

Spring Newsletter 2020

NEWS FROM DSN-UK

- This month saw the launch of our new look website, focusing on making the site more accessible. The new website has a **Donate** button on every page. We are incredibly grateful to all those who kindly contribute, but in order to continue our campaign to end caste-based discrimination, we need funds to operate. As a member, even a small monthly amount, or a one-off payment, makes an amazing difference, as we punch well above our weight with just one full-time and two part-time members of staff. Along with membership comes voting rights at the AGM, our regular newsletters and invitations to events. If you can help, please do so [here](#) and help us end the abuse.
- Thanks to the designers at Eighth Day for all their hard work, and to the Methodist Church for providing financial support.
- We are delighted to announce that the Ethical Trading Initiative's (ETI) '[Base Code Guidance: Caste in Global Supply Chains](#)' was published at the end of last year, produced in consultation with DSN-UK and IDSN. This is a vital tool for those involved in global commerce, and is part of our strategy to work more actively within the Business and Human Rights sector. We continue to provide advice to businesses, including as part of the ETI's Tamil Nadu Stakeholder's Group and as a member of BOND.
- Over the last six months we have had two prime ministers, the end of the beginning of Brexit and a cabinet re-shuffle. Despite all this, the APPG for Dalits has continued to meet up to discuss how the repeal of the duty to include 'caste' in the Equality Act 2010 can be halted. It is heartening to see that there is still momentum from both Houses of Parliament to prevent this from happening. The APPG was reconstituted on 10 March 2020 and will begin anew its work to address issues at both national and international levels.
- The latest UK Stakeholder meeting, chaired by DSN-UK, also focused on what to do about the possible repeal, and a letter is being prepared to send to members of the House of Commons and the House of Lords, which has also gained the support of Liberty, Amnesty UK, Race on the Agenda, Runnymede Trust, Stop Hate UK and Stonewall.
- DSN-UK has been actively looking for ways to collaborate with Diversity and Inclusion Teams in higher educational institutes, and a presentation was made at Senate House, University of London, to highlight the hidden aspects of caste-discrimination within education, with a view to having it included in their future policies.
- We continue to be approached by journalists and broadcast media for advice and information – most recently by the Sunday Times for a piece on arranged marriage websites and the 'please state your caste' requirement (see below in the UK news section). The Director was also approached by a documentary filmmaker to provide some background information to set the scene for a documentary on the historic disappearance case of a Dalit woman in the 1970s.

NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

UK

Thursday 12th December saw the UK endure another election. The resulting Conservative government may have significant repercussions for the issue of caste-based discrimination, as they are the [only major party to not support including 'caste'](#) in the Equality Act 2010. Even though a repeal for its inclusion was announced in 2018, DSN-UK and other stakeholders will seek to overturn this decision when it goes to a final vote. Now, however, pressure from the anti-caste legislation may hold more sway.

Linked to this is the UK's [Sikh Manifesto for 2020-25](#), which is based on the words of Sri Guru Nanak Devi Ji on the anniversary of his 550th birthday. The opening words include that 'He rejected all forms of discrimination and exploitation under any pretext and founded a new egalitarian social order. Equality for women, rejection of the caste system, respect for diversity while seeing God in all.' Over the next five years, the Sikh community will use their manifesto to monitor MPs and judge their performance and progress. It is positive to see that the Sikh community supports the eradication of caste-based discrimination.

A [dating website is under fire](#) after being accused of allowing discrimination against the Scheduled Caste (Dalit) community. Shaadi.com, the UK's largest marriage site for the Indian community, allegedly has an algorithm which allows an option for SCs to be left out of potential matches. [The Sunday Times](#) reported that a profile for a higher caste person was not offered lower caste potential matches automatically. Barrister Chris Folsom stated 'By forcing users to state their caste, the sites are either discriminating themselves, or knowingly aiding discrimination by users', and consequently may be in [breach of the Equality Act 2010](#).

Many of our subscribers know that Dr B.R. Ambedkar was considered the founding father of legislation to outlaw caste discrimination in India. However, few are probably aware that between 1921-22 he lived in a house in Primrose Hill, London. Recently a row erupted between two residents and the state of Maharashtra, who own the building, over whether '[Ambedkar House](#)' should be allowed to remain as a museum. It was claimed that it was in breach of planning policy when the building was bought and restored in 2015 as a museum, and that it should have been returned to a residential property. We are delighted that on 12 March a judgement was made that has allowed the building to formally become a memorial. Congratulations to all those who fought so hard to retain this vital piece of history.

In case you missed it last time round, Parle Patel's excellent documentary on '[Hindus: Do We Have a Caste Problem](#)' has been repeated on the BBC.

India

A number of studies have demonstrated that [Scheduled Castes in India are discriminated against despite migrating to other areas](#) due to poverty and lack of opportunity in their hometowns. However, migrants are often pushed to the fringes of cities where there is limited infrastructure leading to poor health and living conditions, partially because of exclusionary government policies. Furthermore, migrants can no longer access the benefits of state-specific schemes like the public distribution system, as the Supreme Court ruled in 2018 that SCs and STs cannot apply for the reservation system when they move from one state to another.

