Re-institutionalising Caste in the United Kingdom:

Principles of Purity, Temples, and Caste Identities among Indian Migrants in Britain

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Statement

I hereby state that this dissertation contains no materials accepted for any other degrees in other institutions. The thesis contains no material previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgement is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

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Abstract

This dissertation examines how caste is practised, articulated and re-institutionalised among Indian migrants in the United Kingdom. It discusses the processes of reconstruction of social relations and identities and poses the question: does caste change with migration or is it re-institutionalised in a different context? The thesis answers this question by analysing the growth of social and religious institutions and their practices among migrants. It argues that on the one hand, caste changes as a result of practical tasks and difficulties that migrants encounter in the host society. On the other hand, caste is reproduced in distinctions and hierarchies through religious practices. Tracing the post-Independence history of Indian migration to the UK, this study examines how caste is practised as a "belief" in scriptures that represent caste hierarchy. Based on ethnographic field work, this dissertation demonstrates how the principle of ritual "purity" and the grading of castes are not only taken seriously among Indian migrants in the UK, but that the ontological drive of caste produces a "gaze" that represents an embodied perspective whereby migrants organise their everyday life and social relations. It represents a system that is reproduced and protected, which is why any attempt to make it relevant to public scrutiny results in the politics of denial. Analysing the reproduction of castes in the diaspora, this study makes a critical contribution to the literature and the scholarship on caste and migration.

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List of Abbreviations

AMCB	Ambedkar Memorial Committee of Great Britain
BSP	Bahujan Samaj Party
DSN-UK	Dalit Solidarity Network – United Kingdom
EHRC	Equality and Human Rights Commission (UK)
ERRA	Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013 (UK)
FABO	Federation of Ambedkarite and Buddhist Organisations
HFB	Hindu Forum Britain
ICERD	International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
IDSN	International Dalit Solidarity Network
IWA	Indian Workers' Association
NIESR	National Institute of Economic and Social Research
RPI	Republican Party of India
SCF	Scheduled Caste Federation
SGPC	Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
VODI	Voice of Dalit International

Introduction

The first time I encountered the question of caste and migration was at an MPhil course on "migration and diaspora" taught by Professor Vivek Kumar at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Building on the colonial and post-colonial trajectories of Indian emigration, the course aimed at understanding migration from, what the professor emphasised, as the "caste perspective". Understanding migration from a caste perspective was the first attempt of its kind that provided a new conceptual and analytical tool to study migration. The course deviated from the conventional approaches to the "sociology of migration" which has undermined caste as an important basis for social formation in the migratory societies. It provided a platform to debate and critically discuss the scholarship on migration. The reading reflected on Indian traditions and customs being brought to migratory societies and provided an idea about their practices. It also pointed to the issues of caste. While some readings pointed to the existence of caste, some indicated that caste is insignificant among overseas Indians. However, the grounds upon which these claims were made – either pointing at the existence of caste or its irrelevance – were ambiguous. This ambiguity about whether caste exists in the diaspora or not aroused my interest in the subject.

When I read two articles on diaspora written by Professor Kumar himself, I began to pursue the question of caste in diaspora seriously while thinking of a possibility of pursuing my MPhil research in the field. These two articles provided a starting point as to how to approach the question of caste in diaspora (Kumar 2004, 2009). They pointed out that the studies on Indian emigration are mainly rooted in understanding mainstream culture and religion but the question of caste has not been paid sufficient attention (Kumar 2009: 53). Based on the migration trajectories in the colonial and the post-colonial migration, the articles pointed out that not only is the Indian diaspora "divided on caste lines" (Kumar 2004: 116) but also there is "caste based discrimination" within the diasporic community (Kumar 2009: 62). At first it was quite surprising for me to learn that caste has travelled beyond India through migration and that the discrimination based on caste also persists among Indian migrants. I began to think that how caste could possibly survive outside of India in a foreign land whose social structure does not support a caste hierarchy. This question enhanced my curiosity to learn more about caste and

migration, and I discuss in this thesis the extent to which caste is changing or remains the same among Indian migrants in the United Kingdom.

In his 1916 paper on "caste in India", presented at an anthropology seminar at the Columbia University (New York), Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar stated that even though caste is a "local problem", it portends a severe consequences across time and space. Referring to Dr Ketkar, one of the twentieth century scholars on caste, he further observes that "as long as caste in India does exist, Hindus will hardly intermarry or have any social intercourse with outsiders; and *if Hindus migrate to other regions on earth, Indian caste would become a world problem.*" (Ambedkar 2014: 5-6, emphasis added.) Ambedkar provides an early theoretical approach to discuss caste among Indian migrants overseas. The paper mainly unravels the mechanism and spread of the caste system in India, but the second part of the quote indicates that caste may not be confined to India alone since it has a potential to survive outside of India through migration. Making the above reference to caste in relation to migration, Ambedkar was not concerned about the migratory dimension of caste. But his reference to caste in the context of migration needs be understood in the light of his central thesis on caste.

In his 1936 essay on "annihilation of caste" (originally a speech)[1], Ambedkar explains that caste is not only confined to the physical segregation and prohibition of inter-dining and inter-marrying, but also, as he emphasises, that "caste is a notion, it is a state of mind" and explains the psychological dimension of caste (Ambedkar 2014: 68). He illustrates convincingly that the root of caste lies in the ancient texts and since the latter are deemed sacred, caste is followed as a sacred belief. According to Ambedkar, it is this sacred "belief" instructed by the religious texts that drives people to carry their caste consciousness beyond India. In other words, his reference to caste with regards to migration hints at the psychological dimension of caste. When Professor Kumar emphasises in his articles about the existence of caste and caste-based discrimination in diaspora, there is resonance in his emphasis of Ambedkar's conceptualisation of caste as a "belief". One the one hand, it is Professor Kumar's perception of seeing migration through a caste lens, and on the other hand, Ambedkar's theoretical imperative that informs the possibility of carrying caste as a belief. These two views appealed to me as a promising

[1] The essay on "annihilation of caste" was originally a speech prepared by Dr BR Ambedkar for the annual conference planned by the Jat-pat Todak Mandal of Lahore in 1936. But it was "not delivered owing to the cancellation of the conference by the reception committee on the ground that the views expressed in the speech would be unbearable to the conference" (quote from the title page of the published speech in 1936).

juxtaposition to choosing the case of Britain to enhance my understanding on the subject while embarking upon my PhD research.

The points raised by Professor Kumar and Ambedkar remain significant to understand and explore the field of migration from a "caste perspective". But unfortunately, these views remain at the margin in the mainstream academia, both in the field of sociology and migration studies. There is a plethora of literature on Indian migration ranging from the colonial to the post-colonial migration of Indians across the globe. Moreover, a significant amount of it also reflects on the social and cultural aspects of emigration while indicating the relevance or irrelevance of caste. However, the question still remains as to why caste is deemed relevant at one point and irrelevant at another in migratory societies. The answer to this question lies in understanding the change and continuity in the structure of caste in the migration context. The available scholarship on migration explains changes in caste structure to some extent, but it is unable to explain why caste still continues despite of certain changes in caste structure. One of the reasons behind this ambivalent portrayal of caste is the sources through which caste analysis is inferred. Mainstream academia has suppressed the views of caste that deviated from the hegemonic articulation of caste. Ambedkar's contribution to the study of caste remained unacknowledged throughout the post-colonial writings on caste in India. Similarly, the scholars on overseas Indian migration, such as Barton Schwartz (1964, 1964a, 1967), Jayawardena (1968, 1968a, 1980), Ravindra Jain (1993, 193a, 2010), N. Jayaram (2004), Roger Ballard (1986, 1989, 2002) and Gerd Baumann (1996), who talk about the caste dimension of migration, seem to have made no reference to Ambedkar's thesis on caste. The theoretical views applied to migration in the existing studies therefore hardly capture the essence of caste and explain why caste dwells among migrants at one point and why it disappears at another. Taking Professor Kumar's and Ambedkar's approach to caste as a vantage point, this dissertation aims at exploring how caste is practised, articulated, and re-institutionalised among Indians in the United Kingdom.

