

Single Equality Bill

Caste Based Discrimination: Nipping it in the Bud

11th January 2010

Memorandum

- ▶ **When** Caste in Politics plays havoc amongst the British electorate during local elections,
- ▶ **When** Caste in the work place leads to denial of shared accommodation; employee victimisation and harassment without legal remedy,
- ▶ **When** delivery of medical services is undermined by consideration of Caste where a medical doctor is suspended,
- ▶ **When** Caste in marriage and social relationship cause hatred, contempt, violence and harassment,
- ▶ **When** Caste identity leads to name-calling and causes low esteem and prejudice in society,
- ▶ **When** Punjabi Cultural music enforces caste stereotypes in Asian media,
- ▶ **When** religious places of worship are divided along Caste lines contrary to teachings of respective faiths e.g Valmiki Temples, Ravidasia Temples, Hindu Temples and Sikh Temples e.g. Ramgarhia, Singh Sabha's etc
- ▶ **When** Hindu organisations openly display their caste affiliations e.g All India Brahmin Association (UK), Bardai Brahmin Samaj etc,
- ▶ **When** the Charity Commission does not prevent associations from achieving Charitable Status wherein organisations intentionally entrench Caste divide,
- ▶ **When** Education Authorities allow the teaching of Caste System with respect to Hinduism in British schools in the name of diversity, multiculturalism and religious tolerance.

Whilst representing the interest of the South East Asian Diaspora and understanding the community's role in the national life of Britain, we express our abhorrence at the practice of Caste Based Discrimination (CBD),

Whilst taking cognisance of the prevalence of a Caste Divide in Britain and its associated Caste prejudice and concluding its detrimental effects on community cohesion,

Understanding Caste Based Discrimination to be the most submerged systemic violator of Human Rights and recognising its global impact,

Understanding the evidence based approach taken by the present Government in law making and endorsing representations and submissions made by others and in furtherance of media reports and discussions held on CBD, we hereby submit further evidence derived from testimonials of affected communities that represent real people and real cases,

Whilst respecting the imperatives of multiculturalism, we urge government to take cognisance of Caste as a stratified system of social exclusion and take steps to prohibit its propagation under the cover of religious and cultural rights,

Mindful that the Government of India protects victims of CBD vide Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989 and Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1995 and National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is established to promote respect for the human rights of *Dalits* and Tribal groups,

Acknowledging the now historic steps being taken by the present Government to harmonise anti-discrimination laws into the Single Equality Bill (SEB), we impress upon the Government of its legal obligation under the International Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) as recommended by the United Nations in 2003 to include in domestic legislation prohibition of Caste Discrimination and analogous systems of inherited status,

Recognising these moral imperatives, the government must take concrete steps to prevent the Caste System from establishing roots in Britain. The need has arisen to nip Caste Based Discrimination in the bud.

Steps to be taken could include exempting Charitable religious institutions from Charitable Status; Local Education Authorities to recognise Caste Bullying; Public Broadcasting media under public license should not promote Caste Stereotypes; Hindu teaching of Caste should be prohibited in schools; violence, harassment and victimisation resulting from Inter-caste marriages must be specifically recognised by law and law enforcement agencies educated to provide appropriate remedies.

We attach herewith short summary of typical Caste Discrimination cases from our case register. Names of individuals are deliberately withheld. Further Details can be provided upon request.

See back pages for list of organisations supporting this memorandum.

Caste and place of Work

Keywords: *Chooria, Chamar, Jat, Brahmin, Mochi* etc are castes and *Biradari, Dalits* also implies as such.

Case: CW0019

I am a Muslim. I came across Caste in a Steel Mill. A person was from a low-caste. He was not allowed to sit in the eating area where the high-castes sat.

Case: CW0023

..I came to be victimised on grounds of Caste as a local authority worker and subsequently faced victimisation again as a manager of a multicultural elders group

Case: CW0032

Mr HS, who is from Jat community, engaged in unprofessional and unwanted conduct with another employee, Mr KKG from Hindu Valmiki community. Mr HS's conduct towards Mr KKG had sole purpose and effect of violating his dignity and created an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating and offensive environment for Mr KKG at work. Mr HS's behaviour on 7th September was particularly bad which pushed Mr KKG over the edge when he made a formal complaint of caste discrimination against Mr HS to his immediate managers. He involved his Trade Union and declared that he was going on hunger strike. He announced that he would stay without food in front of the manager's office until caste based intimidation and bullying stopped by Mr HS and his other Jat friends who also engaged in derogatory behaviour with fellow workers.

some supervisors, who happen to be from 'low castes', are also victims of this Casteist behaviour where people from 'high caste' are reluctant to take orders from those of 'low caste'.....

