



# Hindu Forum of Britain

## Caste in the UK

A summary of the consultation with the Hindu community in Britain



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## Foreword

For many years, there has been a strong lobby in the British Parliament that has been trying to highlight issues of caste discrimination in India, particularly amongst the Dalit communities. Several Members of Parliament have asked questions on the floor of the House of Commons, tabled Early Day Motions, and introduced at least one major debate in attempts to highlight this issue.



A notable feature of the 'caste-discrimination' lobby in the UK is that they are composed of many organisations that have a distinct Christian ethos, like the Christian Solidarity Worldwide, or have the support of many Christian organisations, like the Dalit Solidarity Network. Recently though, there has been an attempt by these organisations to pressurise the Government to legislate 'caste discrimination' in the UK within the framework of the Race Relations Act, 1976.

Against this background, the Department for Communities and Local Government issued a questionnaire on 'caste discrimination in the UK' in an attempt to understand the issue better. The questionnaire has been issued to several organisations from different faith backgrounds as well as ethnicities, perhaps because the Department recognizes that caste is not a phenomenon restricted to one faith or country.

I am pleased to present to the Department a response I have written on behalf of the Hindu Forum of Britain to their questionnaire on caste.

The response has been produced after seeking feedback through a survey from a fairly representative Hindu sample of 245 persons and a focus group meeting attended by 30 organisations. This was also backed by desk-research and feedback from various stakeholder groups.

We hope that our response will add to the knowledge of the Government on this issue and that it will help them come to the right conclusions.

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## Introduction

### Connecting British Hindus

In 2006, the Hindu Forum of Britain (HFB) had conducted extensive research on the question of the Hindu identity in Britain through the Runnymede Trust. Dr Robert Berkeley of the Runnymede Trust summarized and analysed the findings of this research in the '*Connecting British Hindus*' report which was launched by the HFB in the House of Commons. The report included a section on caste discrimination in the UK which summarized discussions with over 1000 Hindus through eight focus group meetings and online questionnaires.

The *Connecting British Hindus* report highlighted that many Hindus in the UK identified the waning importance of 'caste' in the British context – suggesting that generational change and the realities of life in a multi-ethnic society were making discrimination on the basis of 'caste' much more difficult to maintain<sup>1</sup>.

*I think the caste system was to do with very old traditions; those traditions are disappearing. Because of equality.*

**Birmingham focus group participant of Connecting British Hindus**

*My personal view, caste is not a cause of discrimination, if there is discrimination, it is dying, it is probably still in the older community but it is definitely diminishing.*

**London focus group participant of Connecting British Hindus**

The report also made a key recommendation to Hindu leadership to find ways of respecting traditions but also to challenge discrimination based on family background or religious tradition within a community.

The choices that people make about who they establish relationships with in terms of marriage, business networks, and co-celebrants of religious worship are their own. Where intervention may be of benefit to all Hindu communities is to support the creation of unity where appropriate across castes, sects and traditions.

Before we address the issue of caste in the UK, this paper will first look at the differences between the terms 'caste', 'varna' and 'jaati', and provide a historical background to caste from an Indian context.

We will also provide a summary of the findings from our survey in Britain and lay out the context in which the debate on caste can progress in this country.

Finally, we will present key facts about the Dalit campaign in this country and the links between Christian groups that have an evangelical basis and MPs who campaign vigorously on this issue.

## Caste, Varna and Jaati

The Cambridge University Press Dictionary defines caste as:

*"A system of dividing Hindu society into classes, or any of these classes"*

The main problem with this definition is the association of caste with a single faith tradition. In reality the classifications of caste based on social occupation, endogamy, culture, class and social groupings can be found in many faith traditions other than Hinduism, and from different countries including Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, Yemen, China, Rwanda, Japan, Korea, Hawaii, and Latin America besides India.

The term caste was first used by the Portuguese during their 16th century voyages to India. It comes from the Spanish and Portuguese word "casta" which means "lineage".

M.N.Srinivas points out that, there are two models of caste system operating in India – *varna* and *jaati* and there exists certain differences between the two systems<sup>ii</sup>. *Varna* is the Vedic classification of the four ranked occupational orders whereas *jaati* refers to ranked hereditary, endogamous and occupational groups separated from each other by the ideas of purity and pollution.

The Hindu scriptures including the Veda and the Bhagavad-gita make reference to what they call '*varna*' or occupational duties based on the '*guna*' or qualities and personality traits of an individual. According to Wolpert, such "a process of expansion, settled agricultural production, and pluralistic integration of new people led to the development of India's uniquely complex system of social organisation by occupation, which was mistakenly labelled the caste system by the Portuguese."<sup>iii</sup>

### The four varnas

The four main *varnas* or occupational classes stated in the Rig Veda and the Bhagavad-gita were:

1. Brahmanas (scholars and priests)
2. Kshatriyas (soldiers, administrators and warriors)
3. Vaishyas (merchants, artisans, and cultivators)
4. Shudras (workers)

An outstanding feature of the '*varna*' system is that it was migratory. Persons born into a *brahmana* family were not necessarily considered to be *brahmana* until they acquired the qualities of a *brahmana* priest and were actually engaged in the work of a *brahmana*. There are innumerable references in the Hindu scriptures of such migration where people born into one *varna* have moved into another.

### Jaati and caste

About a thousand years ago, this system of occupational division gave rise to another system called '*jaati*' which was primarily a cultural and social network. While *varna* was migratory, *jaati* was hereditary – a person born into a particular *jaati* was often restricted

from moving into another *jaati*. It is this system of *jaati* that is often confused with the word 'caste'. In this document, when we refer to 'caste' in the Indian context, we only refer to '*jaati*'.

Caste did not strike early European writers as something specifically Indian. They knew it in their own countries and saw it that way. Mill in his Political Economy said that occupational groups in Europe were "almost equivalent to a hereditary distinction of caste"<sup>iv</sup>. It must be remembered that in medieval Europe the estates of the realm practiced a kind of caste system too. The population was divided into nobility, clergy and the commoners. In some regions, the commoners were divided into burghers, peasants or serfs and the estate-less. Although originally based on occupation, one's estate was eventually inherited, because of low social mobility.

*Varna is within the construct of Hinduism. Jaati on the other hand is just a social and cultural phenomenon. It really has nothing to do with the core principles of Hinduism.*

**Lohana participant at HFB Focus Group meeting**

## **Caste and religion**

There are anthropologists and sociologists who view caste as a product of religious ideas, which designates certain caste higher and the others lower, based on the notions of occupational duties and requirements for purity. Caste is interpreted as an ideological framework to formulate a social order. On the other hand, many others interpret caste as a structured social divide based on the wealth of different social groups.

Swami Vivekananda, on the other hand says, "In religion there is no caste. A man from the highest caste and a man from the lowest may become a monk in India and the two castes become equal. The caste system is opposed to the religion of *Vedanta* (Hinduism). Caste is a social custom, and all our great preachers have tried to break it down. From Buddhism downwards, every sect has preached against caste, and every time it has only riveted the chains. Beginning from Buddha to Rammohan Ray, everyone made the mistake of holding caste to be a religious institution and tried to pull down religion and caste altogether, and failed... The son of a *brahmana* is not necessarily always a *brahmana*; though there is every possibility of his being one, he may not become so. The *brahmana* caste and the *brahmana* quality are two distinct things."<sup>v</sup>

## **Mobility and rigidity in the caste system**

Many commentators on caste often question the purported rigidity of the birth-based system of *jaati* and claim that it provided security and mobility. Swarup says, "In the old days, the Hindu caste system was an integrating principle. It provided economic security. One had a vocation as soon as one was born - a dream for those threatened with chronic unemployment. The system combined security with freedom; it provided social space as well as closer identity; here the individual was not atomised and did not become rootless. There was also no dearth of social mobility; whole groups of people rose and fell in the social scale. Rigidity about the old Indian castes is a myth."<sup>vi</sup>

Ziegenbalg writing on the eve of the British advent in India saw that at least one-third of the people practiced other than their traditional calling and that "official and political

functions, such as those of teachers, councillors, governors, priests, poets and even kings were not considered the prerogative of any particular group, but are open to all”.