In this introductory part, I first set the migration context through which I locate the problem of caste in diaspora. I will analyse some of the literature on overseas Indian migration, both in the context of colonial and post-colonial migration, and point to the observations on caste made in the previous studies. Secondly, I discuss some of the major theoretical concepts and ideas I have used to explain my field work material. Thirdly, I provide the details of my ethnographic research methods and the field material I have gathered during my field visits in the UK. Lastly, I draw on a brief overview of the chapters of this dissertation.

Analysing the literature on the overseas Indian migration, one gets a sense that caste has made its presence felt outside of India in various ways. How caste travelled outside of India and in what form is a question that deserves attention. Some scholars maintained that caste is practised through endogamy and religious practices while others point to the decline of these institutions (Schwartz 1967; Tinker 1974; Carter 1996; Safran et al. 2009). Kumar (2004) argues that when Indians migrated across the world, they carried their "socio-cultural baggage" with them and reorganised their social life in compliance with their caste and kinship values (ibid.: 58). The ethnographic entry in the area of overseas migration has further underlined the persistence of traditional norms and customs concerning social and cultural practices that point to caste hierarchy within the migrant community (Schwartz 1964; 1964a; Jain 1993). Moreover, the emerging ethnographic account provides new insight into caste dynamics through rituals and patriarchal relations among Indians living in the Caribbean countries (Ayyathurai 2020, 2021). The post-colonial migration of Indians to industrialised countries such as Britain is another important migration trajectory that informs the reorganisation of the social in line with the vernacular distinction based on religious sects, social and cultural organisation, as well as the family and kinship relations that indicate the production of caste hierarchy in the diaspora (Ballard 1994; Bauman 1996).

Over the last few decades, the South Asian communities in Britain have made their presence visible through religious activities while displaying their religion in public. This scenario received an academic attention especially from religious scholars who studied the transcendence of religious systems through ritual practices and the socio-religious organisations within the South Asian religious tradition in the diaspora (Burghart 1987; Ballard 1989, 2002; Werbner 2002). One of the common features of caste that these studies point to is the presence of endogamy and kinship relations. Moreover, it is also illustrated how economic capital circulates within particular castes or *baradari* among British Pakistanis (Werbner 1990; Shaw 1994). However, it is important to note that these studies broadly revolve around mainstream religious traditions (Hinduism, Sikhism, and Islam) while paying little or no attention to marginalised religious communities within these religious cults. The only exception to this is Eleanor Nesbitt's and Opinderjit Takhar's scholarships that point to the narratives of lower-caste religious cults (Valmiki and Ravidasis). Their work remains an exception in indicating not only the presence of caste in the UK, but also the issues concerning identity struggles, especially among the British-born generations within the lower caste religions (Nesbitt 1990, 1994, 1997; Takhar 2011). Taken together, the above studies reflect on the presence of caste in

migration, where migration carries caste either through "cultural baggage" and identity or the endogamy practices and kinship relations.

While these studies serve as a preliminary to locate the caste problem in migration, we are yet to know adequately how caste is produced in migration and how it survives there. The production of caste among migrants indicates both change and continuity in caste relations and practices. In this dissertation, I elaborate on the basic question: does caste change with migration or is it re-institutionalised in a different context? Building on the existing literature on the Indian diaspora, I formulate my research question with a hypothesis that caste does exist in the diaspora and that it changes in some respects while it does not change in others. What are the areas in which caste changes and what are the areas in which caste does not change? What does the change in one aspect meant while there is no change in another? Does it mean that caste is weakening its grip on one area while reinforcing it in another? If so, what are the factors that make caste decline its hold in one aspect and strengthen in another? Moreover, what are the modes (socio-religious practices) through which caste identities are produced and how do these identities translate into ordinary conversations and social relations, thereby maintaining a sense of caste superiority and inferiority? These are the broader questions, I set out to address in this dissertation.

My objective is to examine how caste is produced and reproduced in the United Kingdom. Drawing on a range of narratives across various generations and the people belonging to various castes and religious cults, I argue that caste has become an organising principle among Indian migrants in the UK. It plays a decisive role in the making of social identity and relations that reflect hierarchical relations between different castes. Caste is not only a matter of social identity. It reacts in everyday interactions and socio-religious practices while invoking the distinction between the pure and impure in caste hierarchy. It governs social life in accordance with scriptural norms that reproduce Brahmin principles of purity. The principles of "purity and pollution" reflect an important dimension of caste associated with the scriptural beliefs (Dumont 1980). This "belief" in caste is sanctioned by the divine authority of the Vedic scriptures and therefore practised as a sacred entity (Ambedkar 2014). While the objective features of caste, such as endogamy and physical separation (purity and impurity) are essential for the reproduction of caste, these features are the manifestations of the "belief" in caste as Ambedkar explains. Therefore, objectively studying the institution of endogamy and the ritual system in the diaspora gives only a partial picture of caste as can be seen in some of the past

studies on caste in overseas Indians (e.g. Schwartz 1964, 1964a; Jayawardena 1966). The migration of Indians suggests a significant amount of subversion of traditional caste ties as a result of breaking endogamy and hereditary caste occupation. But that did not amount to the elimination of caste hierarchy among overseas Indians. In fact, caste has survived effectively as a "belief" and been re-instituted through the tradition of endogamy and ritual practices in which the notion of purity and pollution began to be practised as per scriptural norms. This indicates that the purity of caste is not only taken seriously among Indian migrants, but that the mental state of caste also produces a "gaze" that represents an embodied perspective whereby the migrants organise their everyday life and social relations.

Illustrating the psychological dimension of caste, Ambedkar explains that caste practices are the result of the "beliefs" inculcated in minds by the sacred texts. And therefore, until these minds discard their beliefs in the sanctity of the sacred texts that direct them to maintain caste inequality, caste practices will not cease to exist in regular life (Ambedkar 2014: 68). Ambedkar unravels how caste is internalised through beliefs in the scriptural authority that forces people to carry out social differences and exclusion. Analysing the psychological basis upon which caste hierarchy thrives, Ambedkar is certain in his radical stance on the abolition of caste. For he seeks the means to abolish caste not in the superficial acts of inter-marrying and inter-dinning, but he takes a radical step by attacking the sources through which caste is manifested: the Vedic texts. For Ambedkar, real remedy to abolish caste, therefore, is to "destroy the belief in the sanctity of the *Shastras*" (ibid.). The caste scenario among the diasporic Indians reflects a great deal of this psychological underpinning of caste. Drawing on the narratives of the old and new generations, I examine how caste is manifested as a belief and how it reflects in caste-based prejudices and discrimination against the people of the lower social echelons in the diaspora.

While exploring the articulation of caste and its practices in the ordinary lives of people, my objective is to understand the persistence of caste in Indian communities in the UK. To proceed with this objective, I trace the post-Independence migration of Indians to the UK and outline the processes through which migration took place and the context in which the emigrants eventually settled in the host society. I draw on the earlier social and cultural practices of first-generation migrants through which they made their identities explicit. By focusing on first-generation migrants, I ask how and in what socio-political context people decided to leave their homes and migrated to the new land, and what happened to their social (caste) differences when

they started working in factories while sharing their living spaces. Moreover, did caste relations change upon their arrival in the new land, or how did emigrants cope up with their internal caste hierarchy in the host society? These questions provide a basis to understand the production and reproduction of caste as an important factor in the social organisation of the migrant community. Furthermore, focusing on the narratives of the subsequent (British-born) generations, my goal is also to investigate the nature of caste within the new generations. I demonstrate that there is a continuity in the reproduction of caste through social and cultural practices within the new generations as well. I argue that along with the institutional practices of endogamy, religious functions, and a host of other customs that maintain the essence of caste, the consciousness of caste is also inculcated in the minds of the younger generation.