Case: CW0031

Two Court Judgments relating to Caste discrimination occurred at a community organisation run by a Local Authority. The discrimination suffered was dealt under religious discrimination since Caste Based Discrimination is not presently recognised in Law.

Caste and Medical Services

Case: CW0034

Dr RM, a heart consultant at W Hospital in Coventry was suspended from his duties on the basis of fabricated charges filed against him by a fellow Indian Junior doctor who happened to be from higher caste. Dr RM had to fight to clear his name and was suspended for five years before he was reinstated back to his duties this year. The underlying cause for his suffering was caste prejudice.

Caste in Shops

Case: CW0009

... I was in an Indian sweet shop in Leicester and the owner boasted about being a Brahman and he said that he was higher than me and that was a God-proven fact. There was no arguing with him because he was so ignorant and so fixated with the idea of being higher. I just walked out...

Case: CW0011

.... I was serving a customer at my shop and this customer was of a so-called high caste background who constantly questioned me about my caste. This lady refuses to put money in my hand, like I am an Untouchable. Instead, she slams the money on the counter and tells me to put the change in the charity box. This has happened to me on many occasions now and the next time this happens, I will refuse to accept her custom until she puts money in my hand....

Caste in schools

Case: CW0012

.... I first heard the word choora at school at the age of 15 years. I was confused and angry because it had to mean something bad for it be said to me time after time. This abuse started when I became friendly with a Sikh boy called Hardeep . His dad had told him that chooras were a dirty tribe in India and were also called 'untouchable'. Name-calling happened every time my friend and I talked. He said it in front of some of my other mates. This made me feel ashamed because they actually started to ask me if it was true when I was not sure what it meant. They all laughed at me.

Hardeep carried on making my life a misery by whispering it [choora] when he walked by, laughing at me when I spoke in class as part of a discussion. On the last day of school before we broke up for summer holidays, Hardeep followed my friend and I through the park. He punched my friend in the face and gave him a nosebleed. I grabbed Hardeep by the neck and gave him a few hard punches. He too started bleeding and got up and ran away but saying 'You watch what happens to you, you b choora'.*

Subsequently, A fight broke out that required police intervention. I was let off because I explained that Hardeep is a racist and that he got a kick out of provoking me. Hardeep was cautioned by the police because my friend gave the same story.

The relationship continued in hostile state and there were further skirmishes in school that required Headmaster's intervention.

I believe people like Hardeep and his family should be punished for making other people's lives a misery. They are racists family full of hatred and it is them that are back-ward thinking and corrupt. I think they should be made an example of and punished.

Case: CW0014

..... he discovered the real world, and to him that was finding out his Caste identity. He argued that people at school perceived him as 'different' and consequently he was rejected from the 'Jat' group at school. He recalled that he remembered a lot of 'exclusion' from school and this was one of his first memories of how the Caste system affected him negatively. He adds that there was a certain 'rude' attitude from the higher Castes and it was always them that were in the 'in group' who were really outgoing and confident. His family were always quiet and reserved. Most recently he experienced some discrimination in a legal company, where he worked. He felt as if he was "being left out and not included" with his colleagues who were from 'higher' Castes. This behaviour led him to feel very upset and he did leave eventually.

....First started work at the age of 16 in a factory. I questioned what he experienced in terms of Caste discrimination. He explained how after his GCSEs he and his cousin

found jobs in a factory that was owned by some Asians. This particular factory was where his father once worked. On the discovery of his Caste (known because of his father) things started to change. He says:

*“ . . . things got really strange when I made tea for the boss’s brother he wouldn’t take it and this other guy said, ‘We can’t take this tea.’ And I was, like, ‘why?’ And he shook his head and said, ‘You know why.’ And I was like, ‘Spit it out.’ And he said in Punjabi that ‘we’re not allowed to take food from a chamaar’s hands’. That was low and me and **** ended up throwing a punch at that guy and we walked out huh ”*

Case: CW0015

During the 6th form when I was playing football with a group of people, the ‘high’ Castes among them:

“ . . .would ignore and blank me when we were playing football. It was like I didn’t exist - I was nothing - like not there at all.”

