Dalit Diaspora?
Caste, Inequality and Law in Contemporary Britain.

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Table of contents:

Introduction

Migration to Britain

Theorising caste and ‘tradition’

The interplay between religion and caste

Caste and religion in the UK

Separate places of worship

Generation

The British public realm

The Dalit movement in India and the internationalisation of caste discrimination

“The live debate”

Conclusion
Introduction

This project began by inquiring into the concerns and practices of anti-caste activist organisations working in the UK. Over the past decade, organisations such as Dalit Solidarity Network UK (DSN UK), Anti Caste Discrimination Alliance (ACDA) and Caste Watch UK (CWUK) have conducted research into practices of caste discrimination amongst the South Asian communities in Britain as well as petitioning the British government to legislate against such discrimination. The argument often made by commentators on caste in Britain (both those who support the move to legislate as well as those who oppose it) is that the ‘tradition’ of caste and accompanying discrimination has been ‘imported’ to Britain along with large-scale migration from the Indian subcontinent. Without questioning the existence of caste and caste-based discrimination in the UK, I argue that assuming caste to be a fixed and predetermined category of identification is not the best place to start. I therefore begin by asking how caste, as both identity and practice, has become established in Britain.

For South Asians living in the UK, caste is not the primary or most visible aspect of identity. Instead, it is often through the idiom of religion that caste identities are articulated and caste discrimination is practised. Nevertheless, in particular social and political contexts caste is more explicitly invoked. Understanding caste to be an assemblage (Latour, 2007), I trace some of the circumstances in which caste both is, and is not, assembled, and the actors (both human and non-human) that play a role in these processes. Opposed to the situation in India, caste is in a sense shifting outwards from the ‘private’ sphere of inter-personal relations and into the British public realm. In this, it is beginning to be both recognised and challenged as an institution in Britain. Campaigns led by anti-caste discrimination organisations, such as DSN UK, CWUK and ACDA, are beginning to intersect with the lives and experiences of Dalits living in Britain. At particular moments, such as the recent rallies at Parliament Square, the social experiences of caste among diaspora Dalits and the practices of anti-caste activist organisations working in the UK, which have until recently remained distinct, are beginning to converge. Despite the unity shown in response to the government’s inaction regarding legislation,
and the increasing media coverage of the campaigns, I question the extent to which what can be identified as a ‘Dalit diaspora’ has, as yet, developed in Britain.

The issue of caste-based discrimination in the UK is a politically difficult topic to discuss and write about; there are many implicit tensions involved. A focus upon inequalities and discrimination within ‘other’ cultures can imply a neo-orientalist privileging of our own ‘enlightened’ values. There is much disagreement over the existence of caste discrimination outside of the subcontinent and the relevance of legislating against it in Britain, both from within South Asian communities and the wider British society.

During the Parliamentary debates in March and April 2013, the government remained hesitant to introduce legislation against caste discrimination, reasoning that doing so could lead to caste becoming a more permanent feature of life in Britain. Analysis of the debates in the House of Commons and the House of Lords on the proposed amendment to the Single Equality Act reveals how the issue of caste and caste discrimination has begun to be framed within contemporary Britain.

Sections of the South Asian diaspora in Britain have also positioned themselves in opposition to the legislation. Organisations such as Hindu Council UK, Hindu Forum of Britain and the National Council of Hindu Temples claim that caste discrimination is not a prevalent issue in the UK and that cases that have been reported are concerning inter-personal relations and are therefore outside the ambit of British Equality Law. Nevertheless, many activist and religious groups contend that caste discrimination is a real and serious issue for ‘low caste’ individuals and communities living in Britain that must be responded to with appropriate legislation.

Caste discrimination in Britain, which has for years remained a marginal issue within British politics and the media, has in the past year received unprecedented attention, with the issue being debated in Parliament, on TV programmes such BBC Newsnight and Brit Asia TV ‘Real Talk’ and within the national print media. Such media and political attention has no doubt had an impact on how the issue of caste and caste discrimination is being framed.
within contemporary Britain. In turn, the framing of caste within British law and society will have significant repercussions for the continuing debates and campaigns surrounding the issue on the subcontinent.

Migration to Britain

Migration to Britain from the Indian subcontinent in the aftermath of the Second World War was by no means a new phenomenon. However, the large-scale migration of the post-war period has led to the establishment of sizeable South Asian communities in Britain (Ballard, 1994; Peach, 2006). In response to the acute labour shortages of the post-war period, labour migrants were drawn in from Commonwealth countries, namely the West Indies and, most significant for the purpose of this research, the Indian subcontinent. These early waves of migration in the 1950s and 1960s were comprised predominantly of single men who often considered their stay as temporary. The primary aims of these pioneering migrants were to improve the conditions and social status of their families back home, achieved through working, saving and the sending of remittances. Migration at the time was a largely informal process and migrants originated from a small number of areas on the subcontinent, namely Sylhet, Punjab and Gujarat, often areas from which previous migrants had come (Ballard, 1994). “The vast majority of migrants arrived not as unconnected individuals, but in cascading chains along increasingly well-worn paths of kinship and friendship” (Ballard, 1994:11).

Migration from Punjab to Britain was more numerous than from Gujarat and Sylhet; according to Ballard, around two-thirds of South Asians living in Britain are of Punjabi descent (1994:19). In their study, *Sikhs in Britain* (2006) Singh and Tatla show that most migrants came from the Doaba region of Punjab and from the districts of Hoshiarpur, Jalandhar and Karpurthal in particular. The geographical and demographic history of the Doaba region is notable for two reasons. Firstly, average landholdings in the region were small in comparison to the rest of Punjab, which was a predominately agrarian state. These small landholdings were further reduced in size as a result of the
resettlement in the region of displaced people from West Punjab after Partition, which had an unsettling effect on (predominately Jat) agriculturalists and created pressure for outward migration (Singh & Tatla, 2006:37).

Secondly, the region has always had a high percentage of Dalits. The 2001 Census of India shows that the state of Punjab had the highest proportion of Scheduled Caste population in the country; 28.9 per cent of the population in Punjab recorded themselves as Scheduled Caste\(^1\), and in the four districts of the Doaba region the figure was 35.6 per cent (Singh & Tatla, 2006:40).

While migration was an established feature of life for landholding families in Punjab, political instability and the effects of Partition can be noted as significant push factors behind migration at the time. For the landless and ‘low caste’ families from the region, however, who were dependent upon the Jat agriculturalists for their livelihood, overseas migration was an opportunity to escape this “demeaning relationship” (Nesbitt, 1994:128). “Dalit migration had always mirrored, though to a lesser degree, the pattern of broader Sikh migration, but in the 1950s and 1960s it developed a dynamic of its own” (Singh & Tatla, 2006:40). In the post-war period, Punjabi Dalit migration escalated, with individuals following in the paths of earlier migrants, often the sons of well-educated Dalits who had sought a new life free from the oppression and stigmatisation of a society structured by caste. However, the migration to Britain of both Punjabi Jats and Dalits meant that the latter group did not necessarily enjoy the ‘fresh start’ that they had hoped for.

The British Nationality Act of 1948, which gave Commonwealth citizens the right to settle and work in Britain, and labour shortages in the foundries and textile mills of British industrial towns, encouraged non-European migration, namely from the West Indies and the Indian subcontinent (Singh & Tatla, 2006:50). However, despite the economic demand for workers and government-sponsored campaigns for labour migrants from the Commonwealth, for initial migrants there was little state support for them when they arrived in Britain. Migrants therefore relied heavily upon informal networks of earlier migrants in order to establish themselves in the UK,

\(^1\) http://censusindia.gov.in/Tables_Published/SCST/dh_sc_punjab.pdf
nearly in finding work and accommodation. Singh & Tatla’s study (2006) show that although early migrants relied upon existing social connections in order to find their feet, differences of caste, class and religion were often of less significance for life in Britain than they had been on the subcontinent. “For most migrants early social life in Britain was like a commune in which relatives supported each other and villagers pooled their resources in the first steps towards community building” (Singh & Tatla, 2006:51-52).

In addition to the lack of state support, immigrants felt unwelcome by the often-hostile white majority viewed migrants of South Asian origin as a homogenous group (Ballard, 1994). In the post-war period, while Asian, African and Afro-Caribbean migrants were British subjects in the law, “in practice they were ‘coloured immigrants’” (Kundnani, 2007:40) (cf. Waters, 1997). Studies of South Asian migration to Britain (Werbner, 1990; Nesbitt, 1994; Singh & Tatla, 2006) suggest that in the early years of migration to Britain there was notable co-operation between South Asian immigrants of different classes, castes and religions. Werbner (1990) contends that migrants of all social and economic backgrounds carried out menial and low-paid jobs, both working and living together, often in shared accommodation. “Typically they lived together as singles in one house, with occupancy ranging from 5 to 25, or sometimes more” (Singh & Tatla, 2006:52). Bedrooms and living rooms were full of multiple beds, with migrant workers often sleeping in shifts so that night-workers slept during the day while day-workers slept during the night (Rose et al., 1969:454). “Housing conditions in England in the early days of settlement made it impossible to keep up caste exclusiveness” (ibid: 459).

The initial short-term nature of migration and migrants’ plans of returning soon gave way to longer-term processes of settlement in Britain. The prospect of future immigration restrictions, beginning with the 1962 Immigration Act, prompted an increase in immigration, namely the arrival of families and next-of-kin in order to establish a more permanent home in Britain (Rose et al., 1969). As sojourners became settlers (Ballard, 1994:96) new considerations came into play, as migrants began to look to a future of life in Britain. Ballard’s (1994) ethnographic account of Punjabi Sikh migration to Britain suggests that the initial solidarity experienced between migrants of South Asian origin soon
gave way to increasing differentiation based predominately upon status rivalry and caste differences. It was within this context that Britain emerged "as an arena for status competition" (Ballard, 1994:15).

