

**No Escape**

**Caste Discrimination in the UK**

**Dalit Solidarity Network UK Report**

**July 2006**



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The Dalit Solidarity Network UK (DSN) regards caste discrimination as one of the most severe human rights problems in the world today. DSN was established in 1998 to undertake advocacy and lobbying activities in the UK to raise awareness of caste discrimination and to campaign for its eradication. DSN is part of the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) and is an influential organisation whose members include international development NGOs, MPs, journalists, Dalit organisations and individuals.

## **Foreword**

*I first became truly aware of the extent of caste discrimination in India, and of the resistance to it, when I attended the World Social Forum in Mumbai in January 2004. I had been aware that there was such a system, and that it did affect many poor people, but the reality of it struck home in that experience.*

*There were several thousand Dalits at the World Social Forum protesting about the vicious effects of the caste system in India and other countries of South Asia. Hundreds of them marched, dancing and beating their drums, objecting to being regarded as the polluted outcastes of society. I then learnt more about the problem when I met a group of Dalit activists on a second visit to Mumbai in February 2006.*

*I was therefore horrified to realise that caste discrimination has actually been exported to the UK through the Indian Diaspora. The same attitudes of superiority, pollution and separateness appear to be present in South Asian communities now settled in the UK. This is an issue the Government and all those concerned about good community relations must address. Any discrimination, of whatever kind, is unacceptable and must be both legislated against and challenged by all appropriate means.*

**Jeremy Corbyn MP**

**Dalit Solidarity Network Trustee and Member of the Parliamentary Group on Human Rights**

## 1. Executive Summary

### Caste Discrimination in the UK

Around 300 million people worldwide<sup>1</sup> suffer from caste<sup>2</sup>-based discrimination and caste like practices linked to untouchability under a hidden apartheid of segregation, exclusion and exploitation<sup>3</sup>. Those in the UK involved in campaigning against caste discrimination felt it was important to understand the dynamics of caste within their own countries, as well as seeking to support the struggle for justice and rights of the Dalit<sup>4</sup> communities in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and elsewhere. This report is a first step in the beginning of this process. It comes at a time of growing awareness of caste discrimination amongst the international community. In 2002 the United Nations (UN) Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination passed a General Recommendation on Caste Discrimination and in 2005 the UN Human Rights

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<sup>1</sup> The UN is currently investigating 'discrimination on the basis of work and descent' which is the official definition within the UN of caste discrimination (see Appendix 5). The investigation will look at the international application of this form of discrimination not only in South Asia but also in countries such as Japan, where discrimination on the basis of work and descent against the Buraku people is extensively documented, and countries in Africa such as Senegal and Nigeria where this form of discrimination is only now being identified.

<sup>2</sup> The caste system has existed for more than 3000 years. Over time the caste system became formalised into 4 distinct classes (Varnas). At the top are the Brahmins, the priests and arbiters of what is right and wrong in matters of religion and society. Next the Kshatriyas who are soldiers and administrators. Then the Vaisyas, the artisans and commercial caste and finally, the Sudras, the farmers and peasants. These four castes are said to have come from Brahma's mouth (Brahmin), arms (Kshatriyas), thighs (Vaisyas) and feet (Sudras). Beneath the four main castes comes a fifth group who literally have no caste. They are the 'outcastes', the 'untouchables' or the Dalits. For further information see the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights, [www.Dalits.org](http://www.Dalits.org).

<sup>3</sup> For further information see Human Rights Watch report on caste - <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/globalcaste/caste0801-03.htm>

<sup>4</sup> 'The term Dalit, drawn from the Marathi language, literally means 'crushed' or 'broken', but more generally Dalit is translated as 'oppressed people'. The term evolved in South Asia out of various struggle and liberation movements fighting and campaigning against untouchability and caste based discrimination. These movements chose the name because it could bring together all the affected 'untouchable' communities in South Asia under a common ideological term. The term Dalits therefore refers to the people of South Asia who were outside the hierarchical caste system, and, therefore, deemed outcastes. Regarded as the most marginalised in society, they were and still are considered polluted and assigned the occupations deemed too defiling for other caste to do, such as manual scavenging, sweeping, disposing of corpses, digging graves etc. Born into his or her caste, a Dalit could not hope to escape their low social status or to ever be employed in a more lucrative or socially respectable occupation.' Caste Race and Discrimination, Discourses in International Context SK Thorat and Umakant, ed., Rawat Publications, 2004, pages 4-5.

Commission (now Council) initiated a three year study on 'discrimination by work and descent.' The first International Consultation on Caste Based Discrimination took place in Kathmandu in November 2004.<sup>5</sup>

This report is based on responses from Dalit communities and individuals to a questionnaire<sup>6</sup> on the existence and impact of caste discrimination in the UK, including anecdotes and testimonies that were gathered during the research. It is very much an initial exploration and outlines recommendations for future research that is essential if we are to develop a better understanding and wider picture of caste discrimination in the UK. Although limited it is the first national study of its kind.

It is estimated that at least 50,000 Dalits live in the UK<sup>7</sup>. Exact figures are unknown due to issues around identification as a 'Dalit', and the changing of names. Caste is not currently recognised as a form of discrimination in UK legislation. However the government is currently reviewing all forms of discrimination in the UK in preparation for the drafting of the Single Equality Act.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the limitation in the scope of this research certain sectors clearly emerge as key areas of concern. These include discrimination in employment, education and religious institutions, particularly in relation to access to temples. This research has been carried out as part of DSN's ongoing work in raising the issue of caste discrimination with the Commission for Racial Equality, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Home Office in

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<sup>5</sup> The report from this conference can be found at <http://www.idsn.org/Documents/pdf/ICCBDRreport.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Approximately 130 individuals and organisations were interviewed as part of this research study.

