



March 1st, 2008

Dr J C Sharma
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Dear Dr Sharma

RE: “The Caste System” - HCUK Report by Dr. R. P. Sharma

We have read with interest the HCUK Report by Dr. R P Sharma, on ‘The Caste System’.

Clearly, the HCUK feels justified in explaining its position on the foundations of the Caste System with respect to their religion. However, HCUK has not denied that the Caste System plays a part in regulating the social life of the Indian Diaspora in Britain and has acknowledged its global implications by including Christianity, Islam, and Sikhism as the other infected religions.

The report has a Brahminist bias and attempts to lay the blame for the incipient form of Caste Practices at the feet of foreigners - foreign invasions and foreign agencies. This is not the first time this argument is presented where foreigners are blamed for the country’s ills. However, the report is extremely low on admitting that the Hindus had anything to do with the Caste System despite ample evidence to the contrary found in the Hindu Sacred Literature. The Report manifestly contradicts itself in numerous places.

It is not the purpose of CasteWatchUK to go into the historical foundations of The Caste System but only briefly touch on these to show how the ancient pattern of society descended into its present form. Although the British could have been guilty of the many sins and evils they may have perpetrated in the name of Empire around the world, Caste System was definitely not their invention. Neither is it our purpose to interpret the Sacred Literature of the Hindus. You would agree with us that ancient social divisions have descended into modern times. Sadly, ancient Religious Laws persist as a custom and plagues modern society. Taking a couplet composed by Shri Guru Ravidass Ji, who prevailed before the British arrived in India, this is what he says which proves the point that Caste existed in pre-British-colonial era :-

“Jat Jat Mein Jat Hai Tin Kelan Ke Pat Ravidas Na Mans Na Ban Sake Jab Tak Jat na Jat” Shri Guru Ravidas Ji is arguing that there are Caste within Caste just like the banana leaf which has leaf within leaf. Until caste is annihilated human beings will not be liberated.

HCUK report also over-emphasises the fact “giving priorities to Dalit means those from higher castes are now complaining that even if they score highly in their entrance exams, they cannot get places”. This statement has no relevance to caste situation in UK and serves no purpose other than importing caste prejudice and casteist euphoria from India into the minds of young British Asians in this country. Dr R P Sharma presumes that people from Dalit communities lack in abilities or intelligence. The report makes no mention about the brutal suppression, institutional bullying and widespread

harassment of young Dalits in places of education by their higher caste peers and teachers and consequent trauma disabling their psychological development. This brutal mistreatment of young Dalit children have been in existence from pre-historic times e.g. *“The story from Mahabharata when a Dalit pupil called Eklavaya acquired fighting skills that no higher caste person could match. Eklavaya’s martial abilities, competence and fighting skills were brutally taken away from him by a higher caste teacher by amputating his body part.”* The situation in schools in India is no different today and newspapers are full of atrocities and humiliation of young Dalits in schools and universities. Higher caste establishment is trying its best to maintain the status quo in social caste structure by disrupting the learning process of Dalits and preventing their educational, psychological, social and economic development. However, younger generations of communities, that are victims of caste prejudice in UK, have proved all “Hindu Theories” wrong. Given equal opportunities in education, right environment to learn and availability of financial means, they have demonstrated that they can achieve new heights in their lives without any reservation in schools, universities or employment. It is very worrying that Hindu Council has chosen not to recognise this phenomenon, learn from it and use it to educate Fanatic Hindus in India and here in UK.

CasteWatchUK is only interested in the psychology of Caste, its traumatising effects on individuals and the resulting damage to the morale of Dalit communities in UK. We now consider ourselves as British citizens and expect protection of our basic human rights by British government. Whether the writers of the ancient Hindu doctrines intended to write one thing & meant another is none of our concern. As responsible citizens of UK, we are interested in the removal of the social evil of Caste, to provide relief to those who are affected by Caste prejudice by raising awareness of Caste based discrimination in a democracy that is prepared to listen and legislate.

