

# Memorandum submitted by CasteWatchUK (E 67)

## Caste Discrimination in the UK

### Evidence Paper

**'People not only migrate as bodies but also as Souls'**  
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## 1. Introduction

Caste has contributed to social paralysis and continues to exert a powerful influence in Britain upon the Asian Diaspora. Whether it be in the High Street, at a school, place of work or on the factory floor its affect leaves the victim traumatised and socially scarred. Not a single day passes without someone being prejudiced by Caste Based Discrimination (CBD) in Britain.

It is not the purpose of this paper to explain the meaning of 'Caste' or 'Caste' origins or engage in academic discussion or definition of Caste. That is beyond the scope of this paper. However, Caste System is recognised as a social system of stratification in which groups are pigeon holed in a hierarchy of 'ascending scale of reverence and a descending scale of contempt'. In the Indian sub-continent, over 250 million people are directly affected by CBD. These are people who are at the receiving end of the most brutal form of discrimination affecting their daily livelihood, access to jobs, education and employment, health and access to public services. Although, no direct comparison can be made of the scale and severity of CBD found in the Indian sub-continent, its effects are felt no less severe in Britain. Whilst CBD is also found in African countries this paper focuses on communities in Britain from the Indian sub-continent.

We are aware that many representations have been made to the Government Equalities Office by a number of organisations through submission of reports, letters and evidence of CBD. It is not our intention to explore the work already submitted but present here, for the consideration of the Single Equality Bill (SEB) Scrutiny Committee, CBD evidence of cases that have come to our notice as contained in our case register in section 3.

We are extremely disappointed to note that despite our lobbying during the consultation stage, CBD has not been addressed in the SEB, allegedly, due to lack of 'strong evidence'. We appeal to you to please consider the testimonial CBD evidence as presented here compassionately and objectively. Caste traumatises lives and recognition of CBD in law will provide a welcome relief, as a starting point, to those whose life leads to spoliation and degradation. No modern democracy should allow its citizens to suffer in this way, especially, by virtue of antiquated norms and ancient social customs.

## **2. Summary**

### **2.1. Background**

After the BBC Radio 4 broadcast on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2004 entitled 'Caste Divide in Britain', CasteWatchUK held its inaugural conference in Coventry on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2004 to create awareness of CBD in Britain. Since then we have held a number conferences; engaged with media, community and academia and with statutory authorities to address the vital issue of CBD.

On 15<sup>th</sup> July 2007, the Sandwell conference was held in the West Midlands under the theme of Fighting Caste Discrimination in the UK. Conference topics covered Caste and Community Relations, Caste and British legislation, Caste and Globalisation, Caste Discrimination and Challenges of Multiculturalism, Caste Dynamics amongst the Indian Diaspora, Caste Discrimination in the Work Place and Caste Psychology.

On 6<sup>th</sup> November 2007, CasteWatchUK conference held at the Palace of Westminster addressed the theme of Caste and British Discrimination Law. Topics covered were Caste and Identity and British Discrimination Law.

On 30<sup>th</sup> August 2008, CasteWatchUK held a conference at the University of Aston under the theme of Caste and Social Cohesion, Community Engagement and Mobilisation.

On 21<sup>st</sup> March 2009, CasteWatchUK held a conference in Coventry under the theme of Caste and Indian Christian Diaspora that explored how caste continues to affect Indian Christians in the UK.

## **2.2. Caste *Modus Operandi***

Referring to the Times2 supplement dated Monday, 25<sup>th</sup> February 2008 one can see an open letter written by Mr Sathnam Sanghera brought up in a 'Caste-conscious Sikh community' to his mother saying 'sorry mum, but I'll marry who I want'. There are numerous examples of the younger generation breaking away from the grip of Caste but there are others who are consumed by it.