<sup>7</sup> Estimates vary widely from between 50,000 to the much higher 200,000 estimated by some Dalit organisations such as the Federation of Ambedkarite and Buddhist Organisation and Shri Guru Ravidas Sabha. For further details see Appendix 3 - Overview of Dalit Populations in the UK.

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.theequalitiesreview.org.uk/>

the UK. These bodies have indicated to DSN that they are looking into the presence and impact of such discrimination and whether it should be incorporated into existing equality laws in the UK.

This report clearly illustrates that caste discrimination exists in the UK. DSN believes that it is as unacceptable as any other form of discrimination and that policy makers, civil society and the judiciary must work together to ensure its eradication. In particular we urge the Home Office, the Department of Education and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to prioritise this issue and to work together with organisations like DSN to raise awareness and develop recommendations and mechanisms to address it. It is also vital that caste should be included in the equality legislation which is due to come before Parliament during late 2006 and 2007.

## 2. Background <sup>9</sup>

Immigration during the 1950s, 60s and 70s saw a new wave of migrants coming to the UK from Asia. The majority came from rural villages bringing with them specific values, culture, patterns of behaviour, and, varying skill and knowledge levels depending on their socio-economic and political backgrounds. Kinship networks began to develop so that people from particular villages would live near each other. As communities continued to grow through family reunions, personal and family honour or 'izzat' became increasingly important. The immigrants had extended families that lived together, bound by a complex set of obligations which often involved pooling of income and joint living arrangements. As a result, extended families and wider networks of kin and communities have been established in many parts of The UK. The close knit family unit aims to fulfil all the needs of the family members and in turn demand a strong loyalty in every aspect of life. Izzat has considerable influence on family obligations which children of second and third generation immigrants are often expected to adhere to.

The majority of South Asian communities traditionally have a strong religious affiliation which provides mutual identification and solidarity. These religious communities have, in turn, specific loyalties to caste and descent groups. Such loyalties belong to jati (sub caste, occupation) and biraderi (lan/caste based) groups or sects.

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<sup>9</sup> Including information from Mr. Balram Sampla (Vice Chair of DSN), Ms Y. Sekhon, (PhD student, Bournemouth University), *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain*, edited by Roger Ballard, 1996 and Mr. Chanan Chahal, (President of the Federation of Ambedkar and Buddhist Organisations).

With the establishment of religious institutions, growing izzat and competition among immigrants there has been increased pressure to belong to or to conform to a particular group. For example Sikhs began to re-grow their hair and readopt the turban, Muslims gave up alcohol and many Hindus became strict vegetarians. With the consolidation and growth of these communities, networks of mosques, gurudwaras and mandirs were established. These are places of social interaction and important areas of religious celebration and community rituals. Those who were outcastes or so called 'lower castes'<sup>10</sup> were often made to feel unwelcome and experienced direct and indirect prejudice which made them conscious of their 'inferior' status.

Caste remains invisible in much of British society, creating subtle social and political linkages (biraderi). However caste steps out from the shadows every time a marriage is arranged, a child is born or a new professional or business opportunity emerges. The membership of a particular caste implies that a person becomes part of a person-based social network that controls insider information about economic opportunities, transmits skills, and provides varied types of human and material support.

This report is an initial investigation into the existence of caste and caste discrimination amongst the Asian Diaspora in the UK, although here it limited to the Indian community<sup>11</sup>. The Dalit experience is that caste discrimination is not something which you are responsible

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<sup>10</sup> These two terms are often used interchangeably as a derogatory term however the lower castes are actually shudras who are not Dalits (See footnote 2) It should also be pointed out that for Dalits and those working in the field of Dalit rights it is unacceptable to refer to 'lower' or 'upper' castes and the latter are increasingly referred to as 'dominant' or 'oppressive' castes.

<sup>11</sup> Caste exists in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal however for this study the Indian Diaspora was targeted with the majority of the communities interviewed, being mostly Ravidassi and Valmiki, which originate from the Punjab.

for but something which is 'done to you' by more dominant castes. For many, caste is an essential part of social acceptance and identity but for Dalits this is being questioned. In the UK different caste groups have been able to maintain their communities intact due to traditionally arranged marriages within particular castes. This has led to the continuation and development of communities along strict caste lines.

