Now that we are here, we must have decency to respect the British Values. We left our countries of birth to find a new way of life in Great Britain. We should have left all the bad things behind us. If we bring bad values with us to this country and contaminate the British Values, where do we go from here. I know that we cannot change the situation in India or Pakistan but I urge all the organizations to join this campaign for putting an end to caste system and caste discrimination in the UK. I also urge British Government to take steps to ensure that one section of the community does not intimidate other groups who have equal human rights. It is important that “Caste” is included in the “Single Equality” bill and it would send a message not only to right wing Hindus to behave properly but would send signals to other countries including India.

Q&A Panel: Councillor Elias Mattu, Samuel Masih, David Webb & Davinder Prasad**Q1: What makes CasteWatchUK think that Caste discrimination can be rooted out from British Society?**

Panel: Caste System is a form of social control in which members of the so called low castes are subjected to discrimination and social disadvantages which are not acceptable in a modern democracy. Caste System has been in existence in India for centuries and its origins can be traced to the old Hindu religious scriptures which give a religious sanction to a life of total depravation and degradation for members of low castes. However, in this country everyone is guaranteed equality of opportunity in social life, education, employment and are everyone is free to practice their religious beliefs. Members of the so called low castes have achieved new and greater heights in the UK and they can be seen in all kinds of professions e.g. Doctors, teachers, lawyers, barristers, magistrates, politicians, businessmen, professors, consultants, managers, scientists, researchers, artistic directors, actors, producers, film makers and the list goes on and on. All this has been achieved without any reservation in education or employment. Our people have proved all the Hindu Theories wrong and have demonstrated that given equal opportunity, we can compete on the basis of our ability, skills and talents. We are also fortunate to be living in the best democracy in the world which does not tolerate any kind of discrimination and we have no doubt that action would be taken to address the problem of caste in this country and this pernicious form of discrimination would be rooted out.

Q2: What is CasteWatchUK doing to stop Caste discrimination from UK ?

Panel: CasteWatchUK has been working very hard to raise the public awareness about existence of caste discrimination in the UK because we believe that the problem has been brushed under the carpet for decades by the authorities and those who promote this social evil. Unless the problem is highlighted, the victims of this social evil will have to suffer for many more decades. We have raised awareness by taking part in the discussions on the Radio and TV channels, newspapers, magazines and we have a web-site internet www.castewatchuk.org. We have held workshops and conferences in which people from all the community groups, religious faiths, academia and political backgrounds have taken part. Our artistic wing "Caste Away Arts" has written, directed and produced a play called "The Fifth Cup" and we have taken this play on a national tour. We believe that theatre is the most effective way of reaching the hearts and minds of people - victims and those who are perpetrators. We have had meetings with department for Education and Skills and have highlighted that teaching of Caste System in schools in its present form should be banned. We are also lobbying politicians and British Government for change in the anti-discrimination law and inclusion of caste as a ground for discrimination in the single equality bill.

Q3: We see only older generation taking part in the conference speeches. What is CasteWatchUK doing to involve people from younger generation?

Panel: CasteWatchUK has very active involvement of younger members. The whole team of "Caste Away Arts" consists of younger members and their play "The Fifth Cup" gave performances in London, Southall, Birmingham and Leicester. Packed audiences in these performances and excellent feedback demonstrated how serious the problem of caste discrimination is and people from all the communities are ready to challenge the British Asian society to bring about change, promote equality for all, encourage community cohesion and integration. CasteWatchUK conducts its work through sub-committees and three of its five sub-committees have younger members as chair-persons.

Q4. How can Single Equality Bill change the way people think about castes?