Case: CW0016

... “I tell you about another example in secondary school. One of my close mates was a Jat and she was a lovely girl but she was not - and I mean not allowed to take any food item from me because of her Caste”

Case: CW0022

.... My son endured caste Bullying in school and caused low esteem and affected his son's school life. Several school projects that he had to do for the GCSE weren't completed because of negativity of Caste that was around him in the class.

I am 28 years of age. I work as a professional legal adviser in a Law Firm.

My first experience of Caste Discrimination was at the of 15 when I was still at a secondary school. I had a very close friend of mine and used to visit each other's house and go out and play together as friends normally do . My friend's mother started to ask me the following questions once when I visited my friend's house.

- 1. What village do you come from in India*
- 2. What is your dad's name and surname*
- 3. What is your Mum's village in India*
- 4. What is your Mums Parents village in India*

.. then one day she asked me what my Caste was.

After this, I began to notice a change in my friend at school. He became very distant but he still occasionally spoke to me. One day he came to my house and told me that 'my mum does not want him to be friends with me because I was a low-caste'.

My second experience of Caste discrimination was in Sutton Coldfield College in Birmingham where Caste once again played a key part in who your friends were.

One other horrific incident happened when an unprofessional comment was made to my niece by a school teacher. I am highly concerned about this because my 3 year old daughter has just started to attend the same school and wonder what will happen to her.

An Indian Sikh teacher said to my niece, 'I cannot recognise your surname vassan, what are you?'. My niece replied what do you mean. He said what is your caste, you know I am Tarkhaan (carpenter Caste). She came home and I was there when she told her mother who just laughed it off.

I questioned my niece further and asked how long this had been going on. She replied, about a month. I asked her mother if she would report this to the head teacher because the questions he asked had no educational meaning and I am concerned as to why a teacher of whom you trust in a position of authority should be asking such questions. Pupils tend to look up to teachers and if our teachers of today are questioning pupils on Caste, what hope do we have in educating our children against Caste practices.

Caste Identity

Case: CW0001

.. there's trouble everywhere. You can go to Derby; you can go to Birmingham. Go to the student nights and you see it. Someone will get called a name and it will all kick off from there, and then get what you will call a ruck on your hands". [Rama]

"Yeh. I wasn't aware that this caste thing existed in my community. It meant nothing to me until I went to university, and then suddenly my caste was more important than the degree I was doing and the person I was. It wasn't what are you doing? what sort of person are you?, it was what caste are you and then I'll decide if I want to be friends with you". [Parveen]

So basically even in this day and age you still got abuse?

"We get treated like lower class. They believe they are the tractor drivers and we are their farm workers, we pull out the potatoes while they eat". [Rama]

Case: CW0004

... "My father used to tell me you are born jat and you will die a jat. Everybody be proud of whatever creed caste they are and I think we should stick to it. It's like roots. How can you plant a tropical plant into a cold country? It has to be in a tropical country otherwise you are lost. We are already lost in this country by eastern and western cultures and if this carries on the time will come nobody will know which background religion or caste they come from".

Case: CW0006

"I became first a councillor in 1989. My name was put forward by the Labour Party and members of the Labour Party but there was a lot of resentment on my selection. One of the relatives came to tell me in the pub when we were having a pint. He came to tell me that such and such person came to say 'Why are you going to vote for him because he is a chamaar'. So there was some kind of whispering campaign within the membership and though I got through the first time, they increased the Labour Party membership. It was unfair the way it was put in. Members didn't know they were members. They were brought in to vote me out. They did the next year. They could not stomach that a person like me should be a community leader for them when they are from a so-called high caste. They had to wage a campaign to get me out. And I was out".

Were you bitter?

"I was bitter. It is natural. But I knew that if I just keep showing the bitterness, that's what they want. So I found another ward where there were no Indians and that's where I came in and there was not a single member of Indian. I succeeded from there. I am still there from a long time".

Case: CW0032

Mr TK, deputy leader of the council Liberal Democrat group, said "gangster politics" and intimidation tactics arising from the 'biraderi' clan system were being used to force people, particularly women, to vote against their will in the way dictated by their wider families.

He accused Labour of exploiting the caste system in last week's council elections by arranging for supporters to stand at entrances to polling stations in order to put pressure on Asians to vote for the party.

The council code of conduct states that no more than two representatives from each political party should be outside a polling station, but Councillor TK said he had counted as many as 10 Labour supporters on several occasions in his own Washwood Heath ward.

His remarks follow a major report published last month by the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust which warned election fraud driven by immigrants practising "village politics" of the Indian sub-continent could be a crucial factor in deciding the future control of Birmingham City Council.