Understanding migration as a process is also significant in underlining the growth and continuity of the migrant community in social and cultural spheres (Werbner 1990; Ballard 1990). As will be illustrated in this dissertation, the migration of Indians reflects a peculiar patterns of family and kinship networks that ultimately resulted in the formation of close ties based on one's own caste and religious belonging. This caste-based community pattern further developed to the extent where religious places (temples) have been established on caste lines. Every temple that exists today in Britain indicates its belonging to a particular caste and sect within a religion. The process of the formation of temples is an important dimension which not only reflects reorganisation in religious life but also the social conflict and caste hierarchy among migrants. The diasporic space brought the migrants from different castes and religions under one umbrella as workers in Britain's factories. They worked shoulder-to-shoulder in those industries and also eventually shared their social spaces while living together. But that was only a temporary phenomenon. As soon as the workers were joined by their families from the native places they migrated from, their social life began to appear differently. Their caste consciousness and belief in their superior status began to gain momentum as their social life began to unfold amid family norms and customs. Temples began to appear during this stage when the migrants began to feel secure within their own castes. I argue that the temple as a physical entity provided space to exercise social exclusion and hierarchy. Temples represent caste belonging, either higher or lower in rank, thereby performing rituals and religious activities that reinforce the principles of purity and pollution. By focusing on the process of migration, I intend to analyse the growth and formation of the religious institutions that inform how caste is re-institutionalised in the diaspora.

While demonstrating the re-institutionalisation of caste, I trace an important dimension of migration – namely, the counterhegemonic struggle against caste hierarchy. I discuss that the struggles against caste domination make the Indian diaspora a distinct entity compared to other diasporas across the globe. These other diasporas are usually known for their struggle against the hostile environment in the migratory societies. In some cases, they are referred to as "victim diasporas" for their subjugation as ethnic and religious minorities in the host country (Cohen 1996, 1997). The struggles against domination that exist within the Indian diaspora are not only against the discriminatory environment in the host society. They are also within diaspora's own population based on internal differences and hierarchies. In his paper on the "world conference against racism", Dag-Erik Berg (2007) argues that the Dalits tend to face double discrimination, based on caste and race too. He illustrates that the racial dimension of caste is overlooked by the scholars on caste, who confined caste to India by arguing that it is different from race. While the basis of caste and racial discrimination varies significantly, Dalits are subjected to racial discrimination as well. Drawing on Berg's analysis, I discuss how Dalits encountered external racism in the past while also being subjected to internal casteism. While the issues of racism eventually faded away and became less visible today than decades ago, the struggle against caste discrimination continued to be a major issue among Indian migrants. The analysis of caste in a migration context and of the Dalit struggles against caste domination in diaspora is one of the contributions this study makes. Indeed, to study and learn about the Dalit struggles against caste domination in the diaspora was also a motivating factor behind this research project.

In recent studies, migration is pursued as a movement for freedom and human mobility across the globe. It is also seen as a development agency that provides scope to enhance life chances based on individual capabilities. Hein de Hass, a Dutch sociologist, analyses migration as a new opportunity for "human mobility" and "social change". In his latest article, de Hass (2021) has developed what he calls, the "aspirations-capabilities" framework and illustrates how migration leads to freedom while fulfilling individual aspirations for a better life. Analysing the human mobility across the globe, he argues that migration is a "well-being enhancing factor" that provides space for an individual to cross the boundaries of class, religion, ethnicity and gender (ibid.: 14-20). The Indian migrants are not an exception to these factors of mobility and freedom. In fact, freedom and mobility is explicit in their social and cultural formation since the earlier period of their migration. What is however striking is that their mobility is driven by internal differences. It is confined within one's own caste by avoiding social intercourse with other caste and religious groups. The formation of caste-based temples is one of the peculiar

signs of this mobility within caste. This informs how caste identity and relations are organised in everyday life (Taylor 2013). It also informs the struggle against caste-based identities, whereby the lower caste religious cults have been denouncing caste hierarchy and exclusion by adopting caste-free identities. The idea of freedom therefore is constitutive of counterhegemonic struggles against caste domination.

I have also made an attempt to explain that for Dalits, the ideas of "freedom" and "well-being" are not necessarily confined to individual progress and satisfaction in the economic domain. They are fundamentally a collective response to the system of domination that indicates freedom in social as well as individual spheres. In the Dalit situation, migration is not only an economic opportunity for bettering life chances, but also a means for social struggle against caste oppression. Therefore, migration for Dalits is not only a matter of freedom, but also a "freedom from domination". The struggles against caste dominance are explicit from the initial stages of migration and remain an important feature of the diaspora. The process of building alternative religious institutions and thereby challenging the dominant culture and religion informs the dimension of freedom from caste domination. The migration context helped Dalits build their own temples and religious institutions. The presence of the Ravidasia, Valmiki, and the Ambedkarite-Buddhist communities and their respective temples in Britain is an indication of Dalit autonomy over the social and religious institutions. These alternative institutions are not only the symbols of distinct religious identity, but they also provide a space to counter Brahmanical religion in everyday life. Religion as an important means for social change in India also continued within the migrant community. Drawing on religious programmes such as temple rituals and worship, prayers and sermons, as well as annual religious processions, I demonstrate how caste hierarchy is produced through the Brahmin principles of ritual purity, and how it is confronted by alternative religious practices among migrants.

For the past few decades, scholars on migration and transnationalism have developed a comparative and historical framework to analyse migration processes and diasporic connections – for instance, the scholars on migration, Nina Glick-Schiller and Steven Vertovec, whose studies on migration provide a new theoretical and conceptual tool to understand migration from a "diversity" perspective. Taking migrants as a unit of analysis, these scholars unravel the issues of ethnicity, race, class, and gender, and demonstrate how inequality and discrimination operate against the transnational community (Glick-Schiller et al. 1990; Glick-Schiller 1993; Vertovec 2007, 2014). In his edited book on *Migration and Diversity,* Vertovec (2014) engages

with the conceptual understanding of diversity and multiculturalism. The book is a collection of over thirty articles published in various journals in the last two decades and provides a detailed view of migration history, theories, and policies. It examines the complex patterns and relations between transnational migrants and the host society. Moreover, it offers a conceptual perspective for the reader to understand how migration gives rise to diversity and how the latter is measured against the socio-political environment in the host society. Analysing a migrant's location in the host society and the vulnerability associated with their national and ethnic origins, Vertovec points to the "government-regulated systems of categorization and stratification" that reproduce the "patterns of discrimination and inequality" (ibid.: xv). In other words, Vertovec's (2014) observation reflects on the government policies and programmes that indicate vulnerability and exclusion of migrants in the host societies.

While the above-mentioned scholars inform "diversity" as a conceptual framework to understand migration, they analyse inequality and stratification between migrants and the host. This "migrant-host" binary, as I may call it, is crucial to understanding migrants' precarity in the host society based on their racial, national, and ethnic backgrounds. However, this binary remains limited when it comes to explaining the patterns of inequality and discrimination that persists "within" the migrant community. The Indian migration is an example of this. It tells us that inequalities and stratification are not only associated with relations between the migrants and the host, but also exist "within" the migrant community. Therefore, to understand internal differences and inequality among migrants, it is important to view diversity and multiculturalism within migrant social relations and practices. Applying a general framework of migration therefore gives only a partial picture of diversity and multiculturalism as it shades internal discrimination as obvious social and cultural difference among Indian migrants. This scenario tends to overlook caste-based differences and discrimination since these differences are viewed as natural within the diversity framework. This complexity also resulted in undermining caste as a "discriminatory" category in the British laws as the recent debates on caste in the UK show. This contradiction is pointed out by Meena Dhanda, who has written continuously on the development of legal and political aspects of caste in the UK. She explains that caste discrimination is undermined due to this category of diversity and "multiculturalism". She argues that caste discrimination is an "effect of multiculturalism", which "occludes the processes of becoming 'different', by naturalizing difference as pregiven" (Dhanda 2015: 33). The "difference" indicates social hierarchy driven by caste inequality among Indians, and since the principle of multiculturalism promotes tolerance and cohesion, caste practices are

overlooked under the ethos of multiculturalism. This shows us that the diversity framework needs to be understood with respect to the social inequalities that persist within the migrant community.