Caste relationships and the different manifestations of caste discrimination are difficult and complex processes. Dr Eva-Maria Hardtmann (2003)<sup>12</sup>, a Swedish researcher, who has studied the Indian Diaspora in the UK, has documented that caste affected communities have real difficulties when they live abroad. She focused her research on the three main Dalit communities in the UK, the Ravidassis, the Valmikis and the Ambedkarites. Most come from the Punjab with the latter group primarily Buddhists who follow the thought and practice of Dr Ambedkar<sup>13</sup>. Hardtmann comments that the relationship between the Ambedkarites and the Ravidassis is 'highly ambivalent.' She also refers to earlier UK research by Mark Juergensmeyer<sup>14</sup> who states that, 'Caste relationships between caste groups seem to be upheld to a great

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<sup>12</sup> Hardtmann - *Our Fury is Burning: Local Practice and Global Connections in the Dalit Movement*. Stockholm Studies in Social Anthropology 54, Stockholm University, 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Dr Ambedkar – Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was born in India 14 April 1891. He was a Dalit from the Mahar community and rose to become the undisputed leader of all the Dalits in India. Between 1913 and 1923 he completed an MA and PhD at Columbia University, a further PhD at the London School of Economics and concluded his law studies to qualify as a barrister in the UK. He returned to India in April 1923 and started his legal practice in Bombay. Ambedkar soon began to organise the Dalits and to empower them both socially and politically. His criticism of Gandhi, the Congress Party and of caste Hindus grew increasingly strong and in 1935 he founded the Independent Labour Party. Ambedkar became a member of the Constituent Assembly in 1946. As Chair of the drafting committee he became one of the principal architects of independent India's Constitution. He was India's first Minister of Law but on 27 September 1951 he resigned from Jawaharlal Nehru's government, protesting at the slow pace of reform. At a ceremony in Nagpur in October 1956, he converted to Buddhism saying 'I was born a Hindu but I will not die one.' He died in his sleep on 6 December 1956.

<sup>14</sup> Juergensmeyer - *Religion as Social Vision: The Movement against Untouchability in Twentieth Century Punjab*, University of California Press, Los Angeles/London, 1982.

extent...the rules of endogamy (marrying within the caste group) are still strictly followed.'

Most Indian organisations in the UK are either caste or religious based with even Dalit community organisations identifying themselves by their caste status. These sharp divisions became obvious following nationwide charity appeals after the devastating earthquake in Gujarat. Dalit communities withheld money as reports surfaced that Dalits in Gujarat had been denied equal access to relief distribution and twenty two temples associated with Dalits boycotted the appeals.

The UK government promotes cultural diversity at many different levels and the Department of Education encourages schools to teach all religions to pupils as part of the National Curriculum. Pupils have been taught the caste system simply as a hereditary system within Hinduism which determines one's place in society.<sup>15</sup> This can result in some children of Indian origin going home and asking their parents, '*What are we - what position do we have in society?*'

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<sup>15</sup> *Advanced level courses in Hinduism as supported by the largest examination board in England (Edexcel) no longer specify 'Hereditary Caste' as a topic of study in Hinduism from September 2006. The topics at GCSE continue to incorporate hereditary caste system in an apologetic manner.* As reported by Jay Dilip Lakhani, Director of Education, Hindu Council UK June 2006.

### 3 Initial Observations

This initial research is a first step in identifying the nature and extent of caste discrimination in the UK. The research was based on questionnaires and interviews with key members of the Dalit communities. The research focuses only on these communities and is a first attempt to identify Dalit communities and their experiences in the UK. It was a learning experience for all involved and given the limited resources and time available it was not possible to investigate the issues comprehensively.

Carrying out research on caste discrimination in the UK is extremely challenging for many reasons. During the course of this study it became clear that there was a lot of reluctance to discuss caste as it relates to communities living in the UK as it is seen as an issue only for Dalits in India. Even within community organisations opinions varied widely. A lot of time was spent in building up an understanding with the individuals, groups and communities interviewed about the need for the research and the motivation behind it. An important indirect output of the research was that awareness was raised about the types of caste discrimination that occur in the UK and the topic debated.

Listed here are some of the main issues that arose during the course of the research - the obstacles encountered, concerns participants had with the questionnaire and misunderstandings about the purpose of the research:

?? There was little awareness of Dalit organisations in the UK and the work of organisations such as DSN. Therefore a lot of time was taken initially to explain the work of DSN, the rationale for the study and to

address peoples concerns about raising such an issue. This brought out new perspectives about caste discrimination but also made participants wary of responding to a formal questionnaire on a sensitive matter from an organisation with which they were unfamiliar.

- ?? Some questions were interpreted differently by different groups and some participants were reluctant to answer specific questions due to concern about contradicting the opinions of Dalits living in India.
- ?? Some Dalit groups strongly objected to raising the issue of caste and chose not to participate in the research.
- ?? Some participants did not wish to identify themselves as Dalit or acknowledge caste discrimination as an issue in the UK.
- ?? Some participants felt that exposing themselves as Dalit could have repercussions for their day-to-day life in the UK and were therefore reluctant to raise the issue publicly for fear they would be looked down upon by dominant caste people, that their business may be hindered or they may suffer discrimination at work.
- ?? Some participants and Dalit organisations interviewed were interested only in raising the issue of Dalits in India.



## 4. Findings of the Research

### 4.1 Caste and Identity in the UK

Question	Yes	No
Do you think caste is an identity?	47.41%	52.59%
Do you believe that Indian people in the UK follow the caste system?	84.67%	15.33%
Do you think caste is necessary?	17.78%	82.22%
Does caste divide people?	80.00%	20.00%
Do you belong to any caste?	84.44%	15.56%
Are your children aware of their caste?	29.23%	70.79%

The research revealed that one in every two Dalits identified themselves by caste, with many observing that within the Indian community, caste is their identity. One person told us, *'If you wanted to find someone's house in Southall, one would get the information only by specifying that person's caste and not simply by stating their name'<sup>16</sup>.*

85% of the respondents felt that Indians actively practise and participate in the caste system. The extent to which this leads to caste discrimination cannot be determined from this study, however, the case studies and experiences documented do indicate that a large proportion of the Dalit community have experienced caste discrimination in the employment, political, education and health sector. The extent of discrimination and vulnerability felt within the Dalit community alone should give rise to serious concern and indicates that priority should be given to further research on this issue.