Ballard has suggested that “swift family reunion” brought with it an increase in the observance of social and religious traditions, such as life-cycle rituals, and an increased significance of caste; “men soon felt the pressure, especially from their wives, to return to more orthodox ways” (Ballard, 1994:96). No doubt the arrival of family members had an impact upon the dynamics of South Asian communities in Britain, which until then had mainly been comprised of single men living together in shared accommodation. However, associating women with the realm of domesticity, religion and tradition, and thus with the revival of ‘traditional’ and ‘orthodox’ practices, simplistically and somewhat deterministically links the arrival of South Asian family units with the re-emergence of social and cultural traditions, such as caste. Conceptualising caste as ‘tradition’ implies it as a pre-existing and stable ‘thing’, and thus overlooks its contested nature. Caste is better conceptualised as a practice or "a system of action", "something which people 'do' rather than something which they 'are'" (Searle-Chatterjee & Sharma, 1994:9). This distinction between the ‘doing’ and ‘being’ of caste has become politically and ideologically significant within the politics of caste and identity, a point to which I will return later.

Looking back fondly upon the early years of post-war migration, first generation migrants suggest that caste distinctions in Britain have become more pronounced. The often-expressed sentiment is that “values were different then” (a Dalit woman teacher, 35+, in Ghuman, 2011:68), implying that the aforementioned unity and co-operation during the early years of migration overrode the significance of caste distinctions in Britain. Rose et al. (1969) contend that, “apart from their importance in marriage, caste distinctions hardly survive the process of emigration” (1969:459). The year of publication is particularly notable here, as the research was conducted during the period in which it was claimed that caste “does not matter” (Ghuman, 2011:68).
Nevertheless, a uniform and linear shift from ‘solidarity’ to ‘status competition’ must not be assumed; the inconsistencies and ambiguities of everyday life, as well as the varying experiences of those who migrated to Britain, need to be taken into account. Speaking with me at a public rally at Parliament Square on 4 March 2013 (which will be returned to in a later section), a second generation South Asian man from the midlands recounted not only his own experiences of caste prejudice at school, in sports clubs and at work, but also his parent’s experiences of caste-based discrimination within factories in which they worked when they first arrived in Britain. Indeed, memories of the past may be somewhat romanticised, focused upon co-operation rather than hardships and disputes encountered. These discrepant experiences also point to the unpredictable nature of caste.

Precise data charting the geographical, religious and caste backgrounds of post-war migrants are unfortunately not readily available. According to Juergensmeyer, in the twenty years following Indian Independence, approximately 300,000 Indians migrated to Britain, “a remarkably large percentage of them Punjabis” (1982:245). A significant percentage of these Punjabi migrants were former ‘untouchables’ – categorised as Scheduled Castes (SCs) by the Indian constitution - in particular the ‘Chamar’ subcaste (ibid: 246). Such migration was largely facilitated by the appointment of a member of the Scheduled Castes to the position of Undersecretary for passports in the Punjab in 1952; as a result, an estimated 500 Scheduled Caste applicants were able to migrate each year (Juergensmeyer, 1982).

Nesbitt (1997) highlights a significant difference between Punjabi and Gujarati migration to Britain. Migration from the Punjab was primarily from a particular geographical area, the Jalandhar Doaba, and included both “the most numerous and economically powerful zat (the Jats) and the socially most stigmatised (the Valmikis and Ravidasis)” (Nesbitt, 1997:214). In comparison, migration from Gujarat was more diverse; “Gujarati jatis in Britain are far more numerous, defying easy ranking… thus although the ‘highest’ caste

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2 Indian High Commission, London, August 2, 1971; “consular officials estimated that the percentage of Scheduled Caste immigrants within the total Punjabi community was as high as 10 percent; the rest are largely Jat Sikhs” (Juergensmeyer, 1982:246).
(Brahmins) are represented in Britain, the scale does not include any low caste group as stigmatised as the Punjabi Valmikis and Ravidasis" (ibid: 214-215). The time and place from which migration occurs, as well as the demographic of migrants, are therefore important factors to consider when charting the (re) production of caste in the UK.

Theorising caste and ‘tradition’

The idea that caste is a ‘tradition’ that has been imported to Britain has been articulated by those recounting their own experiences of migration to Britain, anti-caste activist organisations as well as those opposed to caste discrimination legislation. This assumption needs to be challenged. Those who continue to be treated as ‘low caste’ may understandably consider caste an unwanted ‘tradition’. While it remains important not to discount or discredit the diverse ways in which South Asians living in Britain have experienced and conceptualised caste, it is also important to question and interrogate how the practice of caste has become established here. Beginning from the premise of ‘caste as tradition’ – the continuation and persistence of an age-old system of social stratification and hierarchy – runs the risk of overlooking the complex and sometimes contradictory dynamics of caste in the diaspora. “The South Asian communities in Britain have maintained their traditional, pre-modern social and cultural practices against the grain of a post-modernising White British society” (Peach, 2006:142). Peach's rhetoric reveals the dangers involved in regarding the social and cultural practices of South Asian migrants as "traditional" and "pre-modern". More than its patronising overtones, it views traditions as fixed entities, which can travel, unchanged, along with the migrant communities to whom they ‘belong’. Mintz & Price importantly stress the migratory process as crucial in the shaping of slave cultures in the New World. The argument made is, “No group, no matter how well-equipped or how free to choose, can transfer its way of life and the accompanying beliefs and values intact from one locale to another” (Mintz & Price, 1992:1). This perspective importantly draws attention to the process of migration and the
conditions of the ‘host’ setting, suggesting a dialectic between what people bring with them and the conditions of migration and settlement.

Both Werbner (1990) and Shaw (2000), referring to fieldwork carried out among Pakistani communities in Manchester and Oxford respectively, point to the insufficiency of attempting to explain ‘cultural’ continuities, such as arranged and cross-cousin marriages, in terms of ‘cultural preference’.

“Marriage choice and the negotiations that surround it must be understood in terms of the strategies adopted by different participants, rather than in terms of any rule or preference” (Shaw, 2000:139, emphasis added). Following this line of thought, I want to suggest the insufficiency of attempting to explain the persistence of caste within Britain as an ‘imported tradition’, as if its existence as a tradition is explanation in itself for its continuation. Locating agency within the invocation of caste is significant because is implies political responsibility for such actions. The role of agency as well as its denial will be returned to in a later section.

Having established the shortcomings of viewing the persistence of caste in Britain as simply the continuation of ‘tradition’, it becomes necessary to ask what theory can be usefully employed in order to move beyond such a passive conception of caste and culture. Latour urges us not to confuse what is being explained with the explanation itself (2007:8) and instead proposes a sociology of associations that entails a rethinking of terms such as ‘society’ and ‘the social’, which are too often taken to mean ‘things’ in themselves. According to Latour, ‘the social’ should not refer to “a special domain, a specific realm, or a particular sort of thing” (ibid: 7) but rather should be understood as “a type of connection between things that are not themselves social” (ibid: 5, emphasis in original). ‘The social’ cannot provide part of the explanation for itself, for it is only a “momentary association”. Conceptualising the social in this way, as local, temporary and face-to-face interactions, challenges the assumption that ‘social ties’ are fixed, stable and durable (ibid). Approaching caste as Latour does the social/ society, caste and caste groups are not pre-existing structures and categories from which study should begin. Caste can instead be understood as a web of associations, an assemblage, the effects of which are hard to predict (Law & Mol, 2008). It is not possible to
presume how caste will manifest itself within different situations. Rather, caste identities and caste groups are constantly performed, debated and renegotiated, within “the context of daily interactions” in Britain (Werbner, 1990:1).

Drawing upon Latour, I view caste as a practice that is shaped locally by ceaseless debates and controversy (Latour, 2007:63). For those of ‘high caste’, caste is an asset, whereas for ‘low castes’ it is often experienced as discrimination, humiliation and exclusion. Although caste is discussed as an aspect of some ethnographies of South Asian diaspora communities (Ballard, 1994; Werbner, 1990; Shaw, 2000; Nesbitt, 1990, 1997) there has been little research into the experiences of discrimination and exclusion associated with being ‘low caste’ (Dalit) within the UK.³ I therefore want to locate within the processes of migration, settlement and community formation the emergence of caste-based inequalities. Latour’s conception of power and domination can be usefully employed; “power, like society, is the final result of a process and not a reservoir, a stock, or a capital that will automatically provide explanation. Power and domination have to be produced, made up, composed” (Latour, 2007:64).

The interplay between religion and caste

This study is asking about how identities travel when people migrate; some kinds of identities and associations do so more easily than others. Within the British public realm, caste itself is not always self-evident; it is often masked behind other identities, namely religion. Among ‘low caste’ South Asians in Britain there is often a desire or preference for religious-based identities, such as Valmiki or Ravidasi, rather than caste or jati names derived from stigmatised hereditary occupations (Nesbitt, 1994; Leslie, 2003). The question becomes, what does the invoking of religious-based identities allow, that the use of direct caste identities does not?