Recently, caste has heightened a public debate in the UK and raised its concerns in the House of Commons. The parliamentary debates on the matter ultimately resulted in proposing caste legislation to bring caste under the category of racial discrimination in British law (Waughray 2009, 2018; Dhanda et al. 2014, 2014a; Waughray and Dhanda 2016). However, the demand for caste legislation met with stringent opposition within and outside the British parliament from Hindu religious organisations. The parliamentary decision ultimately rejected caste legislation on the grounds that there are no adequate proofs of caste discrimination and also there is no aggregable definition of caste to recognise caste under British law (Waughray 2018). The caste legislation was rejected based on a "public consultation" held by the British government in 2017. The British government's decision to withdraw caste legislation is contrary not only to the existing organisational and academic survey reports that indicate the presence of caste discrimination, but also it contradicted the findings of the studies that the government itself commissioned in the light of caste legislation (ibid.). The legal debate on caste came to an end with this final decision. However, caste remained a contentious matter in regular life.

Two decades ago, Dalit activists raised caste as a global human rights concern in a World Conference Against Racism (WCAR), held in Durban in 2001. Conceptualising caste as a racial form of discrimination, the Dalit representatives demanded the inclusion of caste in the UN charter so that the international community can pay attention to the caste atrocities and violence against Dalits in the subcontinent (Louis 2001; Visvanathan 2001, 2001a; Natrajan and Greenough 2009). However, the Indian government opposed taking caste to the UN, arguing that caste is an "internal" matter. The government's stand was supported by the prominent Indian sociologists like Andre Beteille and Dipankar Gupta, who not only opposed the inclusion of caste in the UN human rights document, but also criticised the UN for intervening in matters of caste and debating them in relation to racism (Thorat and Umakant 2004; Berreman 2009). This demonstrates that the "social and political hegemony is articulated by building a consensus in India around the argument that caste and race are different" (Berg 2018: 1003). Beteille (2001, 2001a) and Gupta (2001) opposed the comparison of caste and race by arguing that caste is an Indian matter and that it cannot be compared with "race" since the latter stands on a

different theoretical and social grounding. While caste and race differ theoretically due to their rootedness and origin in different social and geographical contexts, the comparison concerning these categories by no means intended to take caste literally as a racial matter in the Durban Conference. Instead, being aware of the theoretical formulation and distinct origins of these categories, the Dalit representatives articulated caste and race as socially constructed categories thereby demanding the inclusion of caste as a form of racial discrimination (Visvanathan 2001; Reddy 2005; Berreman 2009).

The opposition made by Indian sociologists represents a contrast to the scholarship on caste outside of India. Andre Beteille and the mainstream Indian sociology have not addressed caste outside of India. Beteille echoes Dumont's (1980) views on caste by claiming that caste is static to the subcontinent thereby hindering any comparison with other oppressive systems, such as racism. The persistence of caste in Indian diaspora demonstrates the limitation of Beteille's and Dumont's conception of caste. The Dalit activists could not secure the inclusion of caste in the UN charter. But the Durban event provided a platform to internationalise caste, thereby articulating caste in relation to other oppressed groups across the globe (Natrajan and Greenough 2009). The caste debate in the UK resembled this articulation both on the part of the opponents of the caste legislation as well as the supporters. The way caste legislation was opposed at the Durban Conference is also reflected in the UK by the opposition to the inclusion of caste in British law. And Dalit activists challenged this opposition even though they did not succeed in persuading the UK government to make caste legislation.

What is important however is not the outcome of the caste debates that appeared at the UN and recently in the UK. From the Dalit points of view, it is the challenge to the hegemonic articulation of caste that appeared in the UN and was recently reproduced in the British parliament by the opponents of caste legislation. While caste has not yet been mentioned explicitly in the UN document or in British law as a discriminatory ground, it began to be recognised as a human rights concerns. The human rights intervention in caste resulted in articulating a necessity for caste legislation. The Dalit activists and civil rights groups articulated caste as a matter of human rights law. By analysing public debates on caste at the Durban Conference and in the British Parliament, I trace the sociological dimension of these debates. Based on my participatory observations both in the pro-and-anti-legislation campaigns in the UK and in interviews and discussions with activists and organisations associated with this campaign, I examine how the public responded to the legal debates and how these debates

were pursued by activists and religious organisations to gain public support in their respective campaigns concerning caste legislation.

By exploring the re-institutionalisation of caste in the UK, this research makes a two-fold contributions: to the academic and the social. By examining caste through social and cultural reproduction, the research contributes to the scholarly literature and the scholarship on caste and migration. By demonstrating the persistence of caste through temple rituals and religious practices and their manifestation in caste prejudices and discrimination in regular life, this research shows that the Brahmin principles of "purity and pollution" have recently gained momentum among migrants. The mainstream sociology in India has overlooked the religious dimension of caste by suggesting that caste perpetuates itself through politics and the government policies, such as reservations (affirmative action). Moreover, this mainstream sociology has reduced the understanding of caste to a complex terminology, for example "Sanskritisation" in which Brahmin castes are imitated by the non-Brahmin castes and the Brahmin principles of caste hierarchy are undermined (see Srinivas 1956). By examining the persistence of caste through Brahmin principles of ritual purity and its manifestation in everyday life among migrants, this dissertation contributes to sociological and anthropological scholarship on caste. From the social point of view, the dissertation provides a context in which struggles against caste domination exist in the diaspora. By exploring the caste dimension in the migration context, this research contributes to the social movement and activists' struggles against caste oppression.

Theoretical framework

In this section, I introduce and compare three theoretical approaches, namely – Louis Dumont's (1980) concept of "purity and impurity", Anthony Gidden's (1990) conception of the "dis-embedding" and "re-embedding", which is further analysed by Thomas Eriksen (2007); and finally, the articulations of "hegemony" and "antagonism" by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001) and Laclau (2005). In so doing, I bring these scholars into discussion with Ambedkar's explanation of caste while showing how the above-mentioned concepts supplement the latter's view on caste as a "belief". I begin with Louis Dumont's theorisation of caste and discuss why Dumont is relevant today as far as his analysis on "purity and impurity" is concerned. I demonstrate that Dumont helps us understand how caste as a religious principle operates among Indian migrants while also showing his limitations as he does not

explain change and continuity in caste. To make sense of caste in the migration context, I draw on the conception of "dis-embedding" and "re-embedding" that explains the change and continuity in social relations in a global context. Interconnections are a key factor in globalisation studies and the "lifting" of caste relations from native places to the new migratory society points to interconnectivity. Lastly, I discuss Laclau's and Mouffe's (2001) articulation of "hegemony" by exploring a question – how the hegemonic articulation of caste is reproduced in diaspora and how it is challenged by the counterhegemonic struggles against caste. Drawing on Laclau's (2005), ideas on "social logic" and "political logic", I also discuss how caste operates as a social logic through regular interactions and socio-religious practices, and how it appears as a political logic as a result of contestation of caste in public domains.

