

Eleventh hour change from the Government turned 1000 protesters into 1000 partygoers - The UK Parliament outlaws 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 CasteWatch UK, Dalit Solidarity Network UK, Voice of Dalit International, Federation of Ambedkarite Buddhist Organisations UK, Central Valmik 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 Rattu, 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



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Baroness Thornton who alongside Lord Harries 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 Peers 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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