³ Except for: (Leslie, 2003; Dhanda, 2009; Ghuman, 2011), although none directly anthropological
Within the context of British society, where caste is not overtly present, religious-based identities seem more relevant and easier to invoke. Religions carry into the public realm in a way that caste cannot directly. This is illustrated by studies of caste among Muslims, about which there has been much debate. Caste for Muslims, operating as biradari, does not overlap with religious identities in the same way as it does for Sikhs and Hindus, and so doesn't appear so prominently or publicly in Britain. Werbner (1990) suggests that, for the Pakistani communities living in Manchester, it is within marriage choices and arrangements that caste has most significance. Similarly Shaw notes that for Oxford Pakistanis, caste distinctions “do not much affect participation in domestic rituals, eating together, sharing religious worship or economic transactions” (2000:113). Despite this, the significance of caste for Pakistanis in Britain must not be overlooked; the caste of acquaintances is a point of interest for many despite their condemnation of caste as antithetical to the Islamic ideology of equality. During her fieldwork, caste names were often spontaneously offered to Shaw, sometimes in response to questions about family names (Shaw, 2000:113).

The interplay between religion and caste has a long history on the subcontinent and there has been much anthropological debate over the nature of the relationship between the two concepts. The Dumontian approach, which views caste as a primarily religious, Hindu institution, has been widely challenged (Searle-Chatterjee & Sharma, 1994). Rather than conceptualising caste as a Hindu phenomenon that has imperfectly been translated across into other religions, I understand caste to be a social practice, which has economic, political and religious implications. In both India and Britain, it is often within the realm of religion that caste identities and discriminatory practices are articulated, experienced and refuted (Leslie, 2003). “Social revolutions in India have come in the guise of religion” (Juergensmeyer, 1982:4). The Ad Dharm movement of 1920s Punjab is evidence of this. The founders of the movement worked to create a religious identity for the ‘untouchables’ of the area, based upon the concept of them as a distinct religious community, a qaum, and the original inhabitants of the region (Juergensmeyer, 1982; Ram, 2004a). A central focus of the movement
became the creation of the 'Ad Dharmi' category to be included in the 1931 Census. The argument went that if the 'untouchables' were counted together as one category, rather than divided by religion into Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims, their number would almost equal the other major groups (Juergensmeyer, 1982:73).  

The Ad Dharmi category represented a political force and a challenge to the existing (caste-based) status quo; religion was “a means of positive self-representation” (Leslie, 2003:47). It was in part through the invoking of the saint Ravi Das, himself a ‘Chamar’, as a symbol of the movement that allowed the Ad Dharm to "emphasise the separate religious tradition of the lower castes" (ibid: 89). What the history of the Ad Dharm movement importantly illustrates is the existence of counter-cultures and anti-traditions that challenged the caste system and the position of 'untouchables' in a region from which future migrations would occur. A consciousness emerged in the early twentieth century that sought justice and equality for those who would later identify as 'Dalit' (Ram, 2004a). This consciousness and explicitly anti-caste religious identity remained amongst some who would later migrate from the Punjab to Britain.  

An interesting parallel can be drawn here between India and Britain regarding the relationship between caste and religion as aspects of identity. In South Asia, where caste is explicitly recognised, it can be argued that those of ‘low caste’ often use religion in order to avoid over-recognition as ‘untouchables’ or Dalits. Religion is a way in which to evade the most stigmatising elements of their identity. In Britain, in contrast, caste identities are not overtly recognised. Religion, therefore, is often used not in order to evade caste identities but rather as a means of finding recognition and of creating identity.

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4 In the 1931 Census, 418,789 people recorded Ad Dharm as their religion (Ram, 2004b:901).
Caste and religion in the UK

The 2001 British Census was the first to include an (optional) religious question (see above). The question, ‘what is your religion’, gives a list of different religions with which to identify, including the options 'no religion' and 'any other religion'. It is this option of ‘any other religion’ that has provided the opportunity for the expression of political identities, most significant for the purpose of this study, that of the Ravidasis. While in 2001 only 32 people identified themselves as ‘Ravi Das’, by the 2011 Census the number had risen to 11,058. According to Kalra (2013), this suggests a process of mobilisation, in which a group of people who would have previously identified as either Hindu or Sikh has entered ‘Ravi Das’ in answer to the religious question. Out of approximately fourteen Ravidasi temples in the UK, seven ran campaigns actively encouraging their members to identify as Ravi Dasi in the 2011 Census (Kalri, 2013).

Asad’s deconstruction of the concept of religion is useful, as it is necessary to trace how the concept of religion has been constructed and defined. In the West, religion has come to be understood as individual, private belief and thus occupying a separate domain, distinct from politics, law and science (Asad, 2002). However, Asad asks, what if “the line between religious and

5 http://cdu.mimas.ac.uk/2011/documentation/questions/england-wales/ONS-individualquestions.html#ONS-p20
nonreligious domains is not so easy to draw?” (Ibid: 127). The political should not be conceptually separated from the religious; social and religious identities are also political, and vice versa. Similarly, caste has always been political. In this way, the act of declaring one’s identity as ‘Ravi Das’ on the British Census is not a politicisation of religion and/or caste (Kalra, 2013), for these identities are in themselves inherently political (Asad, 2002). Rather, such mobilisation around the 2011 Census can be seen as the making of a demand for political and social recognition.

Religion and places of worship have played a key role in processes of community formation for South Asians in Britain. The 11,058 who identified themselves as ‘Ravi Das’ in the 2011 Census can be understood as having been motivated by not only a desire for the recognition of their distinct religious/caste identity but also by a desire for recognition as a community in Britain.

Hindu mandirs and Sikh gurdwaras in Britain have emerged as key arenas in which not only caste identities but moreover practices of discrimination and exclusion have become apparent. It is these places of worship that have played a formative role in diasporic identity making (Ballard, 1994; Singh & Tatla, 2006; Nesbitt, 2006). The establishment of mandirs in the UK can be seen to follow the expansion of Hindu communities here; “the sequence includes the conversion of community centres and redundant churches… and more recently, the construction of purpose-build temples” (Nesbitt, 2006:199-200). These temples also serve as community centres, providing programmes such as care services and language classes for the local community. Similarly, Singh identifies gurdwaras as "the foundations of community-building" (2006:147) in the last century. British gurdwaras also function as both places of worship and community centres, thus involving those in the local community who do not actively practise their religion. The first gurdwara was established in Britain in the early twentieth century, but it was the rise in Sikh immigration from the early 1950s that prompted the founding of additional
The increase in the number of **gurdwaras** in Britain reflects the growth of the Sikh population as well as growing rivalry and competition between denominations and sects wanting to establish for themselves a distinctive identity (Singh & Tatla, 2006). Both Ballard (1994) and Singh & Tatla (2006) note that diversity and factionalism have long characterised Punjabi society and are therefore not new phenomena within British Sikh society. However, contemporary Britain is a very different context to the twentieth century Punjab and it must not be assumed that “long-standing processes of differentiation” (Ballard, 1994:93) carry overseas intact (Mintz & Price, 1992).

Singh & Tatla’s study, *Sikhs in Britain* (2006), is an attempt to address the lack of research into the diversity of the Sikh tradition. Gathering data from directories, official reports, websites and personal communication with **gurdwaras**, the writers conclude that the majority of **gurdwaras** in the UK, (83.3 per cent) “belong to what might be called the Sikh ‘mainstream’; that is, they do not identify along caste lines” (2006:77). They go on to dismiss as misleading the argument that labels these as "**de facto** Jat caste gurdwaras", arguing instead that, "they do not restrict membership or participation in the management committee to particular caste groups" (ibid). A distinction here is necessary between direct and indirect forms of discrimination. Although non-Jats or ‘low castes’ may not be formally excluded from the congregation or management committees, this does not rule out informal and indirect forms of discrimination and exclusion (a point which is acknowledged in the notes to the chapter but does not form part of the main argument). For example, success in **gurdwara** elections often comes “by mobilising networks of kin and clients” which in turn has led to the emergence of “caste-based voting blocs” (Ballard, 1994:110). Ballard (1994) highlights the prestige acquired by, and thus competition for, seats on the management committees of **gurdwaras**. Competition for such prestigious roles, and the emerging dominance of ‘high

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6 In 1972 there were 42 **gurdwaras** in the UK, by 2001 this number had risen to 214 (Singh & Tatla, 2005: 76)
caste’ Jats, therefore represents a way in which caste has become manifested within Britain. Jats have, in many instances, re-established themselves in dominant positions not only at the expense of but moreover through the exclusion of non-Jats from positions of power or influence. The following comment by Ghuman’s respondent, “a successful Dalit businessman (age 65+)” illustrates this:

The Jats [farmers] only tolerate you as long as you are a quiet member of the Sangat [congregation], but if you want to have your voice heard, then forget it and look out. They will throw you out. The old caste prejudice comes to the surface… They will never forget that they were the sardars [chiefs] in Punjabi villages and we were farm labourers, which amounted to no more than bonded labour… It is not the Brahmins who suppressed us but the Jat community. (Ghuman, 2011:58)

Juergensmeyer’s interview in 1971 with Gurmit Singh, from the Ravi Das Sabha of Wolverhampton, also depicts the unequal treatment experienced within gurdwaras in the UK; “certain candidates told us if we voted for them, they would give us equal status. But after the elections, they forget about us” (1982:247). These ethnographic accounts reveal the key role played by Hindu and Sikh places of worship in processes of community building, as well as the assemblages (Latour, 2007:5) of caste that emerge within these locations and circumstances.