Purity and impurity

It has been argued in the study of caste that the distinction between purity and impurity is a central part of the caste system. The French anthropologist Louis Dumont is well known for having highlighted the distinction between the pure and the impure in his seminal and controversial book, *Homo Hierarchicus*, published in French in 1966. It demonstrates how caste relations are maintained through ritual practices and how Brahmanical superiority is reproduced through a hierarchical distinction between the pure and the impure (Dumont 1980). Analysing the ancient texts, Dumont demonstrates that "hierarchy" is the basis of India's caste system, which is driven by the opposition between the pure and the impure. He maintains that this opposition ultimately leads to the establishing of the superior and inferior statuses and power relations that govern the separation of the two extreme social classes in the caste ranking (Dumont 1980: 59). He suggests that these classes are in extreme opposition to each other in the social hierarchy and their statuses are mutually dependent upon each other even though one governs the existence of the other and remains hierarchical in its implication. For instance, he observes that "the impurity of the untouchables is conceptually inseparable from the purity of the Brahmins" and hence, for the elimination of untouchability (or the caste system), it is necessary to "devalue the purity of the Brahmin" (ibid.: 54). Dumont's scholarship on caste appeared in times when the native scholars in India were already arguing about the decline of the religious dimension of caste. The founding fathers of Indian sociology, such as GS Ghurye, MN Srinivas, and subsequently Andre Beteille remained critical of Dumont's view on caste pertaining mainly to his argument about the extreme opposition between the pure and impure (Quigley 1993; Fuller 1996; Berg 2020). What is the relevance of Dumont today, then, as far

as caste is concerned? Does the distinction between purity and impurity bear any significance today?

When I began my field work, I was aware that the temples in the UK are built on caste lines and that every temple represents a particular caste. However, I was under the impression that temples are important spaces for community gatherings and religious celebrations. While I had decided to observe temple activities as closely as possible, it did not occur to me to pay attention to ideas, such as purity and impurity, for the simple reason that I thought there would not be any scope for observing such ideal practices of caste. But to my surprise, as I gradually settled in my temple ethnography, I found purity and impurity to be important features maintained through regular rituals. My encounter with temple activities and daily rituals proved my own assumption wrong about the ideas of ritual purity and pollution. The rituals practised in the diasporic community are manifold, ranging from the daily temple rituals (prayer, worship, preaching, communal food) to the annual religious processions. There are several other rituals pertaining to marriage ceremonies, birthdays, and death-related ceremonies conducted in accordance with scriptural beliefs. In all these rituals, the distinction of the "pure and impure" is made visible in various manners so as to identify them with the scriptural rules of purity. These rituals have gained momentum in the diaspora since recently and they remain an important source to display ritual purity and social hierarchy.

The process of temple formation in the diaspora clearly indicates the dichotomy of the pure and the impure. It shows how temples were built on caste lines and how priests were appointed while importing them from India from one's own caste. This scenario reinforced the daily rituals and temple activities that began to invoke ritual purity while subscribing to scriptural rules. While the temple premises are in principal open to all irrespective of caste, the entry of each community is restricted to its own temple. This is an outcome of the reinforcement of the distinction of the pure and impure in temple premises. Particularly, it is visible that even though lower castes occasionally visit the temples owned by the upper castes, the lower-caste temples are not visited by the high-castes. There is another important aspect of purity and impurity prevalent in regular temple activities pertaining to women's inferior status. The belief that a woman's body is inherently impure and that she "must not" touch certain idols (murthis) in the temple indicates the scriptural belief associated with the notion of purity and impurity. Moreover, purity in its ideal sense is also conceived through practices such as distributing the "holy water" (*tirtha*) during prayer and worship in Hindu temples. It is also surprising to learn

that the idea of the "holy cow", which was so far existed in the mind, is recently became empirical fact when some Hindu temples imported the holy cows from India in order to maintain the essence of the "holy" in its ideal and scriptural form. This is to say that the idea of purity and impurity has become an explicit feature of the ritual practices within diasporic community.

While Dumont is criticised for relying on the scriptural sources for understanding caste, his explanation of caste as a hierarchical system makes us reconsider his thoughts at least as far as purity and impurity are concerned. His explanation of the opposition between the pure and impure resonates in the religious dimension of caste that makes the practices of purity and impurity sacred. For Dumont, purity and pollution are a manifestation of the scriptural beliefs in caste hierarchy and therefore the separation of pure bodies from the impure – or the Brahmins from the untouchables – is deemed sacred in the caste system. The ritual phenomenon in the diasporic context informs the relevance of purity and impurity as one of the fundamental features of caste hierarchy. Dumont's observation pertaining to purity and impurity as a religious notion supplements Ambedkar's (2014) analysis of caste in which he describes how caste is manifested through "belief" in the religious notion of caste. While Dumont conceives an eradication of caste hierarchy through the "devaluation" of the Brahmin's purity (Dumont 1980: 54), Ambedkar takes a much more radical approach to the elimination of caste. For him, there is no other way to eliminate the caste system than to reject the scriptures that perpetuate the belief in caste.

There are some obvious limitations of Dumont's scholarship on caste. While he explains "hierarchy" as a basis for India's caste structure, he limits the principle of caste hierarchy to India while arguing that there is no scope for caste outside of India. Moreover, he also suggests that it is unlikely for one to find caste hierarchy among non-Hindus to the extent that it is observed by the Hindus. This latter part of his statement borne out by empirical fact since caste is primarily a Hindu religious phenomenon. However, its practices are not confined to Hinduism, including the practices of purity and impurity; they also spill over into the rest of the social fabric in India. Drawing on Sikh religious practices and daily rituals, I demonstrate how Sikhism identifies itself with the Brahmanical religion and how caste persists within Sikhism through its socio-cultural and ritual practices. Caste has a potential not only to cross physical boundaries but also the social and cultural. It is the flexibility and accommodation to change in a new environment that makes caste persists within diaspora and also among non-Hindus. The

lack in Dumont's explanation is precisely this transcendent nature of caste. For him, caste is a static and rigid system confined to the Brahmanical religion that makes sense in India, but cannot be applied to Western societies (Dumont 1980: 210-216). Taking village social structure as a vantage point to observe caste as a "rigid and stable" form of hierarchy, he undermines the continuity in the reproduction of caste (Fuller 1996: 10). In short, he overlooks the changes the caste system has adapted to in order to survive in the new location along with migration. This limitation also makes Dumont unable to explain the counterhegemonic struggles which exist alongside the hierarchical relations between the pure and the impure. If caste is static to India and the Brahmanical religion, then how does caste persist among Indians who have migrated to the West while it is also being practised in the non-Brahmanical religious traditions?

The mainstream scholarship on caste in India confines caste to India and Dumont justifies its claim and arguments. In his view, caste is a hierarchical institution which bears no resemblance to the hierarchical systems, including the "class" division, in other parts of the world. He maintains that caste cannot be compared with class by criticising the American anthropologists AL Kroeber and W Lloyd Warner who tried to explain "caste as an extreme form of race" in the context of American racism (Dumont 1980: 247-248 in Appendix A). The comparative approach taken by the twentieth-century anthropologists was not necessarily to consider "caste" and "class" or "racism" as similar systems in a literal sense. What appears from their arguments is that caste and race were juxtaposed on conceptual grounds in order to provide a vocabulary to understand the respective questions of caste and race in a broader sense. However, such juxtapositions and interconnections did not find their way forward until recently, when the issues of caste began to appear on an international platform.

In his paper on "Caste, Hierarchy and Race", Dag-Erik Berg, a political scientist, points to Dumont's limitation of caste as a static form of hierarchy (Berg 2015). Drawing on the globalisation dimension of hierarchy and its interconnections, Berg argues that "caste and race could be juxtaposed" rather than reducing them to isolated entities (ibid.: 426-427). The Durban Conference of 2001 on "racism" sponsored by the UN was one such platform where caste was articulated as a "racial form of discrimination" by the Dalit representatives. This articulation was not an effort to consider caste as a racial system in a literal sense, but rather as a conceptual ground to unify the struggle against oppressive systems (Viswanathan 2001, 2001a). However, the mainstream sociologists in India (including Andre Beteille) opposed the interconnections and juxtaposition of caste and race, echoing Dumont's view on caste as a static entity. But

nonetheless, the Durban platform remained crucial to analyse caste as a hierarchy from a globalisation and inter-cultural perspective that also led to the internationalisation of caste (Reddy 2005; Natrajan and Greenough 2009; Berg 2015).