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<sup>16</sup> Nesbitt on her research on Dalits in Coventry observed that, 'The Sikh emigration has been from villages within a small area in Punjab, Jullundur district. This makes it possible for the Punjabi immigrants to the UK to keep track of, and know each other's family and caste background.' (Hardtmann, page 156).

While the children of over 70% of the respondents were not aware of their own caste status, other (non-Dalit) children made derogatory remarks to them. A member of the *Valmiki Sabha*, a religious organisation in Birmingham, said, *'My daughter – who is 14 years old and attends a local school with largely Asian students – was called a chamar (derogatory term referring to their caste designated job of dealing with the dead) by one of her classmates. I told her to respond by saying that all Sikhs are equal. However, if you think I am lower than you, then it follows that you are not a Sikh.'*

## Discrimination in the Workplace

The former Mayor of Coventry<sup>17</sup>, Ram Lakha, a Labour Councillor who is a Dalit, faced intense discrimination from 'upper castes' when he stood for election in a largely Indian ward. *'During campaigning I was often told that I would not get people's vote as I was a chamar. So I filed my nomination in a non-Asian constituency and was able to win. The Indian community in Coventry always felicitates every new Mayor, however, till today they have not done this for me.'*

Davinder Prasad of CasteWatchUK reiterated this point and told us, *'Being a Dalit is a disadvantage – it is very hard for a Dalit to become a Mayor.'*

Indrajit of CasteWatchUK was born and brought up in Kenya and was unaware of caste till he moved to the UK. The Indian community in Coventry identified who he was by asking him where his ancestors were from in India. Not only was his identity established, he faced discrimination in his work place (a church social service centre for the elderly), where he was a manager. When some Asians amongst the staff realised that Indrajit was a Dalit, they complained about him and brought disciplinary action against him saying he was inefficient. They also organised a protest at the centre, upon which the management closed down the centre. After a month they restarted it without employing Indrajit.

The General Secretary of Buddha Dhama, a religious association in Southall, faced opposition from non-Dalits when he was promoted at his workplace. *'The non-Dalits in my community objected to my promotion and did not support me in my work. They did not like me in the position as a supervisor.'* His job was in dispute as he was not accepted by his colleagues and this caused concern to his English boss as the work was suffering. *'In the end I proved my leadership qualities and proved to be a successful supervisor. However, it took significantly longer because of the caste-based opposition. The non-Dalits presume that 'Chamars' are good for nothing but they don't know that, given the opportunity, Dalits will rise. It is only because of non-availability of resources, suppression and lack of opportunity that Dalits have been pushed down.'*

Another respondent observed that, *'At work, there is no open discrimination, it is usually discreet. Most of the businesses are small – if you complain, the person who will listen to your complaint is from the 'higher' caste... so no action is taken.'*

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<sup>17</sup> Cllr Ram Lakha was Mayor at the time this research was conducted but has now completed his term of office.

## 4.2 Caste and Religion

Questions	Yes	No
Are people of any caste allowed to perform pooja in Hindu temples in the UK?	34.09%	65.91%
Does each temple belong to a different Caste group in the UK?	82.58%	17.42%
Can people of any Caste become a Hindu priest in the UK?	29.46%	70.54%
Does the Caste system originate from a particular religion?	77.82%	22.14%

Most participants asserted that Hindu temples were not open to persons of all castes, with 80% claiming that each temple in the UK only allowed a specific group of people, based on caste, to worship there and that 'temples were classified on caste lines.' In most parts of India, on the other hand, this is not the case. The ex-Mayor of Coventry told us that *'when the Shankaracharya<sup>18</sup> a well-known priest of Puri, announced that separate temples will be built for Dalits in India, there were large scale protests from various communities. In the UK, on the other hand, they have managed to segregate temples along caste lines. Initially everyone worshipped together but, because of discrimination, separate temples were built along caste lines and that is how we worship today. Today our identities are obvious because of where we worship. Within the Indian community, people are referred to by their caste status.'*

Those interviewed from religious organisations in Birmingham and London told us that Dalits identified themselves within their own communities on the basis of

<sup>18</sup> One of the four Hindu leaders, equivalent in status to the Pope, whose commands must be followed.

their religious identity (*Valmiki, Ravidassi, and Ambedkarite*). Some of those interviewed claimed that Dalits differentiate less on the basis of caste, whereas the non-Dalits identify Dalits by derogatory terms like '*churas*' and '*chamars*'. This experience was shared by several other respondents.

70% claimed that an individual's caste played a significant role in the appointment of Hindu priests in the UK. As an example, Cllr Lakha trained as a Sikh priest but could not disclose his identity of being a *Ravidassi* as he would have lost his post. He told us, *'Here, too, I am identified as a Ravidassi and a chamar.'* He also gave an example of how a Sikh priest visiting the UK from India was not allowed to offer '*prashad*<sup>19</sup>' in the local temple because he was a '*chamar*'.

Nearly 80% of respondents thought the caste system originated from a particular religion. According to one respondent, *'The caste system is deeply rooted in Hindu religion and that the main barrier was Hinduism; wherever Hinduism goes, the Caste system goes and wherever Caste is, discrimination follows. Religion was originally used to bring people together but now it is divisive.'*

<sup>19</sup> A ceremonial sweet that is presented during ceremonies as a sacrifice. It may be eaten after the service by those who are present.