What can be seen to emerge from these ‘mainstream’ gurdwaras (Singh & Tatla, 2006) is the normalisation of ‘high caste’ practices and values at the expense of alternative interpretations, which are often contemptuously referred to as ‘folk traditions’. Some kind of reformism and purification can be identified, in which orthodoxy is highly valued and heterodox practice is, in the process, stripped out. The normalisation of ‘high caste’ practices is a form of indirect exclusion and religious orthodoxy becomes associated with ‘high caste’, Jat Sikhs. This is well illustrated in Nesbitt’s description of her interaction with a young Punjabi girl in Britain:
“When shown a picture of the panj piare (five traditionally accoutred male Sikhs) in a procession and asked what sort of people they must be, instead of describing them (as anticipated) as Sikhs who observed the Khalsa discipline she replied, without hesitation, that ‘of course’ they would be Jat” (Nesbitt, 1997:210-211).

Most interesting here is the use of caste, rather than religion, as the primary mode of identification by the young Punjabi girl. Particular styles and practices of the Khalsa discipline appear to have become explicitly associated with the Jat caste in much the same way that Hindutva discourse has worked to make the Brahmanical worldview and practice dominant (Lobo 2002:4751 in Mosse, 2012:199), which indirectly excludes those not considered ‘high caste’. For many South Asians living in Britain certain things have come to be represented as ‘normal’ and Sikh or Hindu; these “conventional understandings” have, to a large extent, “been generated by – and still serve the interests of – Punjab’s higher-caste majority” (Nesbitt, 1994:120).

It is not, however, solely the dominance and normalisation of ‘high caste’ or Jat practices that act to exclude Dalits in Britain from ‘mainstream’ South Asian society. More explicit instances of caste-based discrimination and exclusion are evident. According to Ghuman’s respondents, “acute caste awareness began in the late 1970s in Indian enclaves such as Handsworth, Birmingham, and Southall, London” (Ghuman, 2011:97). “Hindu priests in mandirs began to question the rights of Dalit persons to perform puja ceremonies” (ibid). Similar discriminatory and exclusionary actions within gurdwaras in Southall are also noted by Takhar (2011). Indeed, Nesbitt’s (1994) account of Valmikis in Coventry reveals the discriminatory treatment experienced in a gurdwara, “Jats were most reluctant to allow them to use the cooking utensils in the langar, or to distribute karah prashad" (Nesbitt, 1994:128). The following anecdote illustrates a specific instance of caste-related discrimination, experienced within a Sikh gurdwara in Britain:

The new Sikh Singh Sabha temple in Southall - we went to Matha tekh [to bow down in front of the Guru Granth Sahab] and we then came down and sat in the hall. I touched one of the glasses and it was
immediately put in for washing because the ramaal [a headscarf] I had on my head said Guru Ravidass.  

These examples point to the reproduction of practices of ‘untouchability’ based upon the notions of purity and pollution and commensality. Instances such as these, of seemingly direct and explicit caste-based discrimination, often through the idiom of ‘untouchability’, have led some commentators to suggest that, “in some ways, the situation in Britain lags behind that in India” (Leslie, 2003:1).

Separate places of worship

In response to these experiences of discrimination and exclusion the Valmikis and Ravidasis of Coventry began to disassociate themselves from ‘high caste’ gurdwaras and mandirs and raise funds to set up their own places of worship (Nesbitt, 1994). Ballard notes, “Inter-caste tensions have become so acute that a single gurdwara structure is rarely able to contain them. In most British towns with a significant Sikh population one finds a plethora of rival gurdwaras, each with a caste-specific management committee” (Ballard, 1994:110). The words of Ghuman’s respondent, “a former president of Guru Ravidas Bhavan (age 63+))”, highlight the dilemma faced:

I would say that we all contributed to build new gurdwaras in the 1960s in good faith but we were disappointed that we were treated as second class citizens… Nobody from our community was on management committees and there were other incidents of discrimination and insults, so we decided to go our own way… (Ghuman, 2011:59)

The aforementioned shift from solidarity and co-operation in the early years of migration to increased differentiation and separation is well illustrated in the shift towards separate places of worship, “marked initially by the organization of worship in temporarily hired halls, and subsequently by the building of their

7 The anecdote was taken from a Focus Group meeting organised by the ACDA on 6 September 2009 in order to gather information about experiences of caste discrimination in the UK; (ACDA, 2009:12)
[Ravidasis and Valmikis] own temples” (Leslie, 2003:67). According to Ghuman, it was during this time, from the mid-1970s onwards, that Indians living in Britain began socialising separately, “visiting caste and family friends at the weekends” and frequenting different social meeting places, such as pubs (2011:98).

The shift towards separate places of worship must therefore be viewed within the context of discriminatory and exclusionary practices occurring in Britain. However, the legacy of movements such as the Ad Dharm movement, which challenged the position and treatment of ‘untouchables’ in twentieth-century India, must also be recognised. Leslie (2003) draws a parallel between the creation of an untouchable qaum distinct from the ‘high caste’ mainstream in early twentieth century Punjab and the desire for Valmikis to create a separate religious identity for themselves in contemporary Britain. Similarly, Takhar attributes the existence of separate places of worship in cities across the UK to the “sentiments of equality” inspired by the Ad Dharm movement (2011:173), the ideology of which provided the foundations for Scheduled Caste migrants to take advantage of the “fresh start” offered upon arrival in Britain (Juergensmeyer, 1982:248). An interesting dialectic exists between the resources that people bring with them when they migrate - memories not only of exclusion and marginalisation but also of resistance to such subordination - and the circumstances encountered in Britain - the roles played by different ‘actors’ such as individuals, places of worship, activist organisations, the state, the law (Latour, 2007; Law & Mol, 2008).

In contemporary Britain, membership to Sikh and Hindu places of worship is increasingly structured along caste lines; the implications of this are perhaps yet to be fully realised. One notable effect has been the facilitation of the use of membership to a particular temple as a means of determining one’s caste. Individuals wanting to inquire into the caste of acquaintances often use probing questions so as to avoid asking directly about caste. This is well illustrated in the following anecdote:

My daughter just recently started a new job. This girl, wanting to know what her Caste was, pointedly asked her, ‘Which Gurdwara do you go
to?’ My daughter replied that she went to Foleshill Road Gurdwara. The girl was none the wiser; on this road there are a number of Gurdwaras. The girl asked which particular one. My daughter replied [this one]. Instead of asking directly they go about finding the Caste in a roundabout way. The Caste system is here and does exist.”

The subtlety of such questioning is important to consider, for it seems to characterise the often-indirect nature of caste discrimination in the context of British society. Places of worship are not, however, the only indicators of a person’s caste in the UK: questions inquiring into surnames and villages of origin are also used (Ghuman, 2011). Writing of Pakistani communities in Manchester, Werbner contends that, “while it was considered extremely impolite to inquire directly about a person’s zat identity, people make it their business to find out the zat of their acquaintances” (1990:91). For South Asian Muslims too, “some zat identities are a matter of pride; others are a matter of shame or concealment” (Shaw, 2000:113).

The establishment of caste-based places of worship in the UK has also, in a sense, acted to proliferate the practice of caste. There is a tension inherent within attempts to escape the humiliation and discrimination associated with being 'low caste'; for caste is invoked within the act of rejecting it. Ravidasi and Valmiki sabhas inadvertently (re)produce caste differences, despite forming out of attempts to escape experiences of exclusion and discrimination within ‘mainstream’ places of worship. “The very fact of organising any such rejection [to the practice of caste] can perpetuate one dimension of what it seeks to overthrow. In this respect, the Punjabi’s caste-based places of worship… may contribute to structural separateness and to a tendency to stereotype” (Nesbitt, 1997:214). Therefore it can be argued that caste is assembled (Latour, 2007) within the act of founding and attending separate places of worship as well as within the practices of caste discrimination and exclusion. Furthermore, Valmiki and Ravidasi sabhas have come to play a key role in the campaigns to have caste discrimination recognised under British Law, a point to which I will return to shortly.

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8 This anecdote was taken from a focus group organised by ACDA on 16 August 2009 in order to gather information about experiences of caste discrimination in the UK; (ACDA, 2009:13)
Generation

There is much debate over the extent to which caste is (re)produced amongst the second, third and fourth generations of South Asians in Britain, or whether indeed caste is “dying out” (NIESR, 2010). The argument posed by organisations that oppose legislation on caste discrimination in the UK9 is that caste consciousness is an issue mainly for the older generations and is thus “dying out” (ibid:59-60). Any caste consciousness that remains is considered to be within the realm of inter-personal relationships and in the private sphere and therefore outside the scope of proposed legal protections. Caste is presented by these organisations as an element of South Asian ‘culture’ and ‘tradition’, as something to be protected and respected. “By far the only ‘caste system’ apparent within the UK based Indian Diaspora is an effort to preserve communal, regional and vernacular based groups” (Sharma, 2008:27). This perspective fits into the wider notion of framing caste as an identity, and thus passive and somewhat involuntary, implying the denial of agency of those involved. Caste is presented as something people have, rather than something they do. Nevertheless, despite perspectives that emphasise both the personal nature of caste relations as well as their decline, there is much evidence to suggest that caste has somewhat changing significance for the younger generation of South Asians in Britain. The question of whether caste has become more significant for life in Britain is not possible to fully determine. As suggested earlier, while personal accounts indicate greater solidarity amongst ‘pioneering’ migrants, other factors contribute to conceptualisations of the past and the present, ranging from a romanticised imagining of the past to a denial of the (re)production of caste in contemporary Britain. Overall, it is misleading to look for a coherent and linear narrative in which caste either gains or loses significance within the context of Britain. Instead, it is more fruitful to ask, what are the particular moments and circumstances in which caste is assembled?