Swarup also feels that the classification of caste in the British census of India added more castes than there actually were, and thus added to feelings of distinction and discrimination. He says, “Even the list of greatly maligned Manu contained no more than 40 mixed castes, all related by blood. Even the *chandals* were *brahmins* on their father’s side. But under the British, Risley gave us 2,378 main castes, and 43 races! There is no count of sub-castes. Earlier, the 1891 census had already given us 1,156 sub-castes of *chamars* alone. To Risley, every caste was also ideally a race and had its own language.”

### Colonial vs. pre-colonial constructs of caste

Scholars like Bernard Cohn, Inden and Nicholas. B. Dirkes have argued that caste is a product of colonialist imperial designs to strengthen their power over the ‘native’ Indians. They were of the opinion that the colonial government endeavoured to gain not only political control but also cultural domination over the Indians, with a hidden agenda, which sought to establish the pernicious beliefs and practices of Indians engendered in the caste system as primitive and barbaric, while simultaneously reinforcing the superiority of western institutions based on equality and rationality<sup>vii</sup>. In their efforts to construct an Oriental ‘other’, the British in colonial India labelled the beliefs, practices and customs of the native Indians as ‘tradition’. Foremost among the belief systems was the social institution of caste, which the British identified as ‘traditional’ as opposed to the ‘western modernity’. Equating western modernity to rationality and equality, the colonial administration established cultural superiority over the Indians, in turn legitimatising the need for Indians to be governed by western administration. (Inden 1986; Cohn 1987; Dirkes 2002).

Others like Bayle refute the idea that caste was a colonial construct and a creation of the colonial administration. She argues that though the subcontinent became more caste conscious under the colonial regime, it would be erroneous to concentrate exclusively on ‘orientalism’ in exploring the meaning of caste. She points out that the Mughal commentators in the pre-colonial period had written on the caste system prevalent during the Mughal conquest of India. Bayle further argues that equally wrong is the idea that the British were the first to classify social groups based on caste in their census. Bayle draws attention to the fact, that the Telugu speaking migrant warriors, Nayakars, who ruled the southern Tamil country in the sixteenth century, followed the classification of social groups for official purposes. Bayle points out that the earliest British revenue surveys and population censuses used techniques and categories, which were borrowed, directly from the Nayakar rulers and successors<sup>viii</sup>.

According to Bayle, the British rule generated statistical and analytical documentation in which references to caste featured prominently, but the colonial governance did not transform caste as single identity marker.



## Reform movements in India

Nineteenth century India witnessed several reform movements that worked to root out any forms of discrimination based on *jaati*. The fact that most of these movements were Hindu reiterates the fact that Hinduism is a self-correcting and evolving religion.

The National Social Conference, an enterprise founded by M.G.Ranade (a Bombay high court judge) and R.Raghunatha Rao (a Madras Civil Servant and co-founder of the daily *The Hindu*) in 1887 launched a vigorous campaign against discrimination on the basis of *jaati*. Its adherents included jurists, academics and other eminent members of the newly emerged Indian Intelligentsia.

### Hindu revivalism

The period witnessed an increasing role by Hindu revivalist organisations in consolidating Hinduism in the colonial state. The Arya Samaj founded by Swami Dayananda Saraswati insisted on the basis of scriptural evidence that any person from any background, birth or caste was entitled to read and learn the Vedic scriptures and participate in performing *yajna* or ritual fire sacrifice. They believed that learning and spiritual purity were not confined to *brahmanas* but could be attained through personal efforts.

Other groups such as Manava Dharma Sabha (Society for Human Religion), Prarthana Samaj and the Society of Liberal Religionists tried to distinguish between supposedly 'good' and 'bad' manifestations of the caste system. They regarded *varna* and *jaati* as moral and cohesive factors that bound the nation, and tried to reform discriminatory practices against 'untouchables' and women. Support for female education, and abolition of child marriage and upliftment of untouchables were key messages of many of these groups.

From the late nineteenth century, Christian missionaries in the erstwhile Madras Presidency in south India had begun to preach and convert the 'untouchables'. The Arya Samaj's practice of performing *shuddhi* or re-conversion of untouchables was a measure taken to address the efforts of the missionaries.

### Nationalism and reform

The Nationalist movement that sought to free India from British rule found it compelling to address the issue of caste in its agenda. Caste egalitarianism emerged as one of the major issues in the discourses of the Indian National Congress. Social justice for the 'depressed classes' became the major priority of the nationalists. In the 1920's Gandhi and other prominent Congressmen portrayed the problem of the 'depressed' as a matter requiring religious solutions. Gandhi established special ashrams and taught virtues of temperance, vegetarianism and other 'norms of pure caste Hindu life'. Gandhi insisted that they should be called 'Harijans' - meaning 'God's children'.

### Waning relevance of caste in modern India

In Independent India, there are several NGOs that are working to educate and inform people about the effects of discrimination on the basis of *jaati* and aim to eradicate it. The Indian Government through its policy of positive discrimination and reservations for

the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (often called 'Dalits' which is seen by many to be a derogatory term). Reservations in education and employment have continued to address this issue in a positive manner.

While discussing caste identities, Bateille observes that the meaning and legitimacy of caste has changed significantly in urban spaces. The nature of caste is highly ambivalent and cannot be coherently defined by the urban intelligentsia. Caste hierarchy has lost its legitimacy and modern India is a more a status conscious world. Differences in status are based more on education, occupation or income and less on caste. The social world created by education, occupation and income cuts across the social world of caste.

Bateille draws our attention to the fact that in modern India, the social world of a *brahmana* judge, diplomat, engineer, civil servant or manager is not the same as that of a *brahmana* clerk, schoolteacher or cook. Instead of a single unified hierarchy, different strategies of exclusion based on other factors like wealth often co-exist in an urban society. Bateille points out that although caste seems to become weaker and imperceptible, it has been strengthened in the political domain. After independence, in particular, there has been an extensive use of caste affiliations for the mobilization of political support during elections.<sup>ix</sup>

## Hindus in Britain

The 2001 Census found that there are 546,982 Hindus in England, making up 1% of the total population<sup>1</sup>. This makes Hindus the third largest religious group in the country. More than 97% of Hindus live in urban areas.

According to the last Census in 2001, about 37 per cent of Hindus in this country had been born in the UK, 30 per cent were born in India and 6 cent in Sri Lanka. A further 21 per cent of Hindus had been born in Africa, reflecting the 1970s migration to the UK of East African Asians.<sup>x</sup> Hindus were also predominantly of Indian origin, irrespective of whether they were born in the UK, India or East Africa. About 84 per cent of all Hindus in the UK were of Indian origin while nearly 12 percent were of Sri Lankan origin.

After independence in 1947 the first influx of emigrants came to work in UK's industrial sector. The 1960 and 70s saw increasing restrictions on non-white immigration and in particular on unskilled labour migration. These restrictions had the effect of increasing family reunification immigration as people brought their families to join them rather than risk never gaining re-entry. In the 1970s unsympathetic regimes in East Africa caused many Indians to flee Uganda and Kenya for Britain – leading to further tightening of immigration policy. It is estimated that as many as one quarter of Indians in Britain have arrived via East Africa.

East African Asians were dominated by Gujaratis, largely Hindus, who entered the small and medium business sector and the medical professions. In more recent times professions rather than geographical origin have determined flows to Britain; in particular, these include IT professionals (at least two-thirds of all software professionals entering Britain are from India), medical professionals, and workers in the hospitality industry who come from various states of India<sup>xi</sup> (Van Hear et al 2004)

When Hindus arrived in Britain, they also brought with them a colourful and inclusive culture that has influenced the British way of life. National eating habits, entertainment, music, dance, and public festivals in Britain have all been influenced to some degree by Hindu culture and tradition.

As Hindus settled into Britain and expanded their professional, employment and business networks, they formed social and cultural organisations that aided their internal and external interactions, cultural expressions, and celebration of festivals. They built over 200 temples in Britain and formed organisations based on family networks and *jaati*.