Almost two decades after the Durban Conference, the caste debates in the UK again paved the way for viewing caste in a broader sense while considering caste as an "aspect of race" in British laws (Dhanda and Waughray 2016; Waughray 2018). This indicates that even though caste is a characteristic feature of India, it has re-embedded itself in and interconnected with the social lives of migrants. Therefore, confining caste to a physical territory and also limiting its conceptual understanding by treating it as an isolated entity from other oppressive systems like racism gives only a partial picture of caste. Such limited views do not explain the change and continuity in caste that is prevalent among the diasporic population. The recent autobiographical works on "caste" by two US-based women writers, Sujatha Gidla (2017) and Isabel Wilkerson (2020) – one Dalit and another Black – are a testimony that informs the interconnectivity, change, and continuity of caste as a multidimensional entity. Taking departure from the conventional approaches to caste, I discuss the question of caste in diaspora with regard to the changing context of caste and its reproduction through social and cultural institutions.

It is important to note that Dumont's observation of caste comes from his structuralist approach that explains caste as a holistic system constituted by the separation of Brahmins and untouchables as two opposite groups. He rejects the psychological approach to caste since it reflects individualism, which he rejects on methodological grounds (Berg 2020: 50). Analysing hierarchy with reference to supreme values and in a world-historical perspective, Dumont limits his approach of caste to "individualism" without fully dealing with it (Berg 2015: 427). In his view, society is composed of collective values and the caste system is governed by such values though in a hierarchical manner (Dumont 1980: 20). This is a problematic thesis for the reason that it provides scope for the interpretation of caste as a value-based functional system. There are defenders of caste even today and they take refuge in justifying caste hierarchy as an ideal and functional model of society.

Dumont's method of analysing caste is primarily based on his "book view" approach as opposed to the "field view" approach. The former is dismissed by Srinivas and Beteille in favour of the latter (Srinivas 1956; Beteille 1975). These native scholars on caste in India advocated the empirical (field view) approach to caste while deviating from the textbook

understanding of caste. For them, caste has been changing and the village social structure is not the same as it used to be in the past, for the hierarchical social relations and power dynamics between castes have undergone a significant change (Srinivas 2005; Beteille 1991). Furthermore, Beteille (1996) points to the urban caste dimension and argues that "caste is growing weaker among educated class" concerning the rules of endogamy, physical contacts, commensality, and rituals (1996: 167). While the empirical approach to caste taken by Srinivas and Beteille is fascinating in terms of the information it provides about the ground reality of caste, their empirical approach is far from explaining caste as a belief. Ambedkar's systematic analysis of caste as a "belief", therefore, remains vital to understanding the continuity of caste in diaspora.

Scholars like May Douglas and Louis Dumont were among the contemporaries who took ancient texts as a basis to claim their ideas concerning purity and pollution. However, recent scholars like Mikael Aktor (2002) have criticised this generation for emphasising the pure and the impure by relying on the ancient texts. But nonetheless, this contested distinction is still relevant as far as caste practices and beliefs are concerned, including in the context of caste in the UK today. If caste had disappeared, Dumont perhaps would not have been relevant today. But, arguably, caste is even more visible in the present context than in the past. It has a multidimensional presence beyond its ideal physical territory as well as beyond the Brahmanical religion. Dumont identifies an important feature of caste by explaining the dichotomy of the pure and the impure, and his analysis helps us understand the scriptural dimension of caste that survives in the diaspora. However, his approach to treating the caste system as static and peculiar to the Indian context falls short of understanding the change and continuity in caste. To this end, we need to look beyond Dumont as far as the change and continuity in caste system is concerned. Caste in the context of migration precisely informs this continuity and reproduction through its flexibility and accommodation with global changes. It shows how social relations and customs are "lifted out" from one social context and how they are reproduced and re-institutionalised in a different context. To understand the transition of caste in the migration context, I draw on Anthony Giddens' and Thomas Eriksen's conceptions of "dis-embedding" and "re-embedding". These concepts explain how social relations and practices are taken out of one social context and restructured in another through the process of migration.

Dis-embedding and re-embedding

In his seminal book titled *The Consequences of Modernity*, Giddens (1990) defines dis-embedding as "the 'lifting out' of social relations from the local context of interactions and their restructuring across indefinite span of time-space" (Giddens 1990: 21). He explains that "[d]is-embedding" is a feature of modernity that shows how social identity, practices, and customs are transcended from their natural context and are reconstructed in the new social context while the attempt is made to make sense of these practices and identities. This transition ("lifting out") gradually results in the process of "re-embedding" while systematically reinforcing and "re-appropriating the dis-embedded social relation" (ibid.: 79-80). Collectively, these processes explain the change and continuity in the social structure being produced and reproduced in the new context. While the "dis-embedding" reflects the transition of social structure, the "re-embedding" is characterised by the growth and reproduction of that structure in the new social atmosphere. The underlying factor that gives rise to these processes is migration.

Migration is an important feature of modernity and globalisation that informs human mobility across time and space (Giddens 1990; Eriksen 2007). The processes of dis-embedding and re-embedding show how transnational mobility operates in the migrant community. The Indian emigration is characterised by a diasporic mobility centred around caste, religion, and to some extent, regional and linguistic mobility. The presence of temples and socio-cultural or religious associations in the UK signifies this mobility. It also demonstrates how caste relations and identities are maintained within temples or socio-cultural associations as an important aspect of the mobility. While describing the change and continuity in the social structure, the processes of dis-embedding and re-embedding also explain how caste mobility operates and how caste relations are produced and reproduced in the diaspora.

I argue that the reproduction of caste is constitutive of change in the original customs and practices as a result of the practical tasks and challenges posed. These challenges were peculiar to the earlier life of the migrants pertaining to the institutions of marriage and religion. In the case of marriages, for instance, there were no temples nor priests, but marriages still took place as an important practice with whatever resources were available at the early migrants' disposal. Similarly, when temples were built, they did not resemble the conventional appearance of Indian temples (neither the art nor the architecture) since the infrastructure purchased for the temples represented the local buildings of various kinds – local council buildings and post-

offices, cinema houses and theatres, as well as old factories and defunct churches. The point is that temples and social customs, such as endogamy, were "lifted out" from their natural context in their native places and re-institutionalised in the diaspora while negotiating with and accommodating to the conditions and challenges in the host society. This scenario shows that the reproduction of caste is constitutive of change and continuity in the diasporic social structure.

Illustrating the process of reproduction of caste, I also point out that the implicit "change" in the reproduction needs to be understood in the given time and circumstances where early migrants were obliged to accommodate to those changes concerning their social customs and practices. It was not necessarily an outcome of the "change" in the "beliefs" or the attitudes towards caste hierarchy. In short, the changes that are visible in the diasporic social structure are essentially the changes concerning the objective features or the material conditions of the diasporic life; they hardly reflect any subjective change or the transformation in the belief concerning social hierarchy. On the contrary, caste consciousness remained a decisive factor for social identity and distinction.

In drawing on Giddens' (1990) work on "modernity", the concept of "dis-embedding" is further explored by the Norwegian anthropologist Thomas Eriksen in his book on "globalisation" (Eriksen 2007). Analysing "dis-embedding" as an important feature of modernity, Eriksen points out that "dis-embedding" is a "gradual movement from the concrete and tangible to the abstract and virtual" (ibid.: 17). The initial changes in the diaspora clearly indicate this shift from the "concrete to the abstract". The changes in the social customs related to endogamy and ritual purity, as mentioned above, are the indicators as to how these practices became "abstract" while accommodating to the given circumstances in the new social environment. The formation of religious institutions (temples) and the subsequent "restructuring" of the social and cultural lifestyle in accordance with traditional norms and customs eventually provided a suitable ground upon which the caste practices began to acquire the "concrete" form. This is to say, that the shift from the "concrete to the abstract" in the caste context is not only linear as Eriksen (2007) would suggest, but that it also indicates the reversing trend of concretising the abstract entity. This scenario ultimately reflects the "re-embedding" of caste through concretising social practices. The transition from the "concrete to the abstract" reflects an important dimension of caste, namely, the persistence of caste through mentality and beliefs.