### 4.3 Caste and Social Behaviour

Questions	Yes	No
Do you think caste system destroys the development of the individual and society?	64.18%	35.82%
Do people tend to marry in their own caste in the UK?	82.09%	17.91%
Is there inter-dining between people of different castes in the UK?	81.68%	18.32%

The majority of those interviewed told us that caste was unnecessary and divided people. 65% thought that the caste system destroyed the development of both the individual and the wider society. Respondents told us that caste:

- ?? destroys the dignity of the person
- ?? encourages the formation of sub-groups and creates friction
- ?? restricts interaction between members of society
- ?? judges people by their birth and not their worth

Respondents emphasised that caste not only leads to separatism between different social groups but also breeds mistrust. 80% responded that people did not marry outside their own caste in the UK Diaspora.<sup>20</sup>

Most respondents knew of only a handful of inter-caste marriages, and that these marriages had not been socially accepted in the Indian community. Couples not marrying within their own caste faced repercussions, *'in terms of violence and intimidation, and exclusion from the communities they belong to'* or that *'sometimes these*

<sup>20</sup> This response is similar to the one highlighted by Ballard, 1994, quoted in Eva Maria's study, page 154.

*pressures led to divorce'* and that *'couples were ostracised especially from the 'higher' caste and the elderly.'*

Research revealed that caste was an important consideration for selecting a life-partner amongst young people. One of the respondents from Birmingham had a Sikh girlfriend and they had talked about getting married. But when she found out that he was a Dalit she immediately left him.

On the question of inter-dining, 80% of those interviewed said that people from different castes can eat together. Thus in public settings like restaurants this feature of the traditional caste system – where inter-dining between castes was forbidden – seems to have broken down. However it is also possible that this is due to the urban setting of a restaurant where people do not know each other making it difficult for people to ascertain caste.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> This is also the case in urban settings in cities in India where people eat together in restaurants.

#### 4.4 Caste in Wider Society

Questions	Yes	No
Have any of your relatives experienced caste discrimination?	56.82 %	43.18 %
Do you know of any international conventions which protect people against caste discrimination?	30.53 %	69.47 %
Should the UK authorities work towards the elimination of caste discrimination?	85.61 %	14.39 %

Over 50% of those who responded could give examples of discrimination based on caste that their relatives and friends had experienced. The majority were unaware of any international conventions or organisations that protect individuals against such caste discrimination. Only about 30% of respondents were aware of CasteWatchUK, an organisation that assists people facing caste discrimination. A few also mentioned *Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha*, a religious community organisation, as an institution they could approach if faced with discrimination. This indicates the importance placed on religious bodies in providing support to their community. However, 85% felt that the UK government should work towards the elimination of caste discrimination.

#### 4.5 Conclusions

The research revealed that Dalits across the UK felt that, within the Indian community, their identity was based on caste and that the caste system was very much in operation. Examples of non-Dalits discriminating against Dalits were documented in the sectors of employment, politics, health care and education. While 70% of those who responded said their children were not aware of their

own caste status, other (non-Dalit) children directed derogatory remarks at them targeting their caste status.

The majority of those asked told us that caste was unnecessary as it divided people and destroyed the development of the individual and the society. A majority also thought the caste system originated from Hinduism, with a large proportion asserting that Hindu religious temples were not open to persons of all castes. The research found that 70% thought an individual's caste played a significant role in the appointment of Hindu priests within the UK.

Here are some suggestions made by those interviewed about what they felt would help eliminate caste discrimination in the UK:

#### Education

- ?? Teaching children the impact of the caste system as part of the National Curriculum.
- ?? Encouraging parents to take responsibility to educate their children about the caste system and caste discrimination, especially first generation Indians.

#### Religion

- ?? Have one place of worship for everybody.

#### Action against Discrimination

- ?? Acknowledge that there is caste discrimination through local radio channels and newspapers.
- ?? Publicly question religious and government organisations and institutions about the relationship between caste discrimination and religious beliefs and practices.
- ?? Involving single-caste organisations in community projects.
- ?? Open criticism of caste discrimination by communities, alongside learning to treat people equally.

## **5. Case Studies** - *Names have not been given for reasons of confidentiality.*

### **Case Study 1 - Caste Discrimination in the NHS**

L is a Dalit from India who arrived in the UK in the late summer of 2005. He came to work with a healthcare team in a NHS Trust, one of those recruited amidst the pressures on the NHS to fill an increasing number of posts. In his first three months he sought to learn how the NHS operates, and although not given a proper induction his relationship with his supervisor - a woman of Indian origin but brought up in the UK - was good.

After three months in the post, the day before he was to go back to India to get married prior to bringing his wife back to the UK, his supervisor discovered his caste. Her behaviour changed immediately and having offered him a little time off before he was to leave for India, she now refused to do so. When he returned from the heat of India with his bride, unfortunately in a cold spell and to an unheated flat, he developed an overnight fever. He was due to return to work the next day, there was no telephone in the flat and eventually he had to struggle from his bed to a telephone to inform his supervisor of the situation. She said it was alright, told him to come in the next day, but docked him a day's pay.

She caused him ongoing difficulties about his failure to own a car, alleged lack of work and incompetence. She had supervisory meetings sometimes every other day for up to three hours, which caused him considerable distress. Eventually she produced a letter stating reasons why he was non-compliant and he was called to a meeting with a more senior manager.