CastewatchUK is a secular organisation without any religious agenda, working to address issues that arise out of Caste practices that affect the lives of people living in Britain as victims of Caste Discrimination - whether they are members of the Hindu Faith, Sikhs, Islamic, Buddhists or any religion, however widespread. We strongly resent and condemn Hindu Council UK for the accusation on page 6 of HCUK’s report that *“CasteWatchUK’s intention appears to be to make money and create further divisions in society”* whereas in fact the opposite is the case. The HCUK by presenting the Statement from the Shri Guru Valmik Sabha Southall are guilty of mischief and the Sabha is guilty of a collusion, which they will one day regret.

CasteWatchUK has also been accused by HCUK of misleading the political classes in Britain which imply that political classes are gullible. It is very unfortunate and makes us feel sad that decades of exposure to British values has not been able to rid the rigid mind set of members of Hindu Council UK of caste prejudice. We believe that first step towards solving a problem is to accept that the problem exists and from our experience Hindu Council UK has always been in a denial mode. How can their offer of help to CasteWatchUK and other organisations to address the caste related issues be taken seriously? It is obvious that HCUK is only paying a lip service, trying to make a public show of the humane side of their religious faith but has no real intention to root out this social evil from British Society. Since its inception, CasteWatchUK has successfully raised public awareness about existence of caste discrimination in UK. BBC Documentary “Caste Divide in Britain” in 2003 and numerous other media coverage of caste discrimination in UK are the result of such work. CasteWatchUK has successfully raised public awareness about existence of caste discrimination in UK. We have highlighted the fact that those who practice caste discrimination in UK deny that they are doing it and the victims are too scared to highlight their plight and chose to suffer in silence because there is no one who can provide help. Caste prejudice is so deeply ingrained in the minds of Indian Diaspora that they do not seem to be consciously aware that their caste prejudice and social behavior is causing suffering to others.

Hindu Council UK has raised question about how widespread is Caste Discrimination in UK and whether it is necessary to prevent this form of discrimination in law. These concerns were never raised by Hindu Council UK when Race Relation Act was going through parliament to protect black and ethnic minorities from racial discrimination. CasteWatchUK would not want to drag the Black community into our debate by highlighting prejudices “High Caste Hindus” have towards black people. Although we have many references and testimonials given by individuals to support our contention we have urged government to conduct an inquiry into Caste based discrimination in Britain. We also take the view that although a legislative framework will send a powerful signal to society our real interest lie in social transformation. It’s about changing the minds and attitudes towards ancient customs that have no validity in modern times. You have rightly acknowledged and it is a welcome sign that ‘The Caste System should and will undergo reforms in the social arena, through education’. It is this part of your statement that we are in full agreement with. However, you go on to say that ‘unjustified discrimination and abuse will be eliminated and the original concept of caste re-established’ which appears warped. Are you suggesting a return to *Chaturvarna (4 Colours /divisions of society)? If so, how will present society be re-organised into the four *varnas (colours)? Who is going to undertake that stupendous task? Is there a ‘justified’ form of discrimination or is positive discrimination implied here? We agree that ‘every human deserves dignity and respect’. The issue before us is what ways this goal can be achieved.

Referring to the Times2 supplement dated Monday, 25th February 2008 one can see an open letter written by Mr Sathnam Sanghera brought up in a ‘Caste-conscious Sikh community’ to his mother saying ‘sorry mum, but I’ll marry who I want’. Of course, there are numerous examples of the younger generation breaking away from the grip of Caste but there are others who are subsumed by it. Sathnam sets himself free from the burden of Caste because the founder of the Sikh faith said that ‘Caste is worthless and so is its name’. All the Sikhs have to do is to follow their religious calling and unburden themselves from Caste. Similarly, the same principle could extend to Christians and Islamists. Can the Hindu call upon his religion for the expression of such a sentiment? Can the Hindus express their moral indignation towards the Caste System and declare an open war against it? If it can then they will surely have to discard part of their Sacred Texts and open a new chapter in their Religion. Whilst the practice of Caste System is found amongst the non-Hindus it does not have the same religious sanction that Hinduism has.