Numerous temples have emerged in Britain founded on Caste lines because at one time members of the 'low-caste' community were made unwelcome by Caste minded Sikhs and Hindus. Indeed the first Ramgarhia Sikh temple opened in 1969 in Foleshill Road, Coventry that resulted from a split in Sikh Temples in UK on caste basis. Questions continued to be raised in school playgrounds, colleges and Universities where students enquire about others Castes. Questions of Caste are raised in pubs and clubs and on the factory floor. There was even a case of a Shopkeeper in Wolverhampton where the customer refused to take Change from the vendor lest they found there touch polluting and insisted that the change be placed on the counter to avoid contact. On the factory floor, in Wolverhampton, we know of women of so called upper Castes not taking water from the same tap from where the so called lower caste person drinks. Banners are painted on car windscreens extolling Caste virtues. Caste based Bullying occurs in schools and Caste System is taught as part of the school Curriculum. Some have been so stigmatised by Caste at university that their experience has caused them to write MA dissertations to expose the discrimination they faced. Others experiencing Caste Discrimination have found expression in art and music.

Matrimonial sections of the English speaking ethnic press also have Caste underpinning, not to mention web-sites like Shadi.com. There have been cases of physical violence against those who have broken through the Caste barrier through inter Caste marriages or those who have eloped. Mr Virender Sharma, Member of Parliament, when interviewed by More4 News Channel recently, said that people are contemplating committing suicides in this country on grounds of caste.

From time to time we see members of the Hindu religious fraternity portray the central message of the Gita on our television upholding the Chaturvarna (four-fold division of society). The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan held seminars on Manusmiriti (Laws of Manu) and the ideals it portrays. Manusmiriti was praised by majority of the audience as a great example of Hindu Sacred Literature - contrary to what it actually teaches.

### 3. Caste Discrimination - Case Register

This section contains summary of cases that have come to light at our conferences and also where CasteWatchUK was directly engaged with the media when debating and discussing CBD. Details of each case are held by CasteWatchUK.

As evidenced, once Asians move into positions of authority CBD will play an increasing part in public services.

**Keywords:** *Choor*a, *Chamar*, *Jat*, *Brahmin*, *Mochi* are castes. *Bhangra* is Punjabi Folk Music.

To protect the individuals concerned names of people have been replaced by 'Role/Gender'.

Case Ref	Date	Role/Gender	CD Brief Narrative	CD Category	Source
CW0001	1 April 2003	Male	I went to university, and then suddenly my caste was more important than the degree I was doing and the person I was. It wasn't what are you doing? what sort of person are you?, it was what caste are you and then I'll decide if I want to be friends with you"	Social Name Calling	Radio 4 Caste Divide (University)
CW0002	1 April 2003	Anonymous	I met someone we just thought we should get married. Her parents didn't agree. They would only oppose us because they thought they were of a higher creed or caste than myself. Nothing else. Her parents started beating her up. One day her dad beat her up so much that I had to take her away from that house. Her back was like full of bruises and everything and I took her to the doctors. They are like willing to hurt their daughter. They are willing to throw her away just because they think the	Social relationship	Radio 4 Caste Divide

Case Ref	Date	Role/Gender	CD Brief Narrative	CD Category	Source
			person she loves is lower than them”.		
CW0003	1 April 2003	Business owner	People are still mentioning the issue of caste and bringing it up when it comes to marriage and generally it is the lower caste that are sort of outcaste is the word simply because people don't want to marry into a lower caste.	Marriage	Radio 4 Caste Divide  (Marriage Bureau)
CW0004	1 April 2003	Head Priest	“My father used to tell me you are born jat and you will die a jat. Everybody be proud of whatever creed caste they are and I think we should stick to it.	Identity	Radio 4 Caste Divide  (Sikh Temple)
CW0005	1 April 2003	Radio DJ	On a purely bhangra level there are many songs about jat pride, about the life of a jat, almost jat nationalism is running rampant in bhangra music	Music	Radio 4 Caste Divide  (BBC Radio 1)
CW0006	1 April 2003	Labour Councillor	<p>“I became first a councillor in 1989. My name was put forward by the Labour Party and members of the Labour Party but there was a lot of resentment on my selection. One of the relatives came to tell me in the pub when we were having a pint. He came to tell me that such and such person came to say `Why are you going to vote for him because he is a <i>chamar</i>’. So there was some kind of whispering ...</p> <p>So I found another ward where there were no Indians and that's where I came in and there was not a single member of Indian. I</p>	Politics	Radio 4 Caste Divide  (Coventry)