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<sup>1</sup> The religious question in the census was introduced for the first time in 2001 so no longer term figures are available. There have been concerns raised about the accuracy of the figures based on understanding of the purpose of the question, including over 200 000 people wilfully protesting against the inclusion of the question by filling in the answer wrongly as 'Jedi'. The Hindu Forum of Britain has extrapolated from the Census figure of 546,982 Hindus living in Britain in 2001 to an estimate of 750,000 in 2008, based on inflow through immigration and an estimate of numbers of Hindus who did not declare their faith in the last Census.

## Research Methodology

The Hindu Forum of Britain has conducted two surveys on caste in Britain. In 2006, for the Connecting British Hindus, the Runnymede Trust conducted a wider survey on behalf of HFB that included questions about caste. Respondents included over 300 people contacted through focus-group discussions and 700 people who filled an online questionnaire.

In 2008, the Hindu Forum of Britain conducted another survey specifically aimed at collecting evidence about caste discrimination in the UK. This was done through a focus group meeting in London attended by 30 representatives of various organisations and temples, and a questionnaire that elicited over 245 responses from around the country.

This report is based on the evidence gathered by the Connecting British Hindus report, the 2008 survey on caste by HFB and desk research conducted by the HFB's Public Affairs Committee.

### Composition of the sample population

The composition of the sample population that elicited 245 responses in the specific survey on caste conducted by HFB in 2008 was as follows:

#### Age Group

Age Group	Percentage
Below 30 years	28%
31 – 50 years	24%
50 – 70 years	34%
Above 70 years	14%

#### Education

Education	Percentage
A Levels or below	14%
Graduation or Post Graduation	56%
Professional Qualification	30%

#### Regional Distribution

Region	Percentage
North	24%
Midlands	7%
London and the South	69%

#### Employment Status

Age Group	Percentage
Self-employed	17%
Employed	55%
Unemployed	8%
Retired	20%

## Communities and 'castes' covered in the survey included:

1. Brahmins
2. Patels
3. Prajapatis
4. Lohanas
5. Chamar
6. Parmar
7. Sodha
8. Soni
9. Shroff
10. Yadav
11. Darji
12. Vishwakarma
13. Chauhan
14. Rajput
15. Others

The communities covered a variety of family networks from all four *varnas*: *brahmanas*, *kshatriyas*, *vaishyas* and *shudras*; different age groups, educational achievement, and regions to give a comprehensive and representative sample. The representation from the Midlands was slightly low compared to the population in the region, but the answers from Midlands reflect the national trend.

## The Questionnaire

The questions covered in the survey included a range of quantitative and qualitative questions.

The first section was made of three multiple choice questions asking if the respondent believed that caste system was a continuing social phenomenon in the UK, whether they or anyone known to them had experienced caste discrimination in the UK and if so, to identify where they faced such discrimination – at school, university, work, friends, temples, while finding a life-partner or in any other place.

The second section of the questionnaire was composed of open questions asking the respondents to describe any incidents of caste discrimination they may have experienced, what remedies they would suggest to address it, and what they believed the role of Government and community organisations to be in addressing these issues.

## Summary of findings

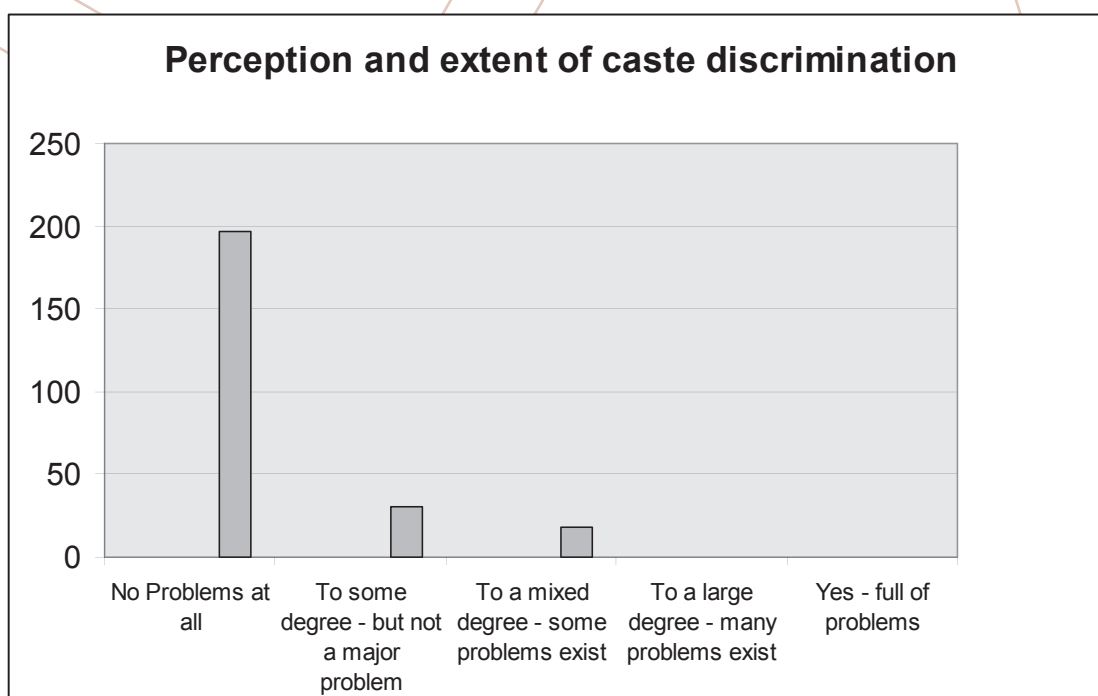
### Perception and extent of caste discrimination

Of the 245 people surveyed, 227 or over 92.6% felt that caste discrimination was not a problem in the UK. Only 18 people or 7.4% felt that there may be some problems which could exist to a mixed degree. None of the respondents felt that there was widespread caste discrimination in the UK or that there were many problems arising out of it.

*Instances of caste discrimination are almost non-existent in UK. There is no need to create an issue that does not exist. It is amazing that a non-issue seems to be given such a high profile by the Government.*

**Lohana respondent to HFB survey from Milton Keynes**

Of the 227 people who felt that caste discrimination was not a problem in the UK, 197 (or 80.4%) felt that there were no problems at all, while 30 (12.2%) felt that it was not a major problem but could exist to some degree.