In a 94-page report called Purity of Elections in the UK – Causes for Concern, the trust argued that the UK's election system was at breaking point.

The study, which said numerous convictions for electoral fraud resulted from incidents in inner-city wards where a large concentration of voters originate from the Indian sub-

continent, added: "Significantly, these convictions have emerged alongside anecdotal evidence of more widespread, and long-run, practices associated with Pakistani, Kashmiri and Bangladeshi traditions of biraderi (brotherhood) clans influencing voting behaviour.

"It is widely suggested that extended family and kinship networks, frequently with their origins in settlement patterns in Pakistan and Bangladesh, are mobilised to secure the support of up to several hundred electors, effectively constituting a block vote."

Councillor TK said: "The biraderi system is disgusting. We live in a Western society, I was born and bred in Birmingham, yet certain people criticise me for my caste. It has all come down to the gutter level of politics.

"People were saying 'TK is from this clan or this part of Pakistan', but I am British through and through. I represent every single part of the community, English, Afro-Caribbean, Irish, every religion and every race. My politics are to work with people, all people.

"This is gangster politics in Birmingham and I won't tolerate it. We are in 2008 but we cannot progress until we eradicate the biraderi system."

Councillor TK, who beat Labour in Westwood Heath at last week's council elections with a majority of 181 votes, said he complained to officials about intimidation only to be told nothing could be done.

He added: "A couple of people were gripping women's arms saying 'vote here, vote here' and I complained to the polling station clerks but they said we can't do anything about it. It is out of our remit.

"We have guidelines about how we should conduct ourselves at polling stations. Well, I am sorry but it is not working.

"We don't want Pakistani politics. We want people to choose which way they want to vote whether they are old, young, men or women."

Councillor TK, who is also the prospective Lib Dem parliamentary candidate for Ladywood, said one of the false rumours spread about him by clans involved the sudden death in Pakistan of a well known barrister.

"They went around saying that Mr TK put money in the kitty to get this man killed. You can't believe how low people can go," he added.

His comments were supported by Mr TC, a Liberal Democrat councillor in Springfield, who said: "There is no doubt that people were being forced by the biraderi system to vote Labour. They didn't want to but because it is family they were being forced into it."

Caste and Marriage

Case: CW0002

"I met someone and just like started meeting each other and started falling in love slowly. Then we just thought we should get married. Her parents didn't agree. I'm quite educated. I had good jobs, worked for banks. They would only oppose us because they thought they were of a higher creed or caste than myself. Nothing else. Her parents started beating her up. One day her dad beat her up so much that I had to take her away from that house. Her back was like full of bruises and everything and I took her to the doctors. I was like under so much stress that how could people do this to their own daughter. They are like willing to hurt their daughter. They are willing to throw her away just because they think the person she loves is lower than them".

You were both totally cut off from her parents?

"I didn't stop her from seeing her parents but she would say that like you are not allowed to go there, let me go myself this and that. So I let her do it, but deep down I was thinking if they don't accept me as your husband, you're doing the same thing. I let it all go because I didn't want to put pressure on her. So eventually they just brainwashed her and ruined our marriage".

Was it caste that ultimately broke down your marriage?

"Yes, caste. Silly caste system".

"How old are you?

I'm 28 years old".

Case: CW0003

.... "People are still mentioning the issue of caste and bringing it up when it comes to marriage and generally it is the lower caste that are sort of outcaste (is the word simply) because people don't want to marry into a lower caste. And then we also find these days that those who originate from a lower caste prefer to meet someone of the same background because they know that they will perhaps be victimised so to say the fact that they are of a lower caste. The first generation are still around and have very strong beliefs and to some extent they have put those beliefs into their children as well" ...

Case: CW0013

...I've always heard remarks like Untouchable and choora and these sorts of names. As a little kid I never took note. I thought when people said he is Untouchable I understood it to mean really tough and a superior person,. I honestly didn't realise what it actually meant. So I never took these things to heart until I was 17.

I met what was then my girlfriend but she's my wife now. Now obviously, I am what is known as an Untouchable, a Valmiki, bottom of the casteing range. And my girlfriend was from 'upper caste'.

We went against their family and got married and she was disowned. She was disowned by the whole family, her sisters, mum and dad, the brother, everybody. The brother said 'Anybody meet her I'm going to disown you whether it be any of the sisters.'