Case Ref	Date	Role/Gender	CD Brief Narrative	CD Category	Source
CW0007	1 April 2003	Local Authority	Continuing presence of caste in the national curriculum	Education	Radio 4 Caste Divide (Coventry)
CW0008	3 July 2004	A female	When I discovered my caste, it changed my life completely. I actually believed that I was inferior. At secondary school, my peers knew about my caste before I did and this was evident in name-calling such as <i>choori</i> and <i>chamaari</i> and rejection from social and group activities. I didn't understand why I was being treated like this until I asked what <i>choori</i> and <i>chamaari</i> meant.	Name-Calling	CWUK Conference Testimonial
CW0009	3 July 2004	A female	I was in an Indian sweet shop in Leicester and the owner boasted about being a Brahman and he said that he was higher than me..	Business	CWUK Conference Testimonial
CW0010	3 July 2004	A Female	Previous owner of my off-licence store assumed that I was a <i>jat</i> and he was in total disbelief when he discovered my caste when he sold the shop to me.	Business	CWUK Conference Testimonial
CW0011	3 July 2004	A Female	A customer at my shop and this customer was of a so-called high caste background who constantly questioned me about my caste. This lady refuses to put money in my hand, like I am an Untouchable.	Business	CWUK Conference Testimonial
CW0012	3 July	A male	I first heard the word <i>choora</i> at school at the age of 15 years. I was confused and angry	Name-calling	CWUK

Case Ref	Date	Role/Gender	CD Brief Narrative	CD Category	Source
	2004		because it had to mean something bad for it be said to me time after time.....		Conference Testimonial
CW0013	3 July 2004	A Female	....No matter how big you become, how well off you might become, once a <i>choora</i> , always a <i>choora</i> .....	Marriage	CWUK Conference Testimonial
CW0014	December 2004	Respondent 1	,,, he discovered the real world, and to him that was finding out his Caste identity. He argued that people at school perceived him as 'different' and consequently he was rejected from the 'Jat' ('high Caste') group at school....	School / Work	MA Dissertation December 2004
CW0015	December 2004	Respondent 3	During the 6 <sup>th</sup> form when I was playing football with a group of people, the 'high' Castes among them:  “...would ignore and blank me when we were playing football. It was like I didn't exist - I was nothing - like not there at all.”	School	MA Dissertation December 2004

Case Ref	Date	Role/Gender	CD Brief Narrative	CD Category	Source
CW0016	December 2004	Respondent 4	“I tell you about another example in secondary school. One of my close mates was a Jatt and she was a lovely girl but she was not - and I mean not allowed to take any food item from me because of her Caste”	School	MA Dissertation December 2004
CW0017	13 <sup>th</sup> July 2007	A Male	My parents told me that my caste is important and I must not marry out of my caste. I have Jatt car number plate and will be passing my caste onto the next generation.	Social	BBC Asian Network  (Radio phone in)
CW0018	13 <sup>th</sup> July 2007	A Male	Caste does cause problems in Birmingham where people have been bullied. It's a big problem in Birmingham	Bullying	BBC Asian Network  (Radio phone in)
CW0019	13 <sup>th</sup> July 2007	A Male	I am a Muslim. I came across Caste in a Steel Mill. A person was from a low-caste. He was not allowed to sit in the eating area where the high-castes sat.	Work	BBC Asian Network  (Radio phone in)
CW0020	13 <sup>th</sup> July 2007	A Male	I was caste illiterate until I came to this country. People are more caste conscious. I used to be asked which Gurudwara(temple) do I attend. is it Ramgharia, Ravidasia etc	Social/Religious	BBC Asian Network  (Radio phone in)
CW0021	13 <sup>th</sup> July	A Female	I am Sikh Jat and I am proud. My	Social	BBC Asian