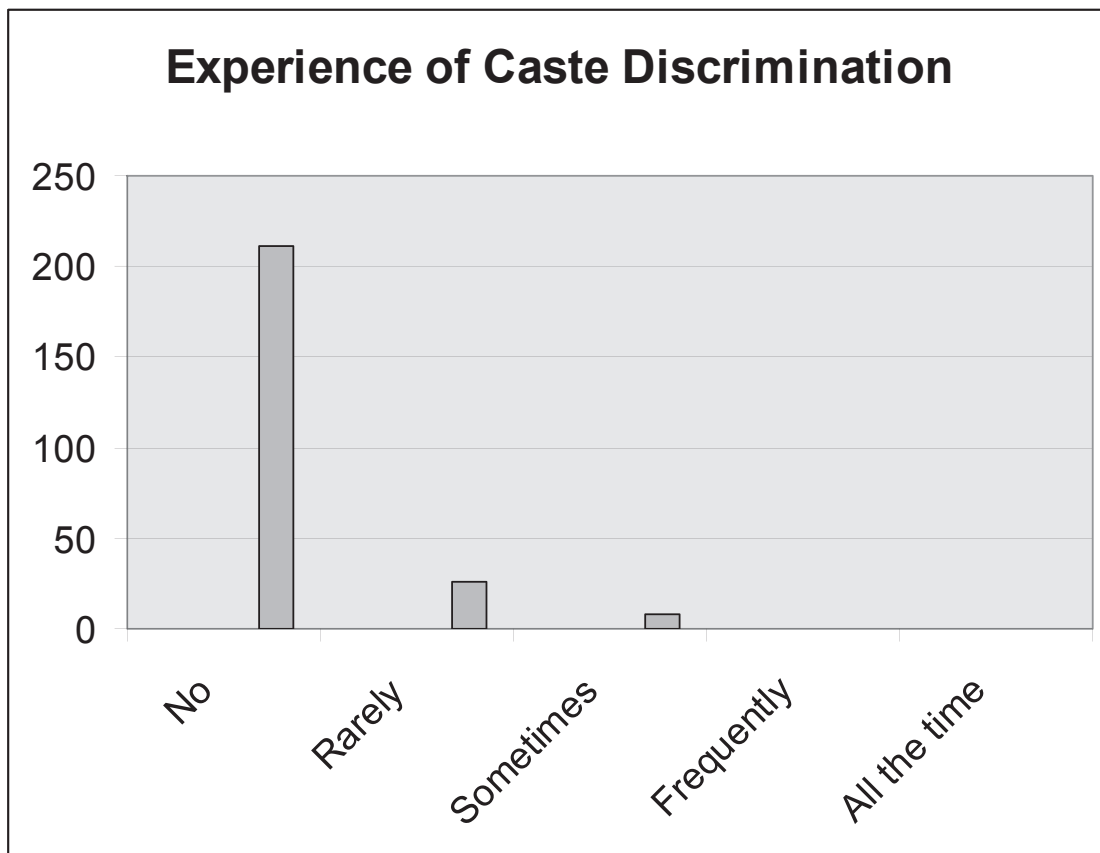


### Experience of caste discrimination in the UK

When asked if the respondents or someone known to them had experienced caste discrimination in the UK (as opposed to the previous question which was about their perception of the existence of caste discrimination), 97% of the respondents said that they had never or very rarely faced caste discrimination, while 3% of the respondents felt that they had faced discrimination sometimes. None of the respondents said that they had faced caste discrimination all the time.

It can be seen that while 7.5% of the respondents felt that there may be caste discrimination practised in the UK sometimes, only 3% had actually experienced it themselves. Of the 3% who said they had experienced it, over half spoke about general racial discrimination (and not caste discrimination) and confused it with caste discrimination (example – respondents cited opposition to Hindu women wearing a bindi (dot) on their forehead, or Hindu women facing difficulties while wearing a nose-ring or traditional clothes, which were examples of discrimination on faith, rather than caste).

This suggests that only half of the 3% of people (1.5%) who felt that caste discrimination could be practised in the UK actually based it on their personal experience while everyone else who said that caste could be a factor of discrimination (6%) may have been influenced by external factors like the media or the debate surrounding caste discrimination.



### Places of caste discrimination in UK

84.8% of the people surveyed said they had never experienced caste discrimination anywhere in the UK or heard of someone else experiencing it.

Of the others, the largest place where caste played an important role was while finding a life-partner – about 8.2%. Other places where it figured in people's experience included

social networks like temples (1.6%), through friends and acquaintances (1.6%) and in schools (1.6%).

There is little evidence to suggest that there has been a concerted effort to wilfully keep people out of jobs, public appointments, schools, universities and good and services because of their caste. The HFB survey revealed that most of the experience on caste stemmed from social interactions between people and while making personal choices.

Some organisations that have lobbied in Parliament for 'Dalit' rights have produced a few anecdotal episodes of caste discrimination, but most of their evidence points to social interaction and marriages.

In a programme on BBC Radio 4 called the 'Caste Divide' broadcast in April 2003, Councillor Ram Lakha claimed that a few Hindus resented his selection because of his caste, and that there was a whispering campaign within the Indians to increase the Labour Party membership and vote him out. He also claimed that he later found 'another ward where there were no Indians' from which he got selected. However, even though several Dalit organisations keep using Ram Lakha's case as a sterling example of caste discrimination in the UK, these allegations are denied by Gordon Wright who was the secretary of the Labour Party's Northeast Coventry constituency at the time. He informed the same BBC programme: "There's no way people would have recruited people to come in specifically to vote against Mr. Ram Lakha. One has to remember that at that time there was a conflict between the moderates in the party and those that we considered to be the left wingers of the party. He was regarded as a left winger. He was deselected because he was on the wrong side at the time".

The responses received by the Hindu Forum of Britain suggest that while most people in the UK do not experience caste discrimination, it could still be a purely cultural issue based on personal choices and social interaction in three broad areas:

1. Marriages – choice of life-partner
2. Social interaction in temples and community centres
3. Verbal interaction between a few pupils in some schools

## Marriages

Members of certain faith communities prefer to marry within their denomination – for instance some adherents from Orthodox Jews, Sunni Muslim, Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic and other such communities may prefer to find a life-partner from their own community due to cultural compatibility.

*I have not experienced discrimination personally, but can believe why it is practiced when it comes to mixed marriages. There could be differences in home-life – customs and beliefs – which may need readjustment. Sometimes it may cause embarrassment in social gatherings.*

**Patel respondent to HFB survey from London**

Similarly, respondents to the HFB survey indicated that some Hindu parents may prefer their children to marry within their caste. Respondents also indicated that such barriers are breaking down, and the incidence of inter-caste marriages as well as inter-faith marriages in the Hindu community have been steadily rising.



*My friend and his fiancé had a difficult time getting married. But the problem will become less of an issue as the forthcoming generations mature.*

**Parikh respondent to HFB survey from Preston**

The issue of discrimination does not arise when both the bride and groom wish to marry within their family or caste network. In some rare instances, the parents may exert undue pressure on their children to marry within their caste even if they may want to marry a partner outside their caste. While such cases are getting rarer, where they do occur, the families should be encouraged and educated through awareness and information, rather than looking towards legal solutions or redress. On the other hand, if caste barriers lead to forced marriages (rather than arranged marriages where both the bride and groom give their free consent to marry), it should, of course, be dealt within the framework of law.

A key feature of marriage preferences is that such preferences are not imposed by the 'higher castes' on the 'lower' ones. Respondents to the HFB survey indicated that parents belonging to castes considered to be on a 'lower' level of the hierarchy have often expressed dissatisfaction when their children wanted to marry into a 'higher' caste. Such preferences imply that the caste factor has more to do with cultural and social matching in matrimonial relationships rather than a preference for higher caste matches.

*My cousin is a Prajapati [from the shudra caste] and married a Patel [from the 'higher' vaishya caste]. Some members of the family disapproved of this.*

**Prajapati respondent to HFB survey from West Midlands**

Respondents also cited increasing cases of inter-caste marriages where there has been no dissent voiced by any relatives or parents. Such marriages are being accepted more and the growth of such relationships points to a healthier social trend.

*I am married to a person from a different caste and faced no problems at all.*

**Brahmin respondent to HFB survey from London**

### **Social interaction**

A few of the respondents suggested that social networks with friends and acquaintances at home or in temples and community centres may sometimes lead to rude remarks or insults based on caste or birth. Interviews and discussions with the few who had said that they had experienced some form of 'discrimination' revealed that almost all such forms of 'discrimination' only took the form of rudeness - where they were called derogatory names. In this sense these are ways of social interaction that could be improved, rather than actual discrimination about provision of goods and services at community centres.