Nesbitt’s research (1997) indicates that awareness of caste amongst younger generations of South Asians living in Britain is heightened once they start

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9 The Alliance of Hindu Organisations, Sikh Council UK
school. For children from the Ravidasi and Valmiki communities in Coventry, it was often at school that they discovered that they were considered to be ‘low caste’ (Nesbitt, 1991). A fourteen-year-old Valmiki girl tells Nesbitt, “‘There’s a lot of fighting in school over religion, and mainly about caste. Some people go around saying, ‘What caste are you? You’re lower caste!’ because of what their parents have told them.’” (1994:137). The school and the playground are therefore key sites in which caste practices are (re)produced. Dhanda’s (2009) more recent research amongst Punjabi Dalit youth in Wolverhampton also highlights the predominance of caste-related bullying at school, primarily through name-calling but also through exclusion. Many of Ghuman’s Dalit respondents, however, were keen to emphasis the light-hearted nature of caste-related bullying (2011:77). This hesitancy to affirm such experiences of caste-based discrimination could suggest a wish not to (publically) acknowledge humiliating and negative aspects of their identity. Caste is often an involuntary identity; for many first generation immigrants it is something they thought they had left behind and not something they wish to impart upon the next generations. However, rather than disappearing, it is finding new expressions amongst British-born South Asians in contemporary Britain.

Dhanda (2009, forthcoming) suggests an interesting dynamic in her analysis of the differences between older and younger generations’ perceptions of caste in Britain. Caste names referring to traditionally ‘low caste’ occupations, such as ‘Chamar’ (leatherworker) and ‘Chuhra’ (sweeper), are considered a source of offence and humiliation on the subcontinent and for the first generation of South Asian settlers in the UK. As noted earlier, religious-based names and identities, such as Valmiki and Ravidasi, are often favoured over direct caste-based ones. These alternative identities allow Punjabis in Britain to talk around the issue of caste, avoiding direct references to it. Amongst the younger generations in Wolverhampton, however, Dhanda found the term ‘Chamar’ often used in self-reference; for example, a text message received from a respondent ends with the phrase “proud 2b a cham!” (Chamar) (Dhanda, 2009:50). Further, comparing the experiences of a father and son, both living in the UK, Dhanda (2012, forthcoming) concludes that while the older generation continue to associate caste with hierarchy and humiliation,
the younger generation are increasingly empowered to assert their (‘low’) caste identities independent of notions of inferiority and superiority. The term ‘Chamar’ is often re-appropriated; the negative connotations usually associated with it appear to be disregarded. The suggestion of pride and confidence in young people’s assertions of their ‘Chamar’ identity is supported by Takhar’s (2011) research. Takhar’s respondent, a teenager from the Southall Ravidasi community, acknowledged the caste-based membership of her sabha and proudly identified herself as a ‘Chamar’, leading Takhar to assert, “the retention of caste labels did not appear to undermine her assertion of equality within British society” (2011:180).

**The British public realm**

This study is asking about the (social, political, economic) circumstances in which caste is *assembled* in Britain. Caste is often invoked in ‘personal’ decisions regarding marriages, friendships and places of worship, a ‘private’ realm that would remain outside the ambit of the Single Equality Act. A process of “compartmentalization” (Singer, 1972) is evident, in which caste, like religion, is considered to be “tradition” and thus ideally contained within this ‘private’ realm. “Bracketing” caste out of “public” and “professional” settings in Britain allows individuals to acknowledge caste while disregarding its wider and on-going significance. This “bracketing” or “compartmentalization” of caste, however, is not always complete. Although in the UK caste discrimination is not systematic, there are certain circumstances in which the norm of non-discrimination is broken down, and caste in a sense ‘escapes’ into the British public realm. It is important to consider the “(f)actors” (Law & Mol, 2008:70) that contribute to this shift.

Nesbitt (1997) highlights a paradox within the occurrence of inter-caste marriages (which sit somewhere in between ‘private’ and ‘public’ spheres of life), in which caste differences are simultaneously eroded and accentuated. Marriages between two people of different castes, while challenging caste endogamy, also often provoke disapproval and expressions of caste discrimination from friends, relatives and the local community. “Ironically, it
was these negations of the caste principle which precipitated their relatives’ most unambiguous displays of loyalty to the system” (Nesbitt, 1997:213). This tension is evident within the case of Amardeep and Vijay Begraj, which has received substantial coverage in the British media. The married couple were the first in the UK to file a legal case on the grounds of caste discrimination, claiming that Vijay, a Dalit, faced prejudice at work and was unfairly dismissed because he is married to Amardeep, a Jat. It appears that caste identities are often articulated in response to the success of those considered ‘low caste’ because ‘high caste’ individuals feel that their place in the ‘hierarchy’ is being challenged, “educationally, occupationally or economically” (Nesbitt, 1997:204).

Numerous cases have been reported of caste discrimination in the UK in areas that would be covered by anti-discrimination law, namely in education, the workplace and the provision of goods and services. The DSN UK report, No Escape (2006), presents the case of an NHS employee from India who describes how his supervisor’s attitude towards him changed immediately after discovering his caste. Upon returning from annual leave, during which he returned to India to marry, the employee was subjected to differential treatment and complaints were made against him to senior management (DSN UK, 2006:14). The NIESR report (2010) identifies caste prejudice and discrimination with the case of a care-worker who refused to bathe a woman under her care upon finding a picture of Guru Ravidass in her bedroom and thus inferring her ‘low caste’. Her son did not mention the issue of caste when making a complaint to social services regarding his mother’s carer, reasoning that the issue would not be understood while also stressing the difficulty of admitting to be a Dalit (NIESR, 2010:49). Cases such as these suggest that caste is increasingly coming to play a role in more public realms of life and is as a result beginning to be recognised as an institution in Britain.

The South Asian media in the UK is another site in which caste is publically (re)produced, most notably in the promotion of Jat identities through the radio broadcasting of bhangra music that refers to caste (Muman, 2000; BritAsia TV, 2013). Ghuman’s respondents, sixth form students in Britain, suggest that bhangra music largely glorifies “Jatism” – the superiority of Jats - and thus
promotes caste consciousness within the UK (2011:80). Many bhangra artists refer to the Jat caste in both their names and their songs\textsuperscript{10}. Muman highlights the airtime given to songs mentioning Jats on South Asian media outlets in Britain\textsuperscript{11}; the frequency of such broadcasting, he argues, contributes to both caste consciousness and the promotion of Jat identities. The BBC Asian Network DJ, Bobby Friction, was quoted in 2004 highlighting what he saw as a worrying link between bhangra music in contemporary Britain and Jat pride and nationalism:

> “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 now to the point where every bhangra album that comes out [in] Britain has at least one track that alludes to the power of jats. One of the most famous bhangra songs is ever is [sic] ‘Putha jatta de’ [Putt jat de] which mean we are the sons of jats and we are proud of who we are and what we do.” (Bobby Friction in Puri, 2004).

Furthermore, in August 2012, the DJ used the social media platform, Twitter, to publically condemn the broadcasting of songs that refer to caste and announced that he would not play any song that promoted caste identities for a three-month period.

\textsuperscript{10} Such as Notorious Jatt, http://www.notorious-jatt.com/

\textsuperscript{11} AsiaNet; Sunrise Radio; Zee TV
The argument made is that bhangra songs referring to caste, and in particular Jats, combined with the significant airtime that they receive, act to (re)produce both caste identities and differences. The growing popularity of bhangra in the UK is acknowledged by Singh & Tatla, who suggest that there has been a “reinvention” of bhangra music; “since the 1980s it has become the emblem of British Punjabis, coinciding with the emergence of an identifiable youth culture and the new information entertainment technologies” (2006:200). According to Roy, “the British media hailed British Bhangra as ‘Asian Kool’ and ‘the voice of the Asian youth’, marking British Asian presence on the popular cultural scene” (Roy, 2011: 755).

The popularity of bhangra music in Britain, and the controversies surrounding the prevalence of Jat pride in many song lyrics, is evidenced in reactions to Bobby Friction's aforementioned decision on the website “chakdey.com”, which refers to itself as “the epicentre of the Asian music scene” (Chakdey, 2012). Many individuals posted comments speaking out in both support and contempt, which highlights the highly controversial nature of the issues of caste discrimination and inequality in contemporary Britain.

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As the above comment suggests, many non-Jats may feel excluded by the lyrical content of the songs and their dominance and celebration as expressions of Punjabi identity and culture. Similar to the normalisation of certain (‘high caste’) Hindu and Sikh practices, some identities in the diaspora context have become dominant and are thought of as ‘normal’ and Punjabi, amounting to indirect discrimination and exclusion.

Dudrah’s work focuses on “how British Asian identity formation occurs through British bhangra music” (Dudrah, 2002: 366). Drawing on the work of Simon Frith, Dudrah argues that both the social and the aesthetic aspects of the music must be analysed alongside one another. Based upon extended interviews with six 14-26-year-old South Asians living in Birmingham, UK, Dudrah analyses how the often-conservative lyrics of British bhangra music are negotiated by its listeners; “issues of caste and gender are sometimes ominously played out through the music” (ibid: 376). The male-dominated British bhangra industry often privileges the Jat “as primary producer and consumer of the music” (ibid: 377). Although not necessarily hampering their enjoyment of the music, the problematic use of caste and gendered lyrics was noted by Dudrah’s respondents. ‘Manjit’, a 22-year-old bank clerk, commented the following:

“In some ways you get the higher castes chatted about, especially the jat. It’s as if the jats only listen to bhangra or live in the Punjab. It can kind of isolate the other castes. Don’t get me wrong, I mean for a lot of young people caste doesn’t really matter, but now and then you still get some people, old and young, who are into caste and shit and

then those kind of songs are played it can be ammunition for them.”
(Dudrah, 2002: 377).