Panel: CasteWatchUK is only campaigning for elimination of discrimination on the grounds of caste. People came into this country in fifties and sixties and they all worked very hard to start their lives in this country. David Webb, now a member of CasteWatchUK, was a police superintendent in Handsworth Area in Birmingham and he supported the campaigns for Racial Equality in seventies and eighties and has written a book called "Policing the Rainbow". There was no caste discrimination at the time when David served as Chairman of Racial Equality Commission, Handsworth, Birmingham. David has observed that in recent years, caste discrimination is on the increase and Indians & Pakistanis are now discriminating against their own people. David has very close friends who are from so called low castes. They have done really well in their lives and have achieved everything on the strength of their abilities and hard work. David says that he worked hard in community policing and knows that unless caste discrimination is made unlawful, it would not go away. David has been to India many times and he has personally seen how people from low castes are mistreated. That kind behaviour towards their fellow British Citizens cannot be tolerated in this country. If the law is changed, it would send signals to general public that caste discrimination is not acceptable in British Society. Those who are determined to create problems and insist in following their agenda to assert their superiority by birth would be dealt with through legal machinery in this country. We thought that Racial discrimination would not stop when Racial Equality Bill was passed in the parliament. Everyone knows what happens to people if they try to engage in racial discrimination. We are sure same would happen when legislation is changed and caste is included in the Single Equality Bill.

Q5. CasteWatchUK is bringing Ethnic Minorities into disrepute by playing the victim card. People from host community would think that these people are hypocrites, they are fighting campaigns against racial discrimination but are doing worse things themselves in the name of caste system. There must be other ways to root out caste discrimination?

Panel: We have tried to engage those who perpetuate caste discrimination and both Hindu Council UK and Hindu Forum of Britain have chosen to oppose our work. We have invited these and other organisations and they have not even bother to acknowledge any correspondence from us. We are glad that leaders of Hindu Human Rights group is present in this conference today. They have told us that they do believe that caste discrimination goes on and they want to join us in addressing the problem in the UK. They have also highlighted that they organised a similar conference in YMCA in London on 2nd March but both – Hindu Council UK as well as Hindu Forum of Britain boycotted their conference. We also sent invitation of Hindu Council UK and Hindu Forum of Britain but as usual, they have not bothered to respond to our request. Probably they know that they can pull strings and make British Government do whatever they want. We are lobbying Department of Education to change the way Hinduism is being taught in the school and ban teaching of caste system in schools and preaching of caste prejudice in Hindu temples. We are trying to reach the hearts and minds of people through theatre and the play "The Fifth Cup". It is a massive challenge for us but change in the legislation through Single Equality Bill would be the deciding factor to protect basic human rights of the victims of caste discrimination in the UK.

Q6. Why has CasteWatchUK dragged other religions into the debate. Your fight is with Hindus and why you can't sit down and resolve the problem with them? Why are you involving Christians into this debate?

Panel: CasteWatchUK has never asked Indian Christians to join our campaign for elimination of caste discrimination. It is the fault of Hindu Council UK and Hindu Forum of Britain and they have, through their fabricated and misleading Research reports, dragged Christians into the caste debate by blaming

them for stirring caste problems in the UK in order to convert low caste Hindus into Christianity. CasteWatchUK is a secular organisation and has provided a platform to Indian Christians to provide clarification to Hindu Organisations who are not present here to defend their false accusations about conversion agenda. Indian Christians converted to Christianity from low castes and Hindus still do not hesitate to mistreat them like they do to fellow Hindus from low castes.

Vote of thanks:

Davinder Prasad summarised the key points of the conference. He also extended welcome to members of Hindu Human Rights Group who were present in the conference. These young members of Hindu Community agree that caste discrimination is a problem in the UK that needs to be addressed.

Propaganda about forced conversion to stir up caste problems in the UK is a simple conclusion of simple minds of Hindu Fundamentalists to solve such a complex problem in the UK. A problem that could not be solved by numerous Saints and Gurus in India for so many centuries, the self styled Right Wing Pundits are giving assurances to British Government that they would solve the problem of caste discrimination in this country without any problem. According to their research, these Pundits are saying that there is no evidence that shows caste discrimination in this country.