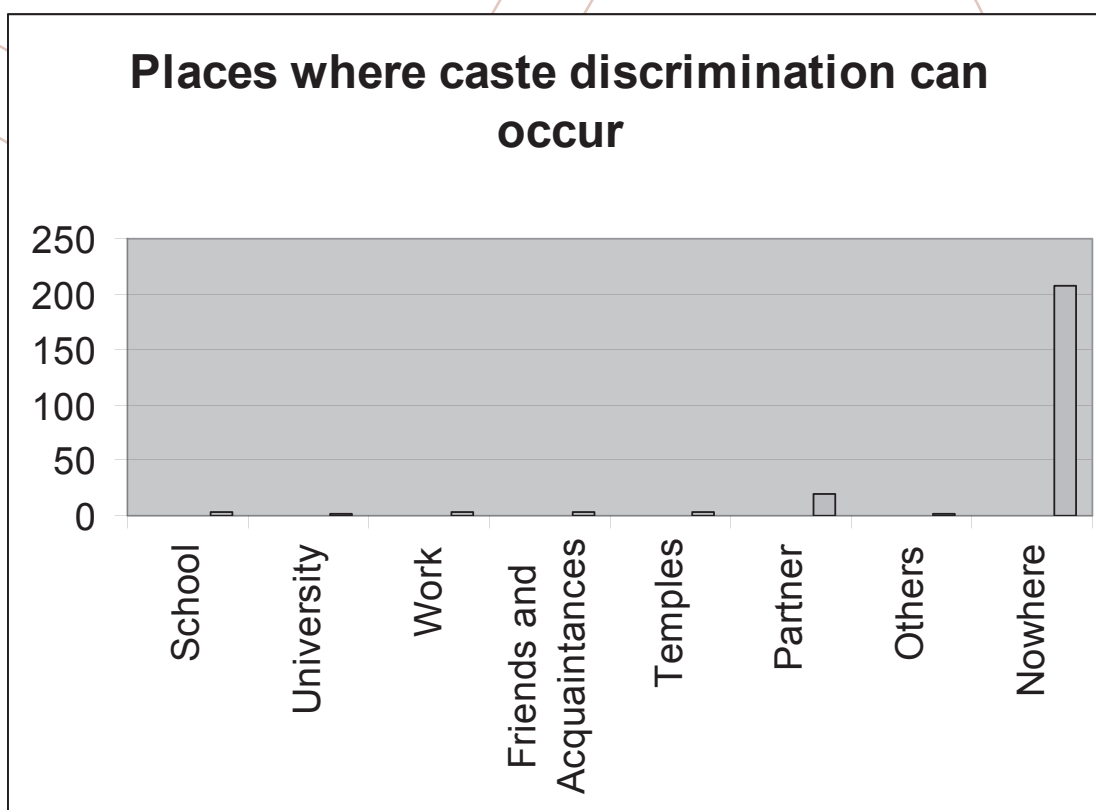
It would be difficult for Government to legislate social interaction based on caste, as it would by extension begin to apply to all other spheres of social interaction where rudeness and name-calling prevail.

### **Schools and universities**

In schools and universities, most Hindu students who reported facing any form of caste discrimination said it took the form of verbal arguments or comments from others. Once

again, there is no evidence that students in school have been denied any provision of education or deprived of any opportunity based on their caste. The extent of name-calling between students of different caste, although rare, can be classified as a lighter form of bullying.

Eslea et al in a recent survey on bullying in schools conclude that Hindu, Indian Muslim and Pakistani children said that bullying was widespread (57 per cent of boys and 43 per cent of girls had been bullied that school term), and that all three ethnic groups suffered equally<sup>xii</sup>. However, bullying was at least as likely to be by other Asian children of a different ethnic group as it was by white children, and it was likely to relate to some religious or cultural difference such as the animal forms of some Hindu Gods, the clothing worn by Indian Muslims or the language spoken by Pakistanis. Bullying between members of the same ethnic group was comparatively rare, although some Hindu children reported insults relating to the caste system. The report claimed that bullying among ethnic minority children is clearly a rich and complex problem that merits further study.



### Religion and social mobility

In the UK, Hindus have performed relatively better than ethnic minorities from other communities in moving up the 'social class' (determined here by professional and managerial occupations, rather than by caste). This fact is substantiated by a study done by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation which examined the class position in 2001 of those growing up in the 1960s-80s in England and Wales<sup>xiii</sup>. The study showed that family background remains important in achieving occupational success and avoiding

unemployment, but that there are differences across ethnic and religious groups. The study, by Lucinda Platt of the University of Essex, was based on the ONS Longitudinal Study. While exploring differences between religious groups, it revealed that those in the study of Jewish or Hindu affiliation showed greater chances of upward mobility than their Christian counterparts, controlling for other characteristics; it also revealed that Muslims and Sikhs displayed lower chances.

The report also claimed that this was not just an effect of ethnicity (i.e. the fact that most Muslims are from the already disadvantaged Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups). Examining differences within the Indian ethnic group showed that Indian Hindus (and, to a lesser extent, Indian Christians) did very well, while Indian Sikhs and Indian Muslims did relatively less well.

The report substantiates the fact that Hindus in the UK have made steady progress in social mobility, even more so than immigrants from other religious groups. It also calls into question the notion of widespread discrimination based on caste, for if it were indeed factual, this social mobility would have been restricted for a large part of the Hindu population. The fact that this did not happen supports our findings that the caste factor exists only in social interactions and personal choices and does not play a role in the provision of education, employment or goods and services.

### **The role of the Government**

A majority of the respondents to the HFB survey felt that the role of the Government in dealing with caste in the UK should be minimal.

*"I don't see a problem – so what can the Government really do?"*

**Respondent to HFB survey from Hemel Hempstead**

It was felt that the Government could encourage programmes of education and awareness to minimize the effects of social interaction and personal choices, but this does not really fall within the direct remit of Government legislation.

*This is not for the Government to resolve. Society leaders and individuals need to address the problem.*

**Patel respondent to HFB survey from London**

*Can the Government actively address a specific issue like this? Community organisations are better placed to deal with such issues.*

**Kshatriya respondent to HFB survey from Preston**

*Government interference in this issue is not needed.*

**Khunti respondent to HFB survey from Birmingham**

### **The role of community organisations**

In response to a question on what organisations like the Hindu Forum of Britain should do in addressing the issue of caste in the UK, most respondents felt that such organisations should create more awareness of negative caste-based interactions and start structured educational programmes to remove any existing barriers.

There was almost unanimous support both at the focus group meeting and through responses in our survey which indicated that building awareness through education was a key way forward.

*Education and promotion in the community is the key.*

**Bhatia respondent from London**

*Exposure, education and appreciation are the way forward. Hopefully it should lead to acceptance of differences.*

**Respondent to HFB survey from Manchester**

*We must educate people and make them understand that we are all human beings.*

**Patel respondent from London**

Many respondents felt that organisations like the HFB should organize national debates, discussions and print literature that would promote awareness of equality and openness in dealing with social interactions and personal choices based on caste.

*HFB should educate people. The problem is not restricted to the caste system but to any mix of religions, culture and social background that can cause such problems.*

**Sethi respondent from London**

*Community organisations should organize discussions and debates on the subject of caste.*

**Odedia respondent to HFB survey from Milton Keynes**

*HFB should prepare literature and propaganda to reinstate the true Vedic culture which promotes all castes as equal in serving the body of society.*

**Kotak respondent from London**

The notion propounded by a few organisations that widespread caste discrimination exists in the provision of employment, education or goods and services in the UK is based on a few anecdotal incidents and perceptions. There is little evidence besides a few anecdotes to back this claim.

The Hindu Forum of Britain's findings suggest that the extent of caste-based behaviour is restricted to personal choices and social interaction, and sometimes leads to rudeness in behaviour or difficulties in finding life partners.

Matters of social interaction and personal choices should be dealt through education, awareness and mentoring, rather than through legislation and penalties.

### The politics of Dalitisation

The word 'Dalit' often used to describe the disadvantaged family networks in India, is often thought by many Dalits themselves to be derogatory as it refers to them as 'broken' or 'depressed'. The Indian Government has drawn up a list of disadvantaged castes and tribes which were to be subject to positive discrimination in terms of reservations and quotas in education, employment and housing. This covered about 24% of the Indian population. Many in the West tend to club this entire list together and label them 'Dalit'. The term 'Dalit' is not used by the Government, officials or even much of society in India, who prefer to use the term 'Scheduled Caste' or 'Scheduled Tribe' often abbreviated in normal conversations to 'SC' or 'ST'.

Anuja Prashar from Goldsmith College in London has argued that "none of the [groupings within the Scheduled Castes and Tribes] correspond to any Vedic or Hindu systems of social ordering described in any historical accounts or religious scriptures. Therefore the word 'Dalit' or 'caste' and its assumed association with Vedic or Hindu religious practices today needs to be re-evaluated to gain the appropriate current operational definition of family networks [*jaati*], in order to retain any hermeneutic validity within the discourse of human rights and religious freedom."<sup>xiv</sup>

She presents evidence that lower income groupings of minority groups is not a phenomenon akin to India and cites the Census data 2001 UK: "People from minority ethnic groups were more likely than White people to live in low-income households in 2000/01. There was considerable variation among the different minority ethnic groups. Pakistanis and Bangladeshis were much more likely than other groups to be living on low incomes. Almost 60 per cent of the 1 million people in this group were living in low-income households before housing costs were deducted. This increased to 68 per cent after housing costs.