He said 'Untouchable is still an Untouchable. You are Untouchable yesterday, today, you'll always be Untouchable, and nothing is going to change you in my eyes. No matter how big you become, how well off you might become, once a choora, always a choora'. I've realised that nothing has changed, we are still discriminated against

Case: CW0027

... People belonging to different castes contemplating inter-caste marriage often face the wrath of parents. I have had examples where youngsters contemplate committing suicide ... ,comments a Member of Parliament

Case: CW0028

.... I had inter-caste marriage which was not accepted and now affects my child. To be born of an untouchable woman that child will always be known as unclean and dirty and regarded as social leper and will never be able to move over the caste barrier.

The mother who gave her birth will be regarded as unclean inside and would mean that child will be open to abuse.

It does not matter how much money you have in the bank or how many degrees you have under your belt many will choose to define you by your caste.

I was not allowed to go into the Kitchen or touch food because I was considered impure.....

Case: CW0029

... I am black and I married a Punjabi Brahmin lady. My sister-in-law (wife's sister) married a Mochi (Ravidassi). Over the years, I have now been accepted in the family but his brother-in-law is still not welcome in the family because of his low caste.....

Case: CW0030

... My Uncle's life was ruined due to his relationship with a low-caste and due to family pressures he was forced him into a life of drinking and violence that ultimately killed him....

I am now facing a similar situation myself as I have enormous pressure from family to avoid getting involved with other low-caste people...

Caste and Punjabi Cultural Music

Case: CW0005

Radio DJ..

... "On a purely bhangra level there are many songs about jat pride, about the life of a jat, almost jat nationalism is running rampant in bhangra music now to the point where every bhangra album that comes out Britain has at least one track that alludes to the power of the jats. One of the most famous bhangra songs is ever is 'Putha jatta de' which mean we are the sons of jats and we are proud of who we are and what we do". This kind of thing is enforcing stereotypes....

Caste and Media

Case: CW0035

TV Broadcaster..

...we have had a complaint to ofcom about me for the show on caste. Apparently there are some religious Hindus who think I was completely out of line [when discussing Caste related issues]and accused me of inciting hatred and unfairness ..I am a bit anxious...

Memorandum Supported by

1. Ambedkar International Mission, London
2. Anti Caste Discrimination Alliance
3. Association for Community Cohesion
4. Bhagwan Valmik Ashram Birmingham
5. Bhagwan Valmik Sabha, Oxford
6. Bhagwan Valmik Sabha, Wolverhampton
7. British Asian Christian Council UK
8. CasteAwayArts
9. Central Valmik Sabha International (UK)
10. Coventry Asian Christian Fellowship
11. Coventry Christian Association
12. Coventry Mazahabi Sikh Association
13. Dalit Solidarity Network UK
14. Dr Ambedkar Buddhist Organisation Birmingham
15. Dr Ambedkar Education Society, Birmingham
16. Dr Ambedkar Memorial Committee of Great Britain
17. Federation of Ambedkarite and Buddhist Organisations UK
18. Federation of Asian Businesses in Europe, Birmingham
19. Global Christian Faith Ministry, Bradford
20. Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha , Birmingham
21. Guru Ravidass Education Trust, Birmingham
22. Helping Hand, Huddersfield
23. Indian Christian Concern, Wolverhampton
24. Indian Overseas Congress, Coventry
25. Indian Workers Association , Coventry
26. Jagat Guru Valmik Ji Maharaj Temple, Birmingham
27. Maharishi Valmik Sabha, Coventry
28. Rotary Club of Handsworth, Birmingham
29. Sandwell Confederation of Indians, Smethwick, West Midlands
30. Sandwell Multifaith Network, Sandwell, West Midlands
31. Sant Nirankari Mandal, UK
32. Sant Nirankari Mission, Buckinghamshire
33. Sant Nirankari Mission, Erith, Kent
34. Sant Nirankari Mission, Leicester
35. Sant Nirankari Mission, Southampton
36. Sant Nirankari Mission, Wolverhampton
37. Seventh Day Adventist Church, Bedford
38. Shri Gobind Singh Khalsa College, Chigwell, Essex
39. Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha UK
40. Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha, Jesmond Road, Coventry
41. Shri Guru Valmik Sabha (Southall)
42. Shri Guru Valmik Sabha International, London

43. Sikh Study Forum
44. Sikh Women's Alliance
45. Sikhs In England (with reference to discrimination within the Sikh community)
46. South East Sikh Gurudwaras
47. Valmik Ladies Sabha
48. Valmiki Education Trust, London
49. VIBES UK
50. Voice of Dalit International, London