L said a colleague offered to attend the meeting, however the senior manager phoned the colleague and after that he withdrew. There then followed a series of meetings with management at which his immediate manager took the lead and developed a whole series of complaints against him. He became ill under the pressure. In subsequent meetings he was given insufficient time to call his union representative to accompany him. After being given a sketchy 'Performance Management Plan' he was called in again and after two minutes told he was suspended for four weeks. He ascribes this whole situation specifically to the fact that he is of a lower caste, and additionally to the fact that he has now married, while his older Indian-origin supervisor is not.

## Case Study 2 – Caste Discrimination in Employment

M, a Dalit of Ravidassia faith, was an employee of a company in the south of England for over six years. He worked in a warehouse on night shifts to boost his income to assist his two children who were at university.

M became a victim of caste prejudice from his fellow colleagues - three Indian Sikhs of Jat caste. He became aware of their caste prejudice when they made derogatory remarks about Dalits within his earshot. On occasion he gave them a fitting reply and the exchange would become heated.

The alleged incident that led to the issue of caste prejudice concerned a woman colleague who made a complaint of sexual harassment to the shift manager about M.

On receiving the complaint, the Shift Manager investigated the incident. He decided to take no action, the matter was resolved and they both continued to work together in harmony.

Soon afterwards the three Sikhs made a complaint that they were witnesses to the alleged incident. They gave written statements to the management. M pleaded his innocence and claimed that they had made the complaint based on caste prejudice. He produced numerous news reports illustrating the caste atrocities and prejudices that Jat Sikhs commit towards Dalits in India. He tried to explain the caste system and accused the three of conspiracy to have him dismissed due to caste prejudice. The whole incident became known as the 'high and low case' among the management and the Union who represented M.

Eventually M was dismissed by the management and so the union took up his case up on grounds of unfair dismissal. One of the reasons that led to M's dismissal was his poor command of English and failure by the management and the Union to fully understand the caste system that exists within the Asian Diaspora.

The Union prepared the case for M and twice the management failed to produce witnesses at the tribunal. On the third occasion the Management decided to settle out of court. M was given £15,000 compensation with full pension restored.

## 6. Policy Recommendations

This research clearly illustrates that caste discrimination exists in a variety of forms in the UK. To date there has been no research on sub-groups within the Indian Diaspora and consequently there is little knowledge of caste discrimination within the government. Therefore no legislation, safe-guards or other support systems are in place to counter caste discrimination. Caste discrimination can have serious consequences for individuals and communities and so must be publicly acknowledged and addressed. This report is an initial exposure of the extent of the problem and illustrates the need for much more extensive research to understand the issue better, identify affected individuals and communities and develop practical recommendations for the eradication of caste based discrimination. This report is an indicator to the government that it is now time to act.

The Dalit Solidarity Network UK urges the government to implement the following recommendations:

### National Government

1. To officially acknowledge the existence of caste as a form of discrimination and include caste as a 'special characteristic' of discrimination in the Single Equality Act alongside race, gender, age, disability or religion, thereby enabling prosecution of anyone discriminating on the basis of caste in the UK, especially in the field of employment.
2. Based on this legislation, to ensure all public advice, education and community support centres are informed and equipped to educate on, and respond to issues of caste discrimination.
3. To commission an extensive research study on caste discrimination in the UK to identify the extent and severity of the issue and the individuals and

communities affected, and to target funds towards affected groups and organisations that support them.

4. To ensure representation of Dalits, Dalit organisations and affected communities in relevant public consultations particularly those concerning ethnic minorities, education and religion.

### Local Government:

5. To engage with Dalit organisations and community groups to support their access to local facilities and allocate specific funding to them.
6. To actively support the participation of Dalits and ensure their representation in local government fora.

### Education

7. To teach about the reality of the caste system from a human rights perspective within Religious Education in the National Curriculum. Ensure that teachers are informed about the realities of the caste system, its social, economic and political consequences and how discrimination is being addressed both by legislation and by Dalits themselves.
8. To raise awareness of caste discrimination in educational institutions from the nursery to university level and to implement measures to ensure that action is taken against those who discriminate.

### Trade Unions and Employers

9. To undertake research into caste discrimination amongst and between employees and employers and address it as appropriate.
10. For companies, government institutions and international non-governmental organisations to sign up to and endorse the Ambedkar Principles<sup>22</sup> and to implement them in their workplace both in South Asia and as appropriate in the UK.

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<sup>22</sup> For these principles in full see <http://www.indianet.nl/ambedkarprinciples.html>. For DSN's report on Caste Discrimination and the Private Sector see <http://www.indianet.nl/casteprs.pdf>



## Appendix 1

### Verbal Responses to the Questionnaire

#### **Q. Does Caste divide people? *If yes could you state how?***

- Some people say they are better than others according to how high they are
- They follow their own way of life
- People fear each other because of this
- People are treated differently; treatment in getting jobs, healthcare and education is affected
- Isolation, mistrust, division, domination
- You are judged by your birth and not worth.
- Marriage, friendship
- By who you believe in, your head bows in front of which great god, as well as whose great steps you and your family follow
- You seem to be stereotyped by old generations rules and laws
- Caste such as Jat thinks they are higher than everyone else and look down at other castes
- By income