"A substantial proportion (49 per cent) of Black Non-Caribbean households also lived on low incomes after housing costs had been deducted. However, the risk of low-income for this group was much less pronounced in comparison with other ethnic groups if income before housing costs is used. The White population was least likely to be living in low-income households, 16 per cent did so before housing costs were deducted and 21 per cent after housing costs."

Prashar's arguments are that the word 'caste' itself is of Latin origin. She points out that segregation of communities no longer applies as people from the 'Dalit' groups have jobs in all areas of the labour force today. Referring to efforts by Christian groups to convert 'Dalits' to Christianity, and their reference to 'Dalits' as 'slaves', she concludes, "I strongly suggest that a Dalit is not a Dalit, when they are portrayed for political effect as slaves, as religious victims or as Christian victims. If the term Dalit means 'broken or not whole' in keeping with anti social occupational status as defined thousands of years ago, then the Dalit Solidarity Network, UK MPs and Christian Far Right organisation's methods for defining the scheduled castes and citizens of India is misleading language that disguises a purpose other than Dalit empowerment. The recent election results in Uttar Pradesh, in India, with the success of BSP leader Mayawati (who is a 'Dalit'), suggests that Dalits or schedule castes are very much part of Indian society and fast becoming part of the political reality of India – and as such cannot be considered to be *broken and not whole*."

## The Dalit-Christian link

There are many organisations in the UK (and in the world) that campaign for Dalit Rights. Some of the organisations that actively lobby in Parliament and/or publicise their efforts in media include the Dalit Solidarity Network and the Christian Solidarity Worldwide.

A close look at these organisations shows that many of the Dalit campaigners and organisations are directly based on a Christian ethos or have a substantial backing from Christian groups.

### Christian support for Dalit campaigns

The Dalit Solidarity Network lists eight organisations on its website as its funders. Of these, four are Christian organisations:

1. Christian Aid
2. Methodist Relief and Development Fund
3. UPSG
4. St Clare and St Francis Trust

50% of the funders of Dalit Solidarity Network come from a Christian background. Why would so many Christian organisations be interested in funding human rights abuse against Dalit Hindus in particular?

The Methodist Relief and Development Fund and St Clare and St Francis Church, in particular have not campaigned actively for any other human rights issues like those of Tibetan Buddhists, Kashmiri Hindus and Serbian Muslims. There seems to be a singular fascination with the 'Dalit' communities in India.

The Christian Solidarity Worldwide, a group that describes itself as 'human rights organisation that 'works on behalf of those persecuted for their Christian beliefs' says in its country profile report on India that "Dalits and tribals, who suffer ... forms of oppression, together number around 250 million."

There is no evidence quoted in their report to substantiate this number or fact, but the question is: why does an organisation that claims to represent the human rights of Christians be so concerned about the rights of so many Dalits, 90% of whom are Hindu?

### Why are Christian groups so focused on Dalit rights?

The answer lies in the fact that 70% of the 25 million Christians in India come from a 'Dalit' background. The 'Dalit' community represent a large audience for religious conversions and evangelisation. In the words of B Chinnappan, Editor of 'Dalit Christians': "The church in India is a Dalit church, because 70% of India's 25 million Christians are Dalits."

Dalits have traditionally formed the largest target group for evangelical groups operating in India and a majority of those converted from traditional Indian faiths into Christianity come from the Dalit communities.

In 1980, a Consultation of World Evangelisation in a meeting in Thailand recorded that "God longs for the whole Hindu people to know Jesus Christ and live under His

Lordship". Referring to the 'Thailand Report on Hindus', Sanal Edmarku writes in the Rationalist International that the Hindu belief system was introduced with special attention to those of the Evangelical elements so that they could use it in the conversion process.<sup>xv</sup>

Edmarku says: 'Miraculous healing, for example was recommended as successful technique. Demonstrating social concern, for example for scheduled castes and tribes or other 'untouchables' of the Hindu community was another proposed technique. The oppressed and the poor have always been receptive for the Gospel down the centuries in India and elsewhere... The poor have a natural capacity to put their trust on almost anything. They are not dogmatic. This has always been the 'entry point' in the structure on any society, through which we can easily enter."

The targeted drive to convert Dalits to Christianity has found its home at the Evangelical Church of India (ECI), established in 1954. It targets the slums, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, in cities and villages. "We must go to where the fish are found ...where the fish bite the bait on the hook," it boasts inelegantly.

## The myth of Dalit emancipation through conversion

Statistics show that more than 70% of the Christians in India are Dalits. Writing for 'India Together', Padmalatha Ravi says: "When Christian missionaries began their work in India in the decades before Independence, their promise of equal treatment and opportunity for all castes became the prime reason for Dalits - who find themselves at the socio-economic lowest rung of Hinduism's hierarchy - to embrace the missionary message. But as is now well documented, conversion offered no escape from caste prejudices. Now the population may worship Maria instead of Maariamamma (a manifestation of goddess Kaali) but the discrimination continued."<sup>xvi</sup>

Conversion to Christianity did not automatically bring equal treatment, says Y Marisamy, Convener of Karnataka Dalit Christian Federation (KDCF). The statistics speak for themselves - out of 158 archbishops in India only seven are from the Dalit Communities.

In 2000, when the Vatican appointed India's first Dalit archbishop in Andhra Pradesh, there was a furore from the majority of the upper caste church goers. The outgoing archbishop Samineni Arulappa made a public statement that the Vatican was ignoring "ground realities" by appointing Marampudi Joji as the new archbishop. Although the Church never openly acknowledged the presence of casteism within the church, it set up a Commission for Scheduled Castes/Tribes and Backward Classes of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of India (CBCI) to study and address the problems of backward communities within the Church. The biennial report submitted by this commission at the CBCI Annual General Body meeting in 2000 at Chennai, says "Dalit Christians, forming the majority in the Christian community, suffer humiliation, discrimination and socio-educational disabilities even after conversion due to the traditional practice of untouchability in the Church and in society."

### Survey establishes caste divide in Indian Church

In March 2008, a Catholic priest, Montfort Brother Paul Raj, surveyed 53 Christian congregations in three dioceses of the southern Indian state<sup>xvii</sup>. He found out that caste and language divisions "haunt" religious communities in Tamil Nadu, which have around 13,000 members, "impacting their spirituality, unity and future."

About 550 people chosen randomly from 41 women's and 12 men's congregations from various Churches participated in the survey. They represented 28 congregations founded in India and 25 international congregations. Paul Raj conducted the survey as part of his doctoral work at government-run University of Madras.

About 43 percent said caste discrimination is "visibly manifested" in annual transfers, appointments and other decisions in the Church, Raj reported, adding that eight out of 10 respondents accepted that "divisive feelings based on caste and language" influence the religious' thinking and actions within the Church.

### Discrimination against Dalit Christians by fellow Christians

B Chinnappan, Editor of 'Dalit Christians' an online resource for the community in India, claims that "conversion to Christianity has not redeemed 19 million Dalit Christians from social discrimination and untouchability. It has only added to their misery. .... as



Christians, we continue to suffer and live all human misery both in the society and in the church.”

Chinnappan goes on to cite discrimination against Dalit Christians in the Indian Church itself by saying: “Although dalits form the majority in all these churches, yet their place and influence in these churches is minimal or even insignificant. Their presence is totally eclipsed by the power of the upper-caste Christians who are only 30% of the Christian population. This is all the more true in the case of the Catholic Church where such discrimination is strongly felt. The majority of the catholic bishops and clergy, the religious and lay leaders, come from the upper caste. One can say that this 30%, the upper caste, occupy the 90% of the administration and leadership of the church. Thus the dalits are pushed aside and reduced to insignificance in their own homeland. Today this trend has become a major matter for concern in the church and must be dealt with.”

Referring to social interactions between Christians of different caste denominations, Chinnapan concludes by saying: “Even the caste Christians do not treat the Dalit Christians as equals.”