Numerous temples and Gurudwaras emerged in early sixties in Britain founded on Caste lines because at one time members of the ‘Dalit’ community were made unwelcome by Caste minded Hindus and Sikhs. Indeed the first Ramgarhia Sikh temple opened in 1969 in Foleshill Road, Coventry that resulted from a split in Sikh Temples in UK on caste basis. Questions are raised in school playgrounds, colleges and even Universities where students enquire about others Castes. Questions of Caste are raised in pubs and clubs and on the factory floor. There was a case of a Shopkeeper in Wolverhampton where the customer refused to take small change from the vendor lest they found their touch polluting and insisted that the change be placed on the counter to avoid contact. A similar incident came to light in Coventry. On the factory floor, again in Wolverhampton, we know of women of so called upper Castes not taking water from the same tap from where the so-called lower caste person drinks. These stories are also coming to light from other cities which have a significant South Asian population. There was an attempt by “High Caste Hindus” to introduce and legitimise caste based discrimination into Local Government Procedures in 1995 in Coventry. A campaign was started by victim communities and authorities were alerted. Coventry City Council stopped the introduction of this unacceptable document from becoming a part of their work procedures of personnel department. Hindu Council UK was aware of this incident but we have no evidence whether they were the instigators. Hindu Council did not offer any help or disapproved it at the time and the problem was resolved by intervention from Coventry City Council. Banners are painted on car windscreens extolling Caste virtues. Caste based Bullying occurs in schools and higher places of education. Caste System is taught as part of the Hindu Curriculum in schools reinforcing unacceptable Hindu practices

in the young and innocent minds belonging to all castes. Some have been so stigmatised by Caste at university that their experiences have caused them to write Post Graduate dissertations to expose the discrimination they faced. Others experiencing Caste Discrimination have found expression in art and music.

Matrimonial sections of the English speaking ethnic press also have Caste underpinning, not to mention web sites like Shaadi.com. There have been cases of physical violence against those who have broken through the Caste barrier and have undergone inter Caste marriages or those who have eloped. Mr Virender Sharma, M.P. for Ealing & Southall, when interviewed by More4 Channel News, recently says that people are committing suicides in this country on grounds of caste. The list of testimonies and examples can go on and on but what use it to those who suffer from a disease of impaired vision and selective hearing.

The issues Caste raises are profound. Its archaic forms are open to challenges and thousands of questions arise. It is the view of CasteWatchUK that all forms of Caste based Discrimination be examined and a study be made in Britain and any remedial action taken. It is not the purpose of CasteWatchUK to examine each and every foundation of Caste origins but to acknowledge the right of victims to be heard fairly, justly and unequivocally. We live in a democratic country wherein the Parliamentarians are committed to remove all forms of discriminations including Caste. We request each and every community to cooperate with this effort to address the social anomalies felt by individuals and communities. Thus we can strive to create an open and cohesive society, based on respect and equal opportunities for all.

We would like to suggest that you reconsider your position on caste discrimination in UK, as highlighted in your HCUK report. Instead of pointing blaming fingers at others, we urge you to join us, the victim communities, the host community, politicians, other social institutions and academics in UK in taking appropriate actions to root out this social evil from British Society before it is too late. Communities, that are victims of caste prejudice in UK, consider themselves to be fortunate and liberated and it feels great to be living in a free, fair, civilised and the best democracy in the world. We are sure that you would agree with us on this, otherwise most of the members of Hindu Council UK would not be living here. Please support us in our efforts to get the legislation on equality amended and to make caste discrimination unlawful in UK. We are confident that your support to our cause would demonstrate to Hindus in UK and around the world that we are all equals and would be a giant step in ensuring that people feel proud to be Hindus in a casteless society. It would also send signals all over the world that the time has come for a global action to put an end to the centuries of disadvantages and oppression faced by lower caste Hindus in the name of caste across the world.

Yours sincerely,

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