#### **Q. Have any of your relatives experienced Caste discrimination? (If so then give examples)**

- People want to know what caste they belong to
- On wedding days and death ceremonies (people) made remarks on our caste
- During inter-caste love marriages

#### **Q. Do you think Caste system destroys the development of the individual and the society? If so how?**

- Peoples dignity, access to job market, education and health and also friends
- Helps people to form groups and then dominate, separate people, put down one caste
- Because of the system you can not move freely in society
- When a job is offered then it is preferably offered to someone of their own caste

#### **Q. Do you know of any International Conventions which protect people against Caste discrimination?**

- Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha UK
- CasteWatchUK

**Q. Can you tell us about any inter-Caste marriages in the UK, u may know of? Are there any repercussions because of inter-Caste marriage in the UK?**

- Know of inter-caste marriages in UK, but few are accepted. Repercussions in terms of violence and intimidation. Married couple face exclusion from the communities they belong to.
- Do know of some but all of them ended.
- Repercussion from higher castes, they ostracise the couple especially the elderly

**Q. Could you tell us of people experiencing Caste Discrimination at work or in business if so what happened when a complaint was made?**

- Caste is not understood by the wider community in UK and it is hidden within the Indian community
- People remark on your caste if someone complains and type-cast you
- In work there is no open discrimination. Discrimination is usually discreet. Most of the businesses are small, if you make any complaint the person who will listen to your complaint is from the higher caste, so no action is taken.

**Q. Can you suggest some solutions to destroy the Caste System in the UK?**

- Better education
- Caste system is deeply rooted in Hinduism. The religion, government organisation and institution should publicly distance themselves from it
- Involvement of organisation in community projects
- Equality
- Main barrier is Hinduism, Wherever Hinduism goes, caste goes, wherever caste is discrimination relating to caste is there.
- Acknowledging that there is caste discrimination through local radio channels and newspaper. Have one place of worship for everybody.

**Q. What kind of steps could the communities take to eliminate the Caste Discrimination?**

- Openly criticise the system and learn to treat people equally.
- Education about Hindu scriptures.

## Appendix 2

### Background to the Research

#### Original Terms of Reference

Aim: To identify the Indian Dalit communities in the UK and their locations, and estimate their numbers. To explore the presence and impact of caste discrimination among the India Diaspora and thirdly to bring the issue before relevant UK bodies and the Dalit communities themselves.

**Duration of Research:** Four months (Sept 2005 to January 2006)

#### Expected outcomes

- ?? To make known to the relevant UK authorities, including the CRE the Home Office, and appropriate MP's the existence and extent of caste discrimination in the UK.
- ?? To reveal the necessity of adding information on the issue of caste discrimination to the education system to correctly inform young people today.
- ?? To raise awareness of this issue and how it is manifested in primarily the Indian communities in the UK. To use the research as tool to tackle the issue and lobby for government support to affected communities to do this.
- ?? To use this research to raise awareness of caste discrimination to the general public both in the UK and other caste affected countries.

#### The research was undertaken in:

Southall                      Bedford  
London                        Birmingham - Handsworth and Wolverhampton  
Coventry

#### The reference communities were:

Buddhist                      Sikh                              Guru Amardass  
Guru Ravidass                Bhagwan Valmiki              Ambedkarite

#### The research was carried out by:

Questionnaire survey of 130 Dalit individuals and organisations  
Desk research from websites, books and journals

**Organisations met during research:**

Federation of Ambedkarites and Buddhist Organisation - Southall

Guru Ravidass Sabha - Southall

Bhagwan Valmiki Sabha - Southall

Guru Ravidass Sabha - London

Guru Ravidass Human Rights Organisation - Bedford

Bhagwan Valmiki Sabha - Coventry

Bhagwan Valmiki Sabha - Birmingham

**Key people interviewed:**

Councillor Ram Lakha – former Lord Mayor of Coventry

Tapper - Coventry

C. Gautam - Southall

Naresh Bangah – Southall

Jagdeshi Roy - Wolverhampton

Jog Raj Ahir - Southall

Davinder Prasad – Coventry

Pragat Nath - Handsworth

Indrajit - Coventry

Ramesh Klair – Southall

Parmeish - Birmingham

Tirathram Bali - London

Gurumail Chand Sondhi – Bedford

Sohan Lal - London

Sohan Ram Mehmi - Bedford

C.L Madahar – East London

Pagrat Lal - London

Sukhdev Singh Heera - Bedford

C.L.Virdee – Southall

H.L.Virdee – Southall

Eugene Culas - Southall

Dharam Paul Nahar - Slough

## Appendix 3 Overview of Dalit populations in the UK

**Dalits communities are located in the following places in the UK:** Birmingham, Bedford, Bradford, Coventry, Darlaston, Derby, Erith (Kent), Glasgow, Gravesend, Hitchin, London, Luton, Newcastle, Southall, Southampton, Stroud, Slough, Walsall, Willenhall, and Wolverhampton.

**There are estimated to be at least 50,000 Dalits in the UK.** The exact figure is unknown because of issues around identification as a 'Dalit', the changing of names, resistance to acknowledge so called 'outcaste' origin as highlighted in the research etc.

### **Approximate statistics of numbers of Dalit Communities (Ravidassis, Valmikis and Buddhists)**

11,000 people in Southall and London      10,000 in Birmingham and Wolverhampton

10,000 in Coventry      1,000 in 18 other places

These statistics were given by the communities and the Dalit Sabhas. Estimates can rise as high as 200,000 as not all 'Dalits' are registered in the Sabhas, some people do not like to disclose their identity, others change their names etc so precise statistics are very difficult to obtain. The largest Dalit community are the Ravidassis followed by Valmikis and Buddhists.