### **Segregation and marginalization of Dalit Christians in the Church**

In a memorandum to Church leaders in India, Prof. Dr. M. Mary John, President of the Dalit Christian Liberation Movement in India writes: “The oppression and discriminations suffered by Dalit Christians within our Church is as serious and appalling ...broadly speaking, we face the problems of untouchability, marginalisation in our institutions (in admissions and appointments), marginalisation in vocation, in of sharing of power and authority in the Church.”

Prof Mary John refers to the external forms of untouchability and their practice still existing among Christians, within the Church. Dalit Christians are not allowed to bury their dead in the same area as higher caste Christians; they have to hold and conduct their own separate festivals, and are usually allowed only to marry within the Dalit Christian community. Prof John writes: “The most unfortunate thing is that the [higher] caste Christians, practising these inhuman acts are often supported by their own caste-priests and nuns, who even encourage them to attack Dalit Christians. That is the main reason for caste-practice continuing in the Church. Incidents in the past and also in recent years prove that in those areas and villages where large number of priests and nuns have been ordained, (few examples: Thatchoor in Madras diocese, Eraiyur in Pondy diocese, Varadarajanpet in Kumbakonam diocese) the caste-Christians are more active in oppressing Dalit Christians and resisting vigorously when they demand dignity, equality, and justice. Most of the caste priests, nuns and some in hierarchical positions use their money, authority and institutional power against Dalit Christians at the times of crisis, instead of supporting their just cause. We are saying this from much experience.”

The Dalit Christian Liberation Movement claims that Dalits are a majority in the Catholic Church, but they are only about 6% as students and employees in most institutions. Dalit Christians complain that they face the worst forms of discrimination: segregation in the parish church, a separate cemetery and an unsaid ban on entering the main street to the church, among other things. Even families of Dalit priests and nuns are not spared discrimination. In 1999, the Archbishop of Puducherry was greeted with abuses and stone throwing, for taking part in the funeral of a Dalit priest's father.

## Violence between Dalit and High-Caste Christians

On March 9, 2008, matters came to a head when Vanniyar (high caste) and Dalit Christians clashed with each other in the Catholic shrine of Eraiyur village near Villipuram in southern India. The two groups resorted to physical violence, resulting in a savage mob attack on Dalit Christians and the death of two higher-caste Christians in police firing. Several Christian shrines in the districts of Villupuram and the nearby areas of Cuddalore and Puducherry were closed following the clashes.

An IANS news report released on March 19 2008 after the clashes and the police firing stated that the head of a Dalit Christian group in India had demanded the resignation of the Archbishop of Puducherry and Cuddalore Diocese, Rev. Anthony Anandarayar, while seeking equal rights to worship.

The report stated that Suresh Rajan, president of the Dalit Emancipation Movement, alleged that the archbishop, who belonged to the upper caste Vanniyar community, was biased against Dalit Christians. Rajan had said that they would launch a struggle 'demanding abrogation of the evil practice of untouchability, inclusion of our denomination into the list of Scheduled Caste and compensation for the closure of our shrine in Eraiyur village in Villupuram district under the archbishop's orders.'

It seems that arguments by Christian priests who say that conversion to Christianity removes the stigma of caste prevalent in the Hindu community does not really hold good even after conversion.

Writing for the 'Hindu' one of India's largest circulating broadsheets, Hilda Raja says: "It is a sad reality that the Dalits come in handy for exploitation in every field and in any cause by the politicians, the church leaders and those who are involved in the business of conversion to suit their own vested interest. The protest against the law which prohibits forced conversions is a telling example. For one thing the Christian churches do practise discrimination even in death, and continue to bury the Dalits in separate cemeteries even today. If it is dignity and equality that force the Dalits to embrace Christianity it is for them to articulate so when they get converted and prove their volition. .. To state that in Christian churches they find dignity is far from truth and that makes it a misleading inducement — to promise equality and then deny them that."<sup>xviii</sup>

### **‘Right-wing’ Christian groups enlist MPs to lobby for Dalit rights**

There are many British MPs who have taken upon themselves the task of representing the rights of Dalits. It has been shown that the Dalit community is the most ‘promising’ target group for conversions by several evangelical Christians, and this is one of the main reasons why Christian groups are involved in Dalit rights.

#### **‘Right-wing’ Christian funds and the Dalit campaign**

In an exclusive report on the Independent on Sunday in March 2008, Jane Merrick and Brian Brady, say that twelve British MPs have interns working for them in Parliament, paid for by the Christian charity CARE (Christian Action Research and Education).<sup>xix</sup> The paper claims that CARE is a ‘right-wing’ charity that is now being subject to a Charity Commission enquiry. The paper said that ‘Christian Action, Research and Education (Care) faces inquiries into its lobbying activities by the Charity Commission and the House of Commons standards watchdog after accessing Parliament at the highest levels.’

HFB has found that there are strong links between MPs who have interns paid by CARE and the Dalit lobby in the House of Commons. Several of the MPs who have CARE interns are also the most passionate advocates of Dalit Rights in Parliament and elsewhere. Some of them are also active members of Christian organisations like the Christian Solidarity Worldwide which advocate a strong case for Dalit Rights. *For a full list of MPs and their links to these groups, please see Appendix 1 of this document.*

#### **CARE MPs letter to the Indian President**

In July 2006, eight MPs who have interns paid by CARE joined eight other MPs to send a letter to the Indian President through the Deputy High Commissioner of India to request the Indian Government to repeal ‘anti-conversion’ laws enacted in several states. This law has been vigorously campaigned against by many evangelical groups because they see it as a threat to their evangelical activities. The law outlaws any attempt to convert a person from one religion to another ‘by use of force or by allurements or by fraudulent means’ but does not ban legitimate conversions exercised by a person of their own choice. It seems like an uncanny coincidence that eight of the twelve MPs who have Research Assistants funded by a purported ‘right-wing’ Christian organisation should lobby for a repeal of the same law that many evangelical Christian organisations are campaigning against in India.

The MPs who signed the letter to the President of India and have interns paid by CARE were: John Bercow MP (Conservative), David Burrowes MP (Conservative), Alistair Burt MP (Conservative), David Drew MP (Labour), Andy Reed MP (Labour), Caroline Spelman MP (Conservative), Gary Streeter MP (Conservative), and Steve Webb MP (Liberal Democrat). The MPs who signed the letter and are associated with Christian Solidarity Worldwide or with Dalit Solidarity Network are: Jeremy Corbyn MP (Labour), Rob Marris MP (Labour), David Arness MP (Conservative) along with Andy Reed and Alistair Burt mentioned above. Other MPs include: Joe Benton MP (Labour), Jeffrey Donaldson MP (Democratic Unionist Party), John McDonnell MP (Labour), Mark Pritchard MP (Conservative), Andrew Selous MP (Conservative).

## Conclusion and recommendations

The evidence gathered by the Hindu Forum of Britain suggests that caste discrimination is not endemic in British society and there is no role for caste in the provision of education, employment or goods and services.

However, due to cultural practises and tradition, caste can play a role in social interactions and personal choices like marriages, conversations and friendships.

Respondents to the Hindu Forum of Britain have categorically requested that the Government should not interfere in personal choices and matters of social interaction. Instead, community organisations should be empowered to break any existing barriers to promote further intra-community integration and cohesion.

A story in the Guardian<sup>xx</sup> reported that the late Piara Khabra MP for Southall accused 'researchers [who wrote the Dalit Solidarity Network's report on caste] of exaggerating the extent of problems'. He was quoted as saying: "It is a big issue in India, but not here. There is a broader community and different traditions. People live happily together." He said many complainants may claim caste discrimination mistakenly or for political reasons. "I am the MP and people come to me who are from the lowest castes."

The Hindu Forum of Britain feels that the only area where Government should interfere is when caste crosses the boundary of law: for instance in cases of forced marriages (arranged marriages where the bride and groom give free consent should not be confused with forced marriages). Although the national media have reported instances of forced marriages from other faith communities, it is not seen as an issue in the Hindu community in Britain.

As Fiona MacTaggart former Minister at the Home Office said in the House of Commons in April 2004: "We acknowledge that there have been criticisms levelled at the Hindu caste system with regards to the treatment of Dalits. However, it is not the role of Government to take a position on the rites, beliefs or practices of any particular religious faith, other than where these give rise to conflict with the law."

