

Caste prejudice 'may exist' in UK

Discrimination on the grounds of caste - or historic social standing in Hindu and Sikh communities - may be happening in the UK, a government peer has said.

Ministers have previously said they did not think people from lower castes were treated unfairly in the workplace.

But Baroness Thornton said evidence may exist. She has ordered more research.

She was speaking as peers accepted an amendment to the Equalities Bill, paving the way for such discrimination to be made illegal if necessary.

Hindu campaigners have long argued that members of the lower caste - referred to as Dalits or "untouchables" - suffer unfair treatment at the hands of higher caste members, even in second generation UK Asian communities.

Baroness Thornton told peers the National Institute of Economic and Social Research was due to present its research in July or August.

" The blight of caste discrimination, under which millions in India are regarded as 'untouchable', has spread to this country virtually unnoticed "

Keith Porteous Wood, National Secular Society

"We have looked for evidence of caste discrimination and we now think that evidence may exist, which is why we have now commissioned the research," she said.

"The proportionate thing is to take the power to deal with that discrimination if and when that evidence is produced."

Lord Avebury, for the Liberal Democrats, who moved the amendment, said he believed the research would "conclusively prove that caste discrimination does occur in the fields covered by the bill".

If it becomes law, the bill will require organisations of all sizes and types to promote equality and avoid discrimination in the workplace.

It will clarify existing discrimination legislation concerning sex, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief and age, and ministers hope increased transparency will help tackle the pay gap between men and women.

Keith Porteous Wood, executive director of the National Secular Society, said the decision to commission research represented "a historic moment".

"The blight of caste discrimination, under which millions in India are regarded as 'untouchable', has spread to this country virtually unnoticed."

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Lords vote to ban caste discrimination



Lords voted for enabling legislation on caste discrimination today

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By politics.co.uk

The House of Lords voted opened up a legal channel for the banning of caste discrimination in the UK today.

Peers voted for enabling legislation to permit the outlawing of discrimination on the grounds of caste in the report stage of the equalities bill.

The move comes after fears that caste discrimination has spread to the UK with migrants from Indian society, which places a great onus on caste.

Under today's measure, a minister can initiate an order at any time without further primary legislation. Activists expect the caste discrimination provisions to be activated following a report commissioned by the Equalities Office.

The measure was proposed by Lib Dem Lords Avebury and Lester of Herne Hill, as well as Lord Harris, the former bishop of Oxford. The National Secular Society worked extensively with Lib Dem science spokesman Dr Evan Harris in securing the measure.

Peers also voted to allow, but not compel, religious organisations to host civil partnership ceremonies.

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UK moves to ban caste discrimination

In a move termed as 'historic', British lawmakers are in the process of amending equality laws to make caste-based discrimination illegal, following mounting evidence of the practice within the Asian community here.

Academics and campaign groups have conducted surveys that highlight the prevalence of caste-based discrimination among people with origins in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

After refusing to amend the laws for some years on the ground that there was no evidence of such practice, Britain has now accepted that discrimination on grounds of caste may be happening.

Baroness Thornton, a government peer in the House of Lords, said such evidence may exist and has commissioned the National Institute of Economic and Social Research to conduct research into the subject and present its report by August.

Based on the evidence and research present in the report, the government is expected to amend equality laws and initiate measures to prevent caste-based discrimination in the same way as discrimination on grounds of sex, colour, religion, age, sexual orientation.

The study says: "There is clear evidence from the survey and the focus groups that the caste system has been imported into the UK with the Asian diaspora and that the associated discrimination affects citizens in ways beyond personal choices and social interaction."

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