Dudrah also importantly highlights the significance of the different spaces and contexts in which bhangra songs and lyrics are listened to and made sense of. Returning to Muman (2000) and Bobby Friction’s (2004, 2012) comments above, perhaps it is the predominance of bhangra songs which refer to and glorify Jats broadcast through South Asian media outlets in Britain, as much as the lyrical content of the songs themselves, that non-Jats find particularly exclusionary and offensive.

**Transnational linkages**

The popularity of and controversies surrounding bhangra music in the UK cannot be read independently of contemporary events and developments taking place on the subcontinent and elsewhere across the South Asian diaspora. Quereshi et al., in their important study *Migration, Transnationalism and Ambivalence: the Punjab – United Kingdom Linkage*, emphasise the importance of looking at “the actual ongoing exchanges between people scattered across the world” (Qureshi et al., 2013: 28).

Nirban (2013) describes a scene at the Guru Ravidas Committee premises in Phagwara, Punjab, where the singer Rajni Thakarwal performs the “brash” and “confident” music that now characterises the Punjabi Dalit music market. In contrast to Dalit folk music, these new songs, “set to fast bhangra beats […] celebrate material success, a sense of having arrived” (Nirban, 2013). The four-hour performance is filmed by young members of the audience and is shared, live, via Skype, with friends and relatives abroad.

In Punjab today it appears that there is a great demand for what Dogra (2011) refers to as “Chamar songs”, whose lyrics and music videos glorify the Chamar community and are reminiscent of the bhangra songs which glorify Jats. According to Dogra (2011), the movement, known as “Mission Chamar”, began in the aftermath of the 2009 attack at a Ravidassia Gurdwara in Vienna, Austria, an event that sparked violent riots in Punjab and Haryana.
Hath leke hathiyar
Jad nikale Chamaar
Pher vekheyo pataka kiven paoo mitro
Aj dekhde panga keda layoo mitro"

[When Chamars walk out with weapons in their hands,
Friends, watch how there will be fireworks,
Let's see who can cross our path]

"Jadon da liya une Chandigarh dakhla
Rakhda bana ke hun saade kolon faasla
Hummer gadi vich aunda nee putt Chamaaran da
Hun nahin ankh milaanda putt Chamaaran da"

[Ever since he took admission in a Chandigarh college,
He has begun keeping me at a distance,
This son of a Chamar who comes in a Hummer vehicle
Does not meet my eyes any more.]

—from the pop song ‘Hummer Chamar’ (Dogra, 2011)

Aside from songs and music videos, popular online as they were initially banned from state radio and music channels, “Mission Chamar” is also visible on t-shirt slogans and car stickers, primarily in the Doaba region of the Punjab, which, as detailed above, has the highest proportion of Dalits in India (Singh & Tatla, 2006). The almost instantaneous transmittance of news and ideas via the Internet and social media channels means that such Dalit assertions and the rise in ‘Chamar pride’ exhibited by Punjab’s Dalit youth is not disconnected from the aforementioned re-appropriation of the term ‘Chamar’ by Dhanda (2009) and Takhar’s (2011) respondents in Wolverhampton and Southall, UK.

The Dalit movement in India and the internationalistion of caste discrimination

I will now return to the point at which this research began in order to examine the work of UK-based activist organisations which have, in recent years, positioned themselves favour of legislation against caste discrimination in
Britain. Organisations such as the Dalit Solidarity Network UK (DSN UK), Caste Watch UK and the Anti Caste Discrimination Alliance (ACDA) have formed out of attempts, primarily by activist organisations based in South India, to internationalise the issue of caste discrimination. While early attempts by Dalit civil society activists in the 1980s to attract international attention had very limited responses, by the late 1990s caste discrimination had become an issue debated outside of the Indian subcontinent. Dalit rights activists wanted to see the issue on The UN agenda as an international human rights issue whereas other actors, namely the Indian government, sought to frame the issue as a solely domestic one and refuted the need for international involvement (Lennox, 2009).

Although a detailed analysis of the Dalit movement in India and its internationalisation is beyond the scope of this study (see Hardtmann, 2009; Lennox, 2009) a brief outline is necessary in order to contextualise the current activism against caste discrimination in the UK. On 10 December 1998, the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) was launched by a group of, predominately Christian, Dalit activists from South India (Bob, 2007; Mosse, 2012). The NCDHR worked to create a more unified Dalit movement by connecting Dalit civil society organisations from across India, and subsequently provided the platform from which to internationalise the issue of caste discrimination and ‘Dalit rights’. The NCDHR is a national platform that has a strong international focus; “the UN is a key advocacy target for the organisation” (Lennox, 2009: 110).

Since 2000, caste discrimination has been recognised as a violation of international human rights law and as a form of 'discrimination based on work and descent'. The recognition by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) of the situation of Scheduled Castes and Tribes in India as discrimination based upon ‘work and descent’ led to a change in the discourse and terminology used by Dalit activists so as to fit within the existing UN framework. Hardtmann argues that this change in language was necessary in order that there was “any chance at all” of getting the issue of
caste discrimination on the agenda of the Durban conference\textsuperscript{14} (Hardtmann, 2009:195).

In addition to appealing to discourses of ‘international human rights’ and ‘discrimination based on work and descent-based’, the NCDHR invoked the tradition of Ambedkar in their campaigns (Hardtmann, 2009). “Ambedkar’s legacy as a founding father for the contemporary Dalit mobilisation is profound. His statue figures prominently around India, his picture is found in Dalit homes” (Lennox 2009: 107). The central role of Ambedkar within the Dalit movement in India is notably different from the relative absence of references to Ambedkar within the lives of many Punjabis in Britain; Dhanda (2012) notes the lack of photos of Ambedkar in the houses she visited during her fieldwork in the West Midlands, UK. In contrast, banners with large photos of Ambedkar were held at the public rallies at Parliament Square on both 4 March and 4 September 2013. This disparity highlights the aforementioned importance of considering the context in which migration takes place, for it largely determines the ideas and connections that travel when people migrate. The significance of Ambedkar for South Asian diaspora communities in Britain needs further research.

The Dalit Solidarity Network UK (DSN-UK) was established in 1998, “initially with an exclusive focus on India but later expanded to address caste-based discrimination more broadly” (Lennox, 2009: 115). National Dalit Solidarity Networks have also been established in the United States and in countries across Europe including Belgium, Germany, Denmark, France, the Netherlands and Sweden. The International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN), based in Copenhagen, was launched in 2000 and acts as a central hub, maintaining links with national Dalit solidarity networks, organisations in South Asia such as the NCDHR and international organisations including the UN, the European Union and the European Parliament (Hardtmann 2009; Lennox, 2009).

\textsuperscript{14} The United Nations World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban, 2001
The initial impetus for the UK-based activism came not from South Asian communities living in Britain but rather from the *internationalised* discourse of ‘Dalit Rights’ coming out of India, with a focus on the experiences and treatment of Dalits on the subcontinent (Waughray & Thiara, 2013). The DSN UK report, *No Escape*, states “there was little awareness of Dalit organisations in the UK and the work of organisations such as DSN” (2006: 8). It seems that this is changing somewhat currently, as new connections between South Asians in Britain, caste politics and activist organisations are being forged. In recent years, of focus of such activist organisations has been primarily on the situation regarding Dalits in Britain and the campaigns to have caste discrimination recognised in British law.

Invoking Veena Das’ notion of “critical events”, Sokefeld urges us to consider the “specific political circumstances” within which diasporic imaginations emerge (2006:280). Following from this, I suggest that Dalit diasporic imaginings have begun to emerge within the context of the campaigns to have caste discrimination recognised within British anti-discrimination law and at the recent rallies at Parliament Square (which will be returned to in the following section).

In recent years, the focus of pro-legislation organisations in the UK has been on lobbying the British Government to provide legal protection for victims of caste discrimination in the UK. During the 2009-10 parliamentary debates these organisations lobbied the government to include caste as a ‘protected characteristic’ within what would become the Single Equality Bill. However, citing lack of evidence, the previous government declined to do so. Instead, a clause was added, “giving government the power to add caste to the definition of race at a future date (the so-called ‘caste power’)” (Waughray, 2012). The government also commissioned research, to be carried out by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR), to determine whether caste discrimination was an issue within

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15 Such as DSN-UK, ACDA, Caste Watch UK, FABO

16 “The “caste power” is found in s 9(5)(a) of EqA 2010, which allows the protected characteristic of “race” in s 9 to be amended by ministerial order “so as to provide for caste to be an aspect of race”.” (Waughray, 2012)
Britain (the findings, published as Metcalfe & Rolfe 2010, *Caste Discrimination and Harassment in Great Britain*, have been utilised for this study).

Despite the publication of the NIESR report in 2010, which found evidence of caste discrimination in the UK and outlined the benefits of a legislative solution, the government maintained that it would not activate the “caste power”, instead proposing an educational initiative, ‘Talk For A Change’, to tackle the issue of caste-based prejudice and discrimination in Britain. The public rallies held in Parliament Square in March and April 2013 were organised in protest against the government’s indecision regarding the issue of legislation. I now turn my attention to the discussions and debates surrounding the issue of caste discrimination and the proposed legislation, as well as the implications of these for the framing of caste in Britain.
Standing alongside approximately 400 protestors in Parliament Square\(^\text{18}\), it became apparent that this rally saw the coming together, probably for the first time, of different, pro-legislation activist organisations (such as DSN UK, ACDA, Caste Watch UK) and religious-based, community-level groups (including Ravidasi and Valmiki temples and Ambedkar groups). The rally was organised jointly by Caste Watch UK, Voice of Dalit International (VoDI), DSN-UK and Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha UK, to coincide with a debate in the House of Lords on an amendment to the Single Equality Bill that would outlaw caste discrimination in the UK\(^\text{19}\). It was an important moment in the efforts to have caste discrimination recognised and legislated against under British law,

\(^{17}\) Photo: DSN-UK, https://twitter.com/DSNUK/status/308869315061493760/photo/1  
\(^{18}\) http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-21659744  
\(^{19}\) See Appendix A
a project that was, at least in part, realised on April 23 2013 when Section 97 of the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act was enacted, which requires that the government make caste an aspect of the protected characteristic race in the Equality Act 2010.