The presence of caste as an "abstract" entity is also an outcome of some other variables in the host society. Apart from the limited material resources and mobilisation of the community in its members' social and cultural lives, the abstractness of caste is also due to the insecure and hostile environment in the host society experienced by the immigrants as a whole. The racial and the anti-immigration context of Britain caused a great deal of insecurity among the emigrants. In order to tackle this hostile environment, they adopted an overarching identity that provided them with a sense of organisation within themselves. This also meant that the internal social differences needed to be tolerated while also maintaining some sort of mutual trust and cooperation within the early diaspora. This scenario ultimately gave rise to what Giddens calls, an "ontological security" that created "confidence" and mental strength to react against the hostile atmosphere (Giddens 1990: 92). He explains that "ontological security" is a vital "form of feelings of security". This "security", he further observes, is an indication of the "confidence that most humans beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action" (ibid.). While the ontological security creates a collective feeling to deal with the external insecurity, it is primarily an "emotional" phenomenon, rather than a "cognitive" one, and therefore it relies on the "unconscious" (ibid.). While caste is a question of mentality (the belief), as argued by Ambedkar, the ontological security among diasporic Indians operates only as a circumstantial relief from the external threats and insecurity. It is unlikely to form a structural integrity that could lead to the "cognitive" process of social organisation.

Giddens does not use psychoanalytical theory, but his concept of "ontological security" has a psychological dimension nonetheless. It resembles the psychological approach in Eriksen's description of "dis-embedding" as a shift from the "concrete to the abstract". Both these dimensions collectively supplement Ambedkar's psychological approach to caste as a "belief". This is however not to suggest here that Ambedkar's ideas of social constitution are similar to that of Giddens', who emphasises the individual role and action in the constitution of society (Giddens 1984), whereas for Ambedkar, the constitution of society comprises of the social relations rooted in the "graded inequality" of caste (Ambedkar 2014: 167). And therefore, his claim that the elimination of caste requires a collective efforts of overthrowing the religion that perpetuates caste goes beyond individual action (Berg 2020: 50). Discussing Ambedkar with Giddens and Eriksen therefore provides a framework to understand the persistence of caste in a migration context. More importantly, it helps demonstrate how caste distinction and hierarchy operated as an "abstract" entity at one point and how they eventually concretised with material

gain and practices. To understand how caste antagonism operates in the diaspora and how hegemonic articulation of caste is confronted by the anti-caste discourse in the UK, let us briefly illustrate antagonism discourse and hegemony.

Hegemony and articulation: antagonism, class, and caste

The question of antagonism is approached from various perspectives, from history to sociology and from philosophy to political theories. In the Marxist intellectual tradition, antagonisms are studied from the point of view of their cause and effect in society. It explains why antagonism exists and how hegemony is maintained in a capitalist society. In later scholarship, the idea of antagonism has taken further from the classical narratives of antagonism rooted in "conflict theory" and "class struggle". In their influential book titled *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, originally published in 1985, Laclau and Mouffe (2001) examine the functioning of hegemonic antagonism in relation to the ongoing social struggles. Building on the Gramscian notion of "hegemony", they consider that antagonism constitutes the foundation and the boundary of the social (ibid.: 122). Hegemony is a "field dominated by articulated practices" where social relations and identities are not solidified or do not exist as an organised entity (ibid.: 134). The articulating subject here lies in the "hegemonic force" that "consists of a fundamental class". The "ontological difference" therefore lies in the "difference between the hegemonic and the hegemonized force" as argued by Laclau and Mouffe (ibid.). The notion of antagonism discussed by Laclau and Mouffe provides an explanation for the "ontological" dimension of caste antagonism.

The concept of antagonism however was not applied to the oriental societies until recently in the context of caste. In the past few decades, some of the historians and the political theorists of India based in the West applied Gramsci and the concept of hegemony to the context of South Asia. But they did not consider caste to be a fundamental social problem and rather rambled over the issues of class. Ranjit Guha (1997), for instance, introduced the idea of the "subaltern" in India, drawing on the Marxian and Gramscian framework of hegemony and class struggle. The subsequent generation of the scholars, such as Gayatri Spivak and others have extended the subaltern school approach while mapping out the subaltern politics in India. However, their analysis did not touch the problem of caste and hence their description of the "subaltern" class is devoid of, what their critics call, the "caste-subaltern" (see Omvedt 1993; Guru 2013). Caste as a basis of the Indian social structure therefore is undermined in the

subaltern studies. As a consequence, until recently the universal language of "hegemony" and "antagonism" remained outside the purview of understanding caste in a broader sense.

In his pioneering book on *Dynamics of Caste and Law*, Berg (2020) develops a new theoretical approach to make sense of caste in relation to the hegemonic framework discussed by Ernesto Laclau. Departing from the post-structuralist approaches to dominance and hierarchy, he introduces a new approach to understanding caste in India's social and political institutions. Drawing on Laclau's "political ontology" framework in relation to Ambedkar's explanation of caste as a "graded inequality", Berg (2020) outlines the hegemonic relations between the high-castes and the lower castes as a matter of historical and ontological antagonism rather than a formal and structuralist binary. Drawing on Ambedkar's analysis on caste as a "state of mind", Berg, explores caste as an "ontological desire" that forces one to practise caste (ibid.: 64). Laclau's antagonism framework finds resonance in Ambedkar's views on caste as a "graded inequality" in that the latter informs the ontological dimension of caste. The psychological dimension of caste explained by Ambedkar captures the ontological dimension of dominance explored by Laclau. For Laclau, antagonism is fundamental to social relations and reproduction, whereas for Ambedkar it is the "graded inequality" that leads to the reproduction of antagonism. The juxtaposition of Ambedkar and Laclau by Berg (2020) provides a platform to understand what he calls the "ontological division between touchables and untouchables" (ibid.: 54). This explains how one category dominates the other by the hegemonic articulation of caste.

Drawing on this framework of ontological distinction, I analyse how hegemonic relations operate between high-castes and Dalits in the diaspora. Recently, the caste discourse has gained momentum beyond India, both in the academic parlance and the human rights domains in the United Nations (Louis 2001; Natrajan and Greenough 2009). While on the one hand the hegemonic articulation of caste has dominated these spheres, there is also an alternative caste discourse that challenges the conventional articulation of caste. The recent issues of caste discussed on the UK's political platform and at the Durban conference of 2001 are the instances that explain the necessity of understanding caste beyond the conventional views and spaces of caste. The issues of caste in diaspora reflect the hegemonic articulation of caste and the way the latter is confronted by the Dalit discourse on caste. The confrontation of caste and its politicisation inform the "political logic" of caste. The formation of caste identities and relations and their manifestations in caste prejudices and discrimination represent the "social logic" of caste. My aim is to explore caste antagonism in the migration context and demonstrate how

caste debates in the UK's legal and political domain are dominated by the hegemonic construction of caste.

The above theorisations of different concepts inform both the religious and social dimension of caste. Dumont's ideas on caste provide a framework to understand the persistence of Brahmin principles among migrants. Giddens' and Eriksen's ideas on globalisation and interconnectivity further explain how caste relations are "lifted out" from their local context and reconstructed in the migratory society. Laclau and Mouffe's articulation of hegemony explains how caste identities and discrimination are contested in regular life. These theorisations are useful to locate caste at various levels, including its domination and confrontation in religious and political spheres.[2] However, to understand the persistence of caste in everyday life and the way in which caste reacts in ordinary conversations in public and personal spaces, we need to move beyond these theorisations. Caste identities and relations are not only "lifted out" and restructured in the migratory society, but also translated into everyday forms of discrimination and exclusion by the re-institutionalisation of caste among migrants.