Case Ref	Date	Role/Gender	CD Brief Narrative	CD Category	Source
	2007		boyfriend is Hindu. My parents told me to be to be proud of being Jat.		Network (Radio phone in)
CW0022	15 <sup>th</sup> July 2007	A Male	Shared some of the episodes of caste bullying that his son and subsequently his family endured while his son was at school. Caste bullying in school caused low esteem and affected his son's school life. Several school projects that he had to do for the GCSE weren't completed because of negativity of Caste that was around him in the class. shared some of the episodes of caste bullying that his son and subsequently his family endured while his son was at school. Caste bullying in school caused low esteem and affected his son's school life. Several school projects that he had to do for the GCSE weren't completed because of negativity of Caste that was around him in the class.	School	Sandwell Conference  2007  Testimonial
CW0023	15 <sup>th</sup> July 2007	A Male	shared his experience how he came to be victimised on grounds of Caste as a local authority worker and subsequently faced victimisation again as a manager of a multicultural elders group	Work	Sandwell Conference  2007  Testimonial
CW0024	15 <sup>th</sup> July 2007	A Female Author	Shared her life story. She said that she had the ability to always question things in my family, and I would say to my mum,	Social	Sandwell Conference

Case Ref	Date	Role/Gender	CD Brief Narrative	CD Category	Source
			<p>“mum, why are we not allowed to play with those people who live across the road. And mum would say, “they’re Chumar, you’re Jaat, you don’t play with them.” And I used to say to my mum, “but mum, in Sikhism, aren’t we all one? Are we not meant to all be equal? Are men and women not equal? Didn’t Guru Nanak say you have to abolish the caste system?” And my mum used to slap me across the head and say, “shut up, you don’t know nothing.” So I suppose caste was always there, but maybe I was guilty of not raising it enough.</p>		<p>2007</p> <p>Testimonial</p>
CW0025	6 <sup>th</sup> November 2007	Anonymous	<p>I am 28 years of age. I work as a professional legal adviser in a Law Firm.</p> <p>My first experience of Caste Discrimination was at the of 15 when I was still at a secondary school. ....My second experience of Caste discrimination was in Sutton Coldfield College in Birmingham where Caste played a key part in who your friends were.....</p>	School/College	<p>Westminster Conference</p> <p>Testimonial</p>
CW0026	6 <sup>th</sup> November 2007	A Male	<p>I was beaten up by so called upper caste men for dancing with a girl at a night club who thought I was low-caste. This totally traumatised my life.</p>	Social	<p>Westminster Conference</p> <p>Testimonial</p>
CW0027	15 <sup>th</sup> February	Member of	<p>People belonging to different castes contemplating inter-caste marriage often face</p>	Marriage	<p>More 4 News</p>

Case Ref	Date	Role/Gender	CD Brief Narrative	CD Category	Source
	2008	Parliament	the wrath of parents. I have had examples where youngsters contemplate committing suicide.		
CW0028	15 <sup>th</sup> February 2008	Anonymous	<p>.... To be born of an untouchable woman that child will always be known as unclean and dirty and regarded as social leper and will never be able to move over the caste barrier.</p> <p>The mother who gave her birth will be regarded as unclean inside and would mean that child will be open to abuse.....</p> <p>It does not matter how much money you in the bank or how many degrees you have under your belt many will choose to define you by your caste.</p> <p>I was not allowed to go into the Kitchen or touch food because I was considered impure.....</p>	Marriage	More 4 News
CW0029	30 <sup>th</sup> August 2008	A Male	... I am black and I married a Punjabi Brahmin lady. My sister-in-law ( wife's sister) married a Mochi ( Ravidassi). Over the years, I have now been accepted in the family but his brother-in-law is still not welcome in the family because of his low caste.....	Marriage	Aston University Conference Testimonial
CW0030	30 <sup>th</sup> August 2008	A Male	<p>... My Uncle's life was ruined due to his relationship with a low-caste and due to family pressures he was forced him into a life of drinking and violence that ultimately killed him....</p> <p>I am now facing a similar situation myself as I have enormous pressure from family to avoid getting involved with other low-caste people...</p>	Marriage/social	Aston University Conference Testimonial
<b>CW0031</b>		<b>Males</b>	<b>Two Court Judgments based on Caste</b>	<b>Work</b>	<b>Wolverhampton</b>

<b>Case Ref</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Role/Gender</b>	<b>CD Brief Narrative</b>	<b>CD Category</b>	<b>Source</b>
			<b>discrimination occurring at work place but dealt under religious discrimination as Caste Discrimination not recognised in Law.</b>		<b>20007/2008</b>