Anthropologically, the rally at Parliament Square on 4 March provides a useful lens through which to analyse the emergence of an, albeit fragmented, ‘Dalit diaspora’ in Britain. Although the different communities and organisations present at the rally were noticeably, and intentionally, distinct, they were together making a united stand against the government’s inaction regarding legislation which in turn acted to make visible the issue of caste discrimination in Britain. Unprecedented media coverage of the issue of caste discrimination in Britain accompanied the debates in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords. National newspapers covered both the parliamentary debates and the rallies and the BBC programme ‘Newsnight’ gave significant airtime to the hitherto arguably marginal issue.

Aside from successfully lobbying Parliament, the UK-based activism has involved working to make caste discrimination a visible issue within Britain, and in turn making ‘Dalit’ a visible political identity for ‘low caste’ South Asians living here. Anti-caste discrimination organisations are bringing to the forefront issues that were not previously recognised and as a result people are becoming conscious of things that were previously only implicit. The Brit Asia TV programme, Real Talk, dedicated an episode to a discussion of the caste system in Britain that included the opinions of those who oppose and those who support the move to legislate against caste discrimination in Britain. The programme, which was aired on 15 March 2013, was probably the first time that sections of the South Asian diaspora in Britain had come together to publically address the sensitive issue of caste discrimination. As Waughray

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20 (see Appendix C)
22 4 March, 16 April & 23 April 2013
23 http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01s0r58
24 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8OsHyzY7mo
and Thiara contend, “for decades caste issues were not acknowledged in the UK, either by the South Asian community or by mainstream society (including the political establishment). Dalits […] were a largely invisible ‘minority within a minority’ in the UK, and the existence of caste and caste discrimination was barely acknowledged by non-Dalits” (Waughray & Thiara, 2013: 116).

Many organisations have conducted research, in the form of questionnaires and focus groups, in order to determine the extent to which caste discrimination is practised within the UK. The questions asked create a framework for the interpretation of experiences, namely through the creation of certain categories of identification. The ACDA report, *Hidden Apartheid* (2010), for example, inquires into the ethnicity, religion and caste of participants, asking them to select from a list of options, including ‘other’. This is inadvertently (re)producing caste, and in particular the notion of caste as identity. The DSN-UK report, *No Escape*, explains how researchers often found that individuals were reluctant to identify themselves as ‘Dalit’ or discuss caste as an issue in Britain (2006:8). Those considered to be ‘low caste’ living in Britain may feel that these organisations are invoking painful, humiliating and often undesired memories of the past by working to make caste discrimination a visible issue in the UK.

Speaking with me at a rally at Parliament Square (on 4 September 2013), a representative from the Ambedkar Mission Society, Bedford, explained the widespread reluctance of many ‘Dalits’ in the UK to come forward and share their experiences of prejudice and discrimination when research for the aforementioned NIESR report (2010), *Caste Discrimination and Harassment in Great Britain*, was being carried out. Experiences of humiliation and subordination are not easy matters to talk about, especially openly to unknown researchers or journalists. This is slowly changing, as individuals are increasingly willing to speak about their experiences of caste and caste-based discrimination in Britain, although there are still some who do not want to get involved in the activism surrounding the legislation or draw attention to the issue of caste discrimination in Britain.

25 See Appendix B for extracts from the ACDA questionnaire
The argument put forward by organisations that oppose the proposed legislation is that, rather than remedying the situation, recognising caste discrimination under British law would in fact act to heighten awareness of caste and proliferate divisions. “This legislation would take us back to the past where we do not want to go” (The Alliance of Hindu Organisations UK, 2013). The difference between the individuals and organisations that publically speak out in opposition to the legislation and those for whom experiences of caste-based prejudice and discrimination are painful memories that they do not wish to revisit is that the former speak with confidence and determination, whereas the latter do not speak at all.

Bourdieu importantly highlights how the class or the category “exists in and through the body of representatives who give it an audible voice and a visible presence, and in and through the belief in its existence” (1991:251). In this sense, the class or category of people, ‘Dalit’, is ‘manufactured’ prior to the demands made for political representation. It is the ‘manufacturing’ of the category ‘Dalit’ by these activist organisations that creates the opportunity for political representation and it is within this context that caste becomes social (Latour, 2007). The institution of caste comes into being through being named. The construction of a particular category of people, here ‘Dalit’, “changes the space of possibilities for personhood” (Hacking, 1986:165). Hacking’s notion of “dynamic nominalism” can be usefully employed in considering how people interact with, and respond to, the ways in which they are categorised. The issue of caste discrimination has received increasing, albeit still limited, coverage in the British media. In addition to the frameworks of identification ‘manufactured’ by anti-caste organisations, there is a dialectic between what people hear and read about ‘themselves’ and their own self-conceptions. In this sense, the emergence of a Dalit diasporic imagination (Sokefeld, 2006) is dependent upon numerous (f)actors (Law & Mol, 2008); individuals, the practice of caste, inequality, the state, the media, law, activist organisations, international human rights discourse.
The Parliamentary debates in March and April 2013 on the amendment to section 9 of the Single Equality Act 2010 had a significant impact upon the framing of caste and the issue of caste discrimination in Britain. Different and often-conflicting opinions were expressed by members of both the House of Commons and the House of Lords; for instance, some leaned towards a religious framing of the issue, understanding caste to be a primarily Hindu institution, while other speakers insisted that caste is a social and cultural rather than religion-specific practice. The complexity of the issue was often emphasised; caste was discussed as something not only fixed, like race, but also exceptional. “You cannot change your caste, and that is why it is an exact parallel of race and may indeed be included within race. Surely it is not acceptable to say that there is anything else like caste” (Lord Deben, HLHansard 2013: col 1312).

On April 23 2013 the coalition government reconsidered their position and agreed to pass the amendment to section 9 of the Single Equality Act. However, a ‘sunset clause’ was added, which “provides for the possibility of review and repeal of the caste legislation after five years” (Dhanda et al., 2014a: 34). Throughout the debates caste was often portrayed not only as a ‘complex’ issue but also as an “inherently […] undesirable concept that we want to fade away” (Jo Swinson, HCHansard, 2013: col790). Such a position confuses ‘caste’ and ‘caste discrimination’; it is only discrimination on the basis of caste and not caste itself that will be legally prohibited. The ‘sunset clause’, which is “legally without precedent” (Dhanda et al., 2013: 34), is also derived from a fear, expressed by speakers from all political parties, that adding caste as a protected characteristic within the Single Equality Act 2010 will act to institutionalise caste in Britain. “If legislation goes ahead, and we hope it does, we must ensure that the process of implementation is right so as to prevent the entrenchment, rather than the eradication, of caste distinctions in Britain” (Baroness Thornton, HLHansard 2013: col 1316).

The framing of caste during the parliamentary debates has had a significant impact upon how the issue of caste discrimination in the UK is discussed. The failure to distinguish between caste as an identity and the practice of caste discrimination has contributed to the fear expressed by some Hindus in the
UK that the legislation will vilify their community; “The proposed law to ban caste discrimination will open a Pandora’s box in which innocent Hindus will be accused of caste discrimination” (Mehta, 2013, emphasis added).

Representatives of Hindu organisations that attended the EHRC ‘Caste in Britain’ stakeholder workshop (see below) expressed concern “of new prejudice against themselves emerging as a result of legislation and a public discourse on caste as a “Hindu problem”, thereby undermining years of successful community integration in British society” (Dhanda et al., 2014b: vii).

Following the enactment of the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act in April 2013, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) commissioned research on caste in Britain to be carried out by a team of UK academics from September 2013. The research consisted of a review of existing socio-legal research on British equality law and caste (Dhanda et al. 2014a) and the organisation of two events, an experts’ seminar and a stakeholders’ workshop (Dhanda et al. 2014b). The research process gave an interesting insight into policy-focused research and the development of secondary legislation. The interaction between social science, legal and stakeholder positions produced new questions and perspectives on the issue of caste discrimination in Britain as well as the practicalities of legislation. “For legal purposes, it is necessary to separate caste practice in the public and the private domain or in family relationships, although from an sociological perspective there is no such clear separation” (Dhanda et al., 2014b: iv).
Conclusion

This study has been asking about the contexts in which caste is practised in Britain and the specific implications this has for those who are considered ‘low caste’. The current research on such issues is in some respects quite limited, based largely upon closed questions and surveys characteristic of social science research. I have been challenging the notion that caste is simply an ‘imported tradition’, a sentiment most recently expressed in the House of Lords debate; “If there is one thing that really annoys people about immigration, it is when people bring to this country attitudes that are wholly contrary to the traditions of Britain” (Lord Deben, HL Hansard, 2013:col1279). Conceptualising caste as an assemblage allows us to better examine the particular circumstances in which caste is (re)produced in new settings, giving consideration to the different (f)actors involved.