CasteWatchUK strongly contest the findings of these Pundits regarding evidence of caste discrimination - Firstly, one has to make an effort to open eyes and try to look for the evidence which is all around us – in schools, in places of higher education, in temples, at community centres and social clubs and in employment where people from South Asia are present in significant numbers. Secondly, instead of asking those who perpetrate this pernicious form of discrimination, go and talk to those who suffer from it – the victims. Hindu Council UK and Hindu Forum of Britain, both conducted research and submitted their reports within a gap of few weeks. It is amazing how the two researches have come to the same conclusion. They seem to have started with their research by first establishing the conclusion and then working their way backwards to collect evidence to justify their conclusions. In case of Hindu Council UK, the only evidence in the form of a statement from Shri Guru Valmik Sabha, Southall, turned out to be a fabrication and this Sabha has lodged a complaint to Hindu Council UK asking for an apology for bringing their Sabha into disrepute by publishing a false statement which did not have their approval.. Hindu Forum of Britain, on the other hand, did not bother to consult the communities who are victims of caste discrimination. None of the numerous organisations that network with CasteWatchUK were approached by Hindu researchers for their research on caste discrimination. CasteWatchUK has no evidence of any conversion agenda by Christian Evangelists and so called low caste Hindus have never seen any kind of forced conversion neither in India or here in the UK. If people get disillusioned by a religious faith that is so discriminatory and offers nothing but lies, hatred and humiliation, it would not be long before people start making choices. Davinder thanked all those who took time to attend the conference and support our cause. It is important that Right Wing Hindu Fundamentalist groups should accept that they are now in the UK and must show respect for the British Values and the religious faith of other people in this country

Davinder Prasad thanked all the Guest speakers who took time to attend this conference. He also thanked those who attended the event and made a very good contribution. He also thanked the members of CasteWatchUK who worked so hard to make this conference a success.

Engaging with other Organisations in the UK

CasteWatchUK has now achieved recognition and image, nationally and internationally, as the champion of Caste related issues in the UK. Media, academic institutions, politicians, community groups and Dalit organisations contact CasteWatchUK on Caste related issues regularly in person, by email and in writing. Dalit Solidarity Network (UK), Voice of Dalit International, Dalit Freedom Network, Central Valmik Sabha (UK), Indian Christian Concern, Asian Christian Association, Asian Christian Fellowship, Federation of Ambedkarites & Buddhists Organisation, Ambedkar International Mission, Dr Ambedkar Memorial Committee of Great Britain (Wolverhaptan), Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha, Jesmond Road, Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha (Foleshill Road), West Midlands Faiths Forum and Committee for the Legislation on Caste Discrimination (CLCD-UK), - are now working in partnership with CasteWatchUK to tackle Caste discrimination in British Society.

We have engaged Equality & Human Rights Commission and are aiming to work in 2009 in partnership with this organisation on issues related to human rights of victims of caste discrimination in the UK. We are also in communication with Department for Communities & Local Government, Joint Committee on Human Rights in House of Commons, Department for Justice & Constitutional Affairs and Strength in Diversity Team of Home Office.

Professor Eleanor Nesbitt (Warwick University), Professor Paul Ghuman (Aberystwyth Wales), Dr Nicholas Jaoul (University of Paris), Dr Sushut Jadhav (University College, London) and Ms Annapurna Waugharay (Manchester University), Dr Meena Dhanda (Wolverhampton University) and Dr Vivek Kumar (Associate Professor) Jawaharlal Nehru University, India are some of the members of CasteWatchUK from the Academia who provide active support and guidance to the charity.

During 2007-08 the Executive Committee and Trustees raised awareness of Caste discrimination and worked to fight for a legal remedy in the UK for incidence of Caste discrimination. Our work was opposed by Hindu Council UK who published a very controversial report on "The Caste System" which took by surprise those community groups who are trying to root out caste discrimination from British Society. Exposure to British Values does not seem to have made any difference to the rigid mind set and caste prejudice of British Hindus. This report has been condemned for its contents and its conclusions by the community groups who are victims of the unacceptable social evil in the UK. It has resulted in emergence of numerous organisations and groups throughout who are now working in solidarity for elimination of caste discrimination from the UK and inclusion of "Caste Discrimination" in the Single Equality Bill.

Engaging with International Organisations

International Organisations have also been very supportive of the work of CasteWatchUK. Chetna Association from Canada, National Conference of Dalit Organisations (NACDOR), Backward And Minority Community Employees Federation (BAMCEF) from India, Buraku Organisation from Japan, Jakara Sikh Movement from USA and a Human Rights group in New Zealand; All India Christian Council, Manuski (India), Kamleshwar Valmiki Education Trust (Punjab) are some of the organisations that have developed links with the CasteWatchUK over the years.