### List of recommendations

1. Hindu leadership in the UK should find ways of respecting traditions and challenging bias based on family background or religious tradition within the community. It would benefit all Hindu communities to support the creation of unity across castes, sects and traditions through a structured programme of outreach and positive interaction.
2. Community organisations like the HFB should be empowered by the Government to undertake education programmes in partnership with Dalit organisations to address cultural and behavioural issues faced through social interactions and personal choices. The choices that people make about who they establish relationships with in terms of marriage, business networks, and co-celebrants of religious worship are their own, but where possible, educational programmes could be used to create and sustain feelings of unity and respect.

3. The Government should not directly become involved in legislating caste in the UK. Its role should be to facilitate and encourage community organisations and individuals to play a greater role in building programmes of awareness and education.
4. A Parliamentary enquiry should be launched into the activities of organisations and MPs linked to the organisations described in the Independent on Sunday as 'right-wing'. Investigations should be conducted as to why MPs have not declared their links to Christian and Dalit lobbying groups while asking questions and initiating debates on their behalf in the House of Commons.

## Appendix 1: CARE connections

### MPs whose Dalit or Christian links are not declared in Register of Members' Interest

Jeremy Corbyn MP is the Chair of the Management Group of Dalit Solidarity Network and is also a Trustee of the same organisation. Although he has praised the work of the Dalit Solidarity Network several times in the House of Commons, he has failed to declare his link to this organisation in the 'Miscellaneous and unremunerated interests' section of the Register of Members' Interests. Corbyn initiated a Westminster Hall Debate on Dalits on 28 June 2007. He also asked a written question on 5 June 2006 to the Secretary of State for International Development on whether he would list the projects in India that are supported by his Department that were specifically aimed at Dalit peoples.

Rob Marris MP is also a Trustee of Dalit Solidarity Network, and although he has campaigned for Dalit rights several times on the floor of the House of Commons, he too fails to declare his link to this organisation in the 'Miscellaneous and unremunerated interests' section of the Register of Members' Interests. In a statement to the House of Commons on 8 May 2007, Rob Marris says: "There are thought to be 50,000 Dalits in the UK. We do not have numbers because we do not collect figures." Despite admitting that he does not have numbers, and is not collecting figures, Mr. Marris still gives a figure and a number for the Dalit population – 'thought to be 50,000'!

Andy Reed MP, who has a Research Assistant by CARE, has not declared in 'Miscellaneous and unremunerated interests' section of the Members' Register that he sits on the Board of Reference of Christian Solidarity Worldwide. He continues to lobby extensively on behalf of CSW on the Dalit issue and has visited other countries in trips sponsored by CSW. He has even led a delegation to the Deputy Indian High Commissioner to discuss the anti-conversion law in India.

Like Andy Reed, Alistair Burt MP, who has a Research Assistant paid by CARE, has also not declared in the 'Miscellaneous and unremunerated interests' section of the Members' Register that he sits on the Board of Reference of Christian Solidarity Worldwide. He continues to lobby on Dalit issues, which is an issue that is high on CSW's agenda.

### CARE MPs and their involvement in Dalit campaigns

The following MPs who had interns paid by CARE had also campaigned and lobbied for Dalit rights as described below.

#### Stephen Crabb

The Tory MP is linked to at least two Christian organisations: CARE and Christian Solidarity Worldwide. His entry on the register of interests doesn't mention CARE, but the register of research assistants lists Christina Lineen, CARE intern, under his name.

It is interesting to note that Mr. Crabb actually failed to declare his paid internship by a Christian charity in the register till the Independent on Sunday report, even though the

Dalit campaign he has been leading is one that has been pushed by several Christian lobbying groups.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide's Annual Report for 2007 says: "In 2007, CSW lobbied for the repeal of 'anti-conversion laws' and the extension of equal rights to Dalits who adopt Christianity or Islam. In addition, CSW campaigned on behalf of the Dalits (formerly 'untouchables') who are subject to discrimination and exploitation for their perceived sub ordinance in India's caste system. CSW hosted Stephen Crabb MP on a visit to India to witness the struggles and exploitation of the 250 million-strong Dalit (formerly 'untouchable') and tribal communities who fall 'below' the caste system."

Interestingly, in the same year as he visited India on a trip paid by CSW, Stephen Crabb also raised a written question and initiated a debate on the question of 'untouchables' in India.

On 22 Jan 2007 he posed a question to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what discussions she had had with members of the Indian government regarding the human rights of Dalit people on a previous visit to India.

On 10 May 2007, he initiated a Westminster Hall debate that lasted well over an hour and was joined by several Members of Parliament from different parties. The debate included discussion on the anti-conversion legislation that CSW had been lobbying against (and for which they had arranged to pay for his trip to India).

Steve Crabb also signed the letter to the Indian President on Anti-conversion laws along with eight other 'CARE' MPs which was handed to the Deputy Indian High Commissioner in London by Jeremy Corbyn MP.

The Independent report on the CARE internship said, "... Mr. Burstow and Mr. Crabb face questions because, while their members of staff have recorded that they are sponsored by Care, the two MPs – in breach of parliamentary rules – have failed to record this in the main register."

### **Andy Reed**

Labour MP, Loughborough. Intern John Powner from CARE. Mr. Reed went on Bible Society trip to Middle East; David Landrum, researcher for the society, also works for him.

Andy Reed is also a member of the Board of Reference of Christian Solidarity Worldwide.

Andy Reed led the campaign against the 'Anti-conversion' law in India by writing to the President of India and handing over a letter signed by 16 MPs personally in a meeting with the Deputy Indian High Commissioner of India.

### **Gary Streeter**

Tory MP, Devon South West. Intern Andrew Griffiths provided by CARE. Mr. Streeter is a Christian, registers a Bible Society visit of last autumn to Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Gary Streeter joined Andy Reed in personally handing over the letter on the Anti-conversion law to the Deputy Indian High Commissioner in London.

### **Alistair Burt**

Conservative deputy chairman, the party's assistant chief whip and MP for North East Bedfordshire. His intern Paul Brennan is provided by CARE.

Alistair Burt signed the letter to the Indian President on the Anti-conversion laws along with eight other 'CARE' MPs which was handed to the Deputy Indian High Commissioner in London.

He also praised CSW in a Commons debate on Christian persecution initiated by fellow MP Andrew Seleos on 17 July 2002, although he fails to declare in the Members' Register that he sits on their Board.

### **David Burrowes**

Shadow justice minister, MP for Enfield Southgate; intern Gemma Parry provided by CARE. Alistair Burt signed the letter to the Indian President on the Anti-conversion laws along with eight other 'CARE' MPs which was handed to the Deputy Indian High Commissioner in London.

### **Caroline Spelman**

Conservative Party chair, MP for Meriden. Intern Sarah Bridgman provided by CARE. Mrs. Spelman is a trustee of the Conservative Christian Fellowship. Caroline Spelman signed the letter written to the Indian President protesting about the anti-conversion law in India.



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## Hindu Forum of Britain

The Hindu Forum of Britain (HFB) is an umbrella body for British Hindus. We have over 300 formally affiliated member organisations from around the country. HFB has three main objectives:

### Equality and Justice

Represent a fair view of a large section of the Hindu community in Britain to Government, media, faith communities, service providers and other stakeholders. We conduct many community consultations on public policy matters, publish research papers and advise several government bodies.

### Citizenship and capacity building

Develop the capacity of the Hindu community in Britain to play a fuller and contributing role as British citizens. We have developed several projects to deliver lasting benefit to the Hindu community in Britain, including a chaplaincy board, a religious education resource kit and a safety forum at the Metropolitan Police.

### Community cohesion and good relations

Build good relations between Hindus and other faith and ethnic groups in Britain to build a cohesive society. We have initiated several bilateral and multilateral interfaith projects and events and play an active role at the Interfaith Network of UK.

At the core of the Forum's activity is a strong belief in its value system that encompasses respect for all beings and faiths. We value the richness and diversity of Hindu culture that aid good relations, community cohesion and peaceful coexistence for Hindus living in Britain.



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