In 1950 a presidential order removed privileges given to Scheduled Caste converts who were not Hindus. While it was reinstated for Sikhs in 1956 and Buddhists in 1990, Christian and Muslim Dalits have not been afforded the same entitlement. At present they are denied government benefits meant for the social welfare of the poor, as it is claimed that Christianity doesn't follow the caste system. However, in January India's Supreme Court agreed to examine [a petition to level the playing field](#), requesting that Scheduled Castes be made 'religion neutral'. Some 60% of India's 25 million Christians also come from Dalit and tribal origin, and so a successful response will infinitely improve the lives of many.

In December 2019 [a wall collapsed in Coimbatore, killing 17 Dalits](#). Built 5 years ago, and increased from 10 feet to 20 feet, it was notoriously used to keep Dalits separated from their so-called 'upper caste' neighbours. The residents of the village had been staging protests since its construction, demanding that the wall be brought down, but apparently without any response from the government. Due to incessant rains and the lack of pillars to support it, the devastation has been significant. But the matter has been further complicated by claims that this has led to the phased conversion to Islam of 3000 Dalits, dividing the community even further. The villagers no longer wish to be used as political tools, but instead to have their dignity and rights restored to them.

If you've been keeping up with our newsletters, you'll know about [manual scavenging](#) and how Dalits are forced to perform this most unpleasant of tasks, due to lack of alternative employment, debt or simply because they are unfortunate enough to live on land where the owner insists that it is part of the conditions of living there. Despite laws and regulations, the [World Health Organisation in November 2019](#) reported that the practice still continued but

had gone underground. The report highlighted the issue of caste discrimination and the perception of 'lower caste' members.

New research from the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) has determined that [children from scheduled castes and tribes are more likely to die before the age of five than children from other castes](#). Although the overall infant mortality rate has reduced significantly since 1992-3, the results are worrying, and suggest that despite the launch of the National Rural Health Mission 14 years ago, a wide gap remains. Figures show that while the infant mortality rate for non-SCs/STs is 3.3%, for Dalits it is 4.3%. The [analysis](#) also looks at a number of factors involved, including type of dwelling, access to sanitation, mothers' level of education and type of cooking fuel used. Although the figures only go up to 2016, it shows that there is still improvement to be made.

Nepal

The [United Nations Nepal](#) report published this January has produced some important figures regarding how caste discrimination is viewed by the population. The results show that [98 % of Nepalese](#) believe that caste-based discrimination causes harm to some groups and people, and we hope that this will be a precursor to the end of caste-based discrimination in Nepal. However, the survey shows that caste-based discrimination and belief in untouchability prevails. Although most respondents, irrespective of caste, stated that there is little caste-based discrimination in access to public service facilities such as police stations, health posts or government offices, 13% of Dalit respondents, who had not reported cases of discrimination that they had faced, had not done so because they felt they would not be believed by the police.

Forthcoming [legislation to regulate social organisations in Nepal](#) has raised concerns about how NGOs will continue to operate in the country. The Home Ministry (responsible for internal security and law and order) has taken over the regulation, registration and supervision of social organisations. Over the last two years new policies have stated that international aid has to be in line with government priorities (currently infrastructure development), and that groups will have to seek government permission to receive foreign grants. Furthermore, international NGOs are banned from advocacy on policy issues and reports sent to home countries have to be approved by the government. Since the work of all international groups must be carried out through local partner organizations, the policy severely constrains domestic organizations supported by foreign partners, and could be used to prevent activism on caste discrimination, amongst other human rights issues.

Bangladesh

Recently there was a widely circulated photo of a girl in social media asking 'why can't the children from Harijan community get admission in the Gaibabndha Sadar Upazila Model School', which has [re-awakened the discussion about caste](#). Despite the principle of non-discrimination under Article 28(1) of the Constitution, approximately 5.5 million Harijans

(Dalits) in Bangladesh continue to suffer from multiple forms of discrimination and 'untouchability' practices due to the lack of sufficient protection, and leads to political, economic and social exclusion. An Anti-Discrimination Bill was submitted to the ministry of law, justice and parliamentary affairs in April 2013 by the National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh but returned to the NHRC four years later for further review, and since then, no progress has been made. Hopefully the flurry on social media will re-start this important conversation.

USA

Congratulations to [Brandeis University](#) for introducing 'caste' into its non-discrimination policy in December. Although the change was not driven by any specific incidences, the school became aware of some [caste-related complaints](#) among students and faculty members of South Asian descent. Brandeis social policy professor Larry Simon said that the university has 'many students who come from low caste backgrounds and others who come from high caste and other backgrounds, including Dalits, and they bring sometimes a sense of privilege and sometimes a sense of being stigmatized to America, where caste is not a household word.'

Author Yashica Dutt has published a [new book](#), *Coming Out as Dalit*, which tells the story of how her mother pretended the family were Brahmin to protect them from caste discrimination. It tells of her mother's ambition to overcome poverty and give her children an education, whilst constantly hiding their true identity. Dutt went to boarding school and then studied at St Stephen's University, New Delhi before moving to New York. In the US Dutt discovered a parallel with her own experience. She heard some lighter-skinned African Americans talk of how they used to 'pass' as white, assuming certain habits, tastes, language and mannerisms, just as her mother had mimicked those of upper caste Hindus. She is also concerned about the absence of guilt among upper caste Indians: while some white people joined the civil rights moment in the US or the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, the upper castes are nowhere to be seen in the Dalit struggle against discrimination.