### **Approximate breakdown of Indian Dalit communities:**

Shri Guru Ravidass (some are Sikhs) - 35000

Bhagwan Valmiki (partially Hindus) - 10 000

Ambedkarites – Buddhists / Valmikis / Christians /Ravidassis - 5000

There are few Hindu Dalits in UK

Student community of Dalits from overseas - a small number of Indians and Nepalese

**Approximate breakdown of Nepalese Dalit communities** (Not included in this research): 200 members of which approximately 100 are in the British Gurkha Army. Dalits are known by their caste name but only when they are publicly used and not hidden. Nepalese Dalits are more spread out except where they are members of Gurkha regiments. Main locations: Farnborough, Reading, Southall, Fleet and Woking.

### **Dalit temples in the UK**

Guru Ravidass temples    Bhagwan Valmiki Temples Buddha Vihar

### **Dominant caste temples in the UK**

Hindu T temple      Ramgarhia Temple      Sikh Gurdwara

## Appendix 4 Further Information

For further information on the issue of caste discrimination and Dalit rights please contact:

**International Dalit Solidarity Network** is a network of Dalit organisations from caste affected countries, European solidarity networks and associated international organisations that works to bring these groups together to campaign for international legislation and recognition of the issue and extent of caste discrimination at the international level.

International Dalit Solidarity Network, Nørrebrogade 66C, 1.sal, DK-2200 København N, Denmark

Tel: +45 35 24 50 80 Fax: +45 35 36 67 46

Website: [www.idsn.org](http://www.idsn.org)

**CasteWatchUK** is an independent and voluntary organisation. Their aims are to raise awareness of Caste discrimination in the UK and to strive for appropriate legal, social and democratic remedies.

CasteWatchUK, PO Box 3685, Coventry, UK CV6 4WA

Email: [info@castewatchUK.org](mailto:info@castewatchUK.org)

Website: [www.castewatchuk.org](http://www.castewatchuk.org)

### Dalit Solidarity Networks in Europe

Dalit Solidarity Deutschland [http://www.dalit.de/ueber\\_uns.html](http://www.dalit.de/ueber_uns.html)

Dalit Collectif France <http://www.france-fdh.org/campagnes/dalits/sommaire.htm>

Dalit Network Netherlands <http://www.indianet.nl/english.html>

### In South Asia

National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (India) <http://www.dalits.org/>

Dalit NGO Federation (Nepal) <http://www.dfnepal.org/>

Buraku Liberation League (Japan) <http://www.blj.gr.jp/eng.html>

The Navsarjan Trust (India) <http://www.navsarjan.org/>

Feminist Dalit Organisation (Nepal) <http://www.fedonepal.org>

People's Watch - Tamil Nadu (India) <http://www.pwtn.org/>

Scheduled Castes Federation of Pakistan <http://www.pakdalits.tk/>

## Appendix 5 Overview of Caste Discrimination in International Law

### Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (01/11/2002)

*CERD General Recommendation no. 29 to Article 1, paragraph 1 of the Convention (Descent), Sections I, part 1-4:*

- 1. Steps to identify those descent-based communities under their jurisdiction who suffer from discrimination, especially on the basis of caste and analogous systems of inherited status, and whose existence may be recognised on the basis of various factors including some or all of the following: inability or restricted ability to alter inherited status; socially enforced restrictions on marriage outside the community; private and public segregation, including in housing and education, access to public spaces, places of worship and public sources of food and water; limitation of freedom to renounce inherited occupations or degrading or hazardous work; subjection to debt bondage; subjection to dehumanising discourses referring to pollution or untouchability; and generalized lack of respect for their human dignity and equality;*
- 2. Consider the incorporation of an explicit prohibition of descent-based discrimination in the national constitution;*
- 3. Review and enact or amend legislation in order to outlaw all forms of discrimination based on descent in accordance with the Convention;*
- 4. Resolutely implement legislation and other measures already in force.*

### Commission on Human Rights approval of Resolution 2004/17

#### **A comprehensive study on discrimination based on work and descent.**

The Commission on Human Rights, taking note of resolution 2004/17 of 12 August 2004 of the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, decided, without a vote, to approve the decision of the Sub-Commission to appoint Mr. Yozo Yokota and Ms. Chin-Sung Chung as Special Rapporteurs with the task of preparing a comprehensive study on discrimination based on work and descent, on the basis of the three working papers submitted to the Sub-Commission on this topic (E/CN.4/Sub.2/2001/16, E/CN.4/Sub.2/2003/24 and E/CN.4/Sub.2/2004/31), the comments made during the sessions of the Sub-Commission at which those working papers were submitted and the provisions of the above-mentioned resolution, and of responses from Governments, national human rights institutions, relevant organs and agencies of the United Nations system and non-governmental organisations to a questionnaire to be elaborated and circulated by the Special Rapporteurs. The Commission also approved the request to the Special Rapporteur to submit a preliminary report to the Sub-Commission at its fifty-seventh session, a progress report at its fifty-eighth session and a final report at its fifty-ninth session, and the request to the Secretary-General and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to provide the Special Rapporteurs with all the assistance necessary to enable them to accomplish this task.

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