Caste has often been both articulated and refuted through the idiom of religion. Efforts to contain the practice within the ‘private’ realm and interpersonal relations are not always successful. Caste is often invoked in a discriminatory manner in more public settings in Britain. Although disregarding the passivity involved with viewing caste as identity, the sense of it being an unwanted aspect of identity has been important to consider. The (re)production of caste in contemporary Britain often comes as a shock for many who thought the practice had been left behind on the subcontinent, especially for those on the receiving end of prejudice and discrimination. This research suggests that despite the fluidity often associated with migrant identities, individuals do not necessarily exert control over the aspects of their identity that have travelled with them. The (re)production of caste amongst younger generations remains a contested issue; further research is needed into the relation between bhangra and caste prejudice as well as the re-appropriation of ‘low caste’ names in self-reference.

On April 22nd the House of Lords once again voted in support of legislation and the following day the government changed their position and decided to
make caste discrimination illegal within the UK. Legislation against caste-based discrimination in the UK will no doubt have both national and global repercussions; the framing of the issue will have significance both in the UK and beyond. The government’s decision to provide legal redress for victims of caste discrimination in Britain will have an impact upon the Indian government’s stance that caste is a domestic issue that does not require international attention. Now that the activist organisations have in a sense succeeded in their campaign for legislation, it will be interesting to see the paths that they take. The years-long campaigns, and more specifically the rallies held in March and April this year, can be understood as ‘critical events’ around which a ‘Dalit diaspora’ in Britain may have begun to mobilise. Whether such Dalit diasporic imagination continues, remains to be seen.

26 See Appendix C for the DSN UK press-release
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UNITE FOR DIGNITY
PUBLIC RALLY

UNITE AGAINST
CASTE
DISCRIMINATION

Leaders against caste discrimination will address the rally

Monday 4th March 2013
1:30pm - 3:30pm
Parliament Square
Westminster, London
SW1P 3AA

On 4th March, House of Lords will be debating the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (CRR) Bill. The Peers of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Dalit have moved an amendment in that Bill to insert a new clause in the Equality Act 2010 to include ‘(d) Caste’ after section 9(1)(c) to make Caste a protected Characteristic in Law. This will mean Caste discrimination will be outlawed in the UK.

We call on all campaigners to join us in Parliament Square to add their voice to the debate to outlaw caste discrimination.

Rally sponsored by:
Sat Pal Muman 07751 689926 / satpal_m@hotmail.com (CasteWatchUK),
Eugene Culas 07919 247332 / vodi@vodiintl.org.uk (Voice of Dalit International),
Meena Varma 07966 081558 / meena.v@dsnuk.org (Dalit Solidarity Network UK),
ACDA infoaccda@gmail.com, Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha UK.
Appendix B (ACDA, 2009)

A Scoping Study into Caste and Caste Discrimination in the UK

Annex B Online Survey about Caste and Caste Discrimination

SECTION 1: About you

1) Please confirm: I live in the UK or have recently lived in the UK.
   Yes – Please proceed to the survey
   No – please DO NOT continue with this survey

2) I am a:
   Female
   Male

3) My ethnicity is
   a) WHITE British
   b) WHITE Irish
   c) WHITE Other White background
   d) MIXED White and Black Caribbean
   e) MIXED White and Black African
   f) MIXED White and Asian
   g) MIXED Other Mixed background
   h) ASIAN or ASIAN BRITISH Indian
   i) ASIAN or ASIAN BRITISH Pakistani
   j) ASIAN or ASIAN BRITISH Bangladeshi
   k) ASIAN or ASIAN BRITISH Other Asian background
   l) BLACK or BLACK BRITISH Caribbean
   m) BLACK or BLACK BRITISH African
   n) BLACK or BLACK BRITISH Other Black background
   o) CHINESE
   p) OTHER ETHNIC GROUP

4) I describe my faith/religion as:
   Hindu
   Sikh
   Buddhist
   Radaswami
A Scoping Study into Caste and Caste Discrimination in the UK

Vaimiki
Narankari
Muslim
Christian
Other – please specify

5) My age, in years, is:
   under 18
   18 – 30
   31 – 50
   51- 60
   over 60

6) My current social class is: (If retired please tick which applied to your area of work)
   I Professional etc occupations
   II Managerial and Technical occupations
   III Skilled occupations
   (N) non-manual
   (M) manual
   IV Partly-skilled occupations
   V Unskilled occupations

7) The name of the town I live in is:

8) The first part of my home post code is:

9) The educational level I have reached is: (Please tick the highest level)
   No qualifications
   GCSE or equivalent
   A level or equivalent (e.g. NVQ)
   Degree
A Scoping Study into Caste and Caste Discrimination in the UK

Higher Degree

SECTION 2 : About Caste

10) Do you know what the word or term Caste means?
   . No
   . Yes
   . If yes, at what age did you become aware of it?

11). Which of the following (Caste jail, Verma, biradari) are you identified with?
    Please note: it is not our intention to offend anyone with the questionnaire wording
    . Dalit (Sikh, Chrisitan, Buddhist)
    . Chamar
    . Vaimiki
    . Ravidasaia
    . Rangaria
    . Rajput
    . Jat
    . Brahmin
    . Tarkhan
    . Lohar
    . Qumar
    . Shinthay
    . Other

12) Do you let people know which caste you belong to?
   . No
   . Yes

13). If not, what is preventing you? Tick all that apply:
    . my job or workplace
    . my family or partner
    . my home or social life
    . I do not want to tell people about my caste
Appendix C

Eleventh hour change from the Government turned 1000 protesters into 1000 partygoers -
The UK Parliament outlawed Caste-Based Discrimination

For the third time in 6 weeks, Dalit groups, communities and campaign organisations made a call to rally in Parliament Square to continue to urge the government to do the necessary to legislate against caste discrimination in the UK. Our call was again answered as coach loads of people from across the country joined members of CastleWatch UK, Dalit Solidarity Network UK, Voice of Dalit International, Federation of Ambedkarite Buddhist Organisations UK, Central Varaksh Sabha UK, Indian Christian Concern, Ravidassia Communities and Dr Ambedkar Memorial Committee GB, as well as scores of regional and community organisations and met at the rally on Tuesday 23 April. The date will now live in all our memories forever.

Growing up in Birmingham I faced tremendous caste discrimination and ill treatment because I was a Dalit (or Untouchable) at the hands of so called high caste people. I became involved in the anti-caste movement so that victims of modern day discrimination would have a voice and legal redress. I am proud to be part of this momentous day”. Rajinder Ratu, Community Activist and Managing Director, Neighbourhood Consultancy Ltd

The carnival atmosphere was evident as we heard at 2.30pm that the UK Government had laid down their amendment to use the Ministerial power to trigger the legislation in the Equality Act 2010 to outlaw discrimination on the basis of caste. This will provide much needed legal protection to the hundreds of thousands of Dalits in the country.

Amendments tabled by Business Secretary Vince Cable in the House of Commons today state that the Equality Act will “provide for caste to be an aspect of race”.

This means that the government conceded on the principle and tabled an amendment, which requires the Secretary of State to bring forward regulations to include Caste as an aspect of Race (under Section 9(5) of the Equality Act) within two months of enactment of the Enterprise Regulatory and Reform Bill.

Lords Avebury and Hussain joined the revellers in Parliament Square before the news had filtered through. Lord Avebury said “This is all the more terrific for being totally unexpected!”

Soon after MPs Jeremy Corbyn and Richard Fuller addressed the growing crowd. They both gave impassioned speeches in the Commons debate.

At around 2.45 PM, the Shadow Junior Minister for Equalities Kate Green MP and Seema Malhotra MP came out to the crowd to break the momentous news – the UK Parliament had passed the amendment without the need for a vote, as there was cross-party consensus.

Kate Green announced that Caste discrimination would soon be outlawed in the UK and paid particular tribute to Seema Malhotra MP for her sterling work in securing the amendment. This brought cheers and whoops from the 1000 people present.

Prepared Tuesday 23 April 2013
Eleventh hour change from the Government turned 1000 protesters into 1000 partygoers -
The UK Parliament outlaws Caste-Based Discrimination

Baroness Thornton who alongside Lord Harris and Lord Avebury were all instrumental in the success we had today came out for a quick chat with campaigners – only to be virtually mobbed by the crowd.

In a major parliamentary stand-off, the House of Lords voted twice for legal protection to be given to Dalits who live in the UK.

On April 16, Commons MPs overturned the first Lords vote, sparking a tug-of-war between the two Houses. But after the Pears again backed the proposals by 181 to 168 votes yesterday thus forcing the government to re-think – and hence the victory for the Dalits and the campaigners who have worked alongside them for many years.

‘This is a major victory for us. Our planned demonstration in Parliament Square today to protest against the Government’s stand on the issue has now turned into a celebration,’ said Caste Watch UK General Secretary Davinder Prasad, who has been spearheading a campaign in favour of caste-based discrimination to be included in the UK’s equality laws.

‘We stand side by side today as we have done for the past 10 years to herald a victory and toast our Government for upholding the essential British notion of justice and equality,’ said Meena Varma, Director of Dalit Solidarity Network UK.

Sat Pal Muman, Chair, CasteWatchUK said with great passion that ‘we started to dig the grave yard 10 years ago to bury caste-based discrimination in the UK. Today, with power and strength of communities and wisdom of British Parliament a last push was given to bury it for good. I pay tributes to all who stayed the course and witnessed the epoch making event.

There was singing, dancing and as ever with us Asians – a plethora of delicious food and snacks to be had and shared by all with everyone there.

We are proud to release this statement on behalf of the 1000s at the rallies in Parliament Square on 4 March, 16 April and 23 April 2013

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Available at: http://idsn.org/news-resources/idsn-news/read/article/britain-bans-caste-discrimination/128/