Drawing on an anthropologist's work, i.e., Thomas Blom Hansen's (2012) conception of "gaze", I examine how caste persists in everyday life through regular interactions in public spaces and personal relations, including friendship, love, and marriage. Hansen explains "gaze" as an act by which a sense of social hierarchy and power relations is reproduced through regular acts of "watching and being watched" (ibid.: 7). The idea of gaze adds to the discussion on "belief" in caste (Ambedkar 2014) and the "ontological drive" of caste (Berg 2020) as an embedded perspective that re-institutionalises social relations where everyday forms of discrimination and exclusion play a part. By exploring the embeddedness of caste in everyday life, I contribute to the critical debate on the above-mentioned theorisations. I discuss the everyday forms of humiliation and exclusion that occurs as an outcome of the belief in caste, where caste has become an everyday "gaze". Hansen's concept of "gaze" is an embedded perspective produced by the ontological desire (the belief) to practice discrimination and exclusion.

[2] Among the theorists I have mentioned here, the French sociologist Bourdieu's conception of "habitus" helps explain how social relations are reproduced through rule-following and shared values. However, like Dumont, his explanation of habitus is inadequate to understand the changes and continuity in caste relations.

Methods and material

This thesis has been based on ethnographic research, interviews, and participant observations. I conducted my ethnographic research from 2016 until 2018. The ethnographic method I opted for helped me gather different types of information in the field. In the places (temples and organisations) where I stayed during my field work, my presence as a researcher was visible. My participation in those temple and organisational programmes therefore helped me extend my contacts through a "snowball" technique. My invisible participation on the other hand enabled me to approach certain premises, such as temples, markets, and several other public spaces, in their natural setting. Participating in daily temple rituals as a visitor, or often as one of the congregants, in Sikh and Hindu temples provided space for frank discussion with other visitors and the devotees, including the priests. I must also say that in my situation, the invisible identity of being an ethnographer became significant especially when the visible status of being a "researcher" was not entertained by some temple authorities and the priests. When I presented myself as a researcher, several temple authorities and priests showed their disinterest and remained hesitant to cooperate. But when I attended temple programmes as an ordinary visitor while taking part in the prayers and rituals, I found it convenient to proceed with my intended objectives of data collection.

Over the course of fifteen months, I made three field trips spread over three consecutive years between spring 2016 and winter 2018. The status of my stay in the UK was based on the visa document I obtained each time, which was usually granted for six months under the category of "research visit". I recorded a total of 56 structured and semi-structured interviews, mostly with open-ended questions. The semi-structured interviews were helpful to delve into personal experiences to gather in-depth information. The interviewees ranged from organisational activists and temple authorities to ordinary congregants and households representing both first-generation migrants and subsequent generations. I also recorded a total of 12 group discussions with temple members, ordinary visitors, and in some cases, a combination of the both while also facilitating group discussions among youngsters and college students in public libraries and temples. The interviews and discussions were conducted in multiple languages: English, Hindi, Punjabi, and in some cases in my own mother tongue too: Marathi. The majority of the recorded interviews are in Punjabi or Hindi or a combination of the both, representing mainly first-generation migrants. The British-born generations spoke mainly in English with a few exceptions who were comfortable speaking Hindi and Punjabi alongside English. As far as my

knowledge of the Punjabi language is concerned, I cannot read or write in Punjabi, but I can understand it fairly since I know Hindi. Over the period of my ethnographic research, my skills in Punjabi improved and that helped me translate the interviews. Some of the archival newspapers, booklets, and pamphlets I received were in Punjabi and in that case I obtained help in translating them from the people from whom I received this material.

While the majority of the data I gathered was on temple premises, there were also some important occasions that connected me to the larger interlocutors in the field. These included, religious processions, community meetings, protests, and political campaigns concerning caste issues. Moreover, occasions, such as the celebration of the birth anniversaries of martyrs (*shahid*) and religious founders, and also the family functions concerning marriage, birth and death rituals remained important in expanding data collection. The other sources, such as archival newspapers, pamphlets, booklets, portraits, images, and souvenir books published by organisations and temple associations on various occasions in the past, remained complementary to the above-mentioned information. I received these sources individually from some of the activists and writers, and also from the organisations that reflect the past struggles against casteism and racism in the UK. Moreover, some of these pieces are also aimed at spreading religious awareness among British-born generations (especially the booklets received in Sikh temples).

As my field work began to unfold, I realised that temples are the central spaces around which social, cultural, and political life is organised. This scenario guided me to take temples as an entry point in order to navigate through social and cultural practices within different communities. Taking a novel approach to the field by adopting what I describe as a "temple ethnography", I took temples as a vantage point to locate myself in the field. "Wherever there is a temple, there is community" is a self-constructed dictum I followed throughout my field work. Whenever I would fix a meeting with one of my interlocutors, the latter would usually ask me to meet at the temple of his/her own belonging. I observed temple events from their opening in the early morning to the closing in the evening. The temple functions in which I participated include daily rituals, social functions like weddings, births, and occasionally also taking part in death rituals. Staying in temples with Sikh priests (*granthis*) was an additional benefit which helped me acquire detailed information on certain ritual practices as well as the stories and legends being narrated by priests during preaching sessions. To follow and make sense of the temple activities, I kept daily diaries and noted down each ritual function and story-

narration in the "strict sense of the term" (Malinowski 1989). The ritual events, stories, and images discussed in the dissertation are the "thick descriptions" (Geertz 1973; Marcus 1998) that helped me analyse these events in minute detail.

Previous ethnographies, such as Arjun Appadurai's (1976, 1981) work on temple rituals in South India, are mainly focused on event-based rituals. In these studies, temples are not focused on as a regular and "everyday" spaces capable of organising and manifesting social life. The temples in diaspora inform precisely the "everyday" dimension of the social. Taking temples and rituals as a locus of my field work, my work is not confined to rituals as such, but I look at the way in which temples represent an institution in which people gain a sense of self and identity, can organise social activities, and reflect on politics and themselves in relation to other temples and castes. In other words, I pursue temples as an "everyday" space for social activities and organisation. Recent studies in anthropology have revisited the concept of "everyday", which was made explicit by American and European historians after the Second World War, while exploring working-class culture and religion (Orsi 2012: 148). Observing the global changes and their relations to the local contexts, Robert Orsi, a scholar on religion, observes that "'the everyday' has never been a static category" and that "everyday religion" is not confined to "specially designated and consecrated sacred spaces, under the authority of religious elites", but rather takes place in the ordinary lives of the people in their regular conversation (ibid.: 150). The "anthropology of everyday religion" explains the change and continuity in ritual activities as well as the institution of the temple as a whole (Schielke and Debevec 2012).

The temple as an institution is not only confined to daily rituals. It encompasses the socio-cultural and political lifestyle of the community. Most temples contain libraries and museums that maintain the ongoing flow of the visitors to the temples. Some temples also run professional classes for school children (computer learning, language, scripture reading, and awareness), along with several voluntary services that attract public attention beyond regular ritual programmes. It is also interesting to see that temples explicitly represent a political affiliation to political parties in India. The annual meetings and political programmes conducted on temple premises naturally charge the temple environment over political issues. The temple authorities mainly represent first-generation migrants who came to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s. Their presence in the temple is an all-day phenomenon. I found them always involved in different kinds of activities in their respective temples. Apart from my occasional meeting with them in

their houses, the temple was the place where I would usually meet them. That is where they would spend most of their leisure time over rounds of tea and snacks throughout the day, chatting and gossiping over family issues and the news concerning political affairs in India. That is where I usually met them, talked to them while accompanying them in their mundane tasks, such as cleaning, food preparation, as well as participating in regular rituals and sermons.

As I progressed with my research, the methodology aspect developed throughout my field work and also while writing my findings. According to my original research proposal, my plan was to decide on only two field locations: Southall (West London) and Wolverhampton (Midlands). However, when I actually encountered the field upon my first visit, I realised that I should extend my field locations to multiple sites and follow the "multi-sited" ethnographic approach. This decision was not based on quantitative grounds but rather conceptual and qualitative. I realised that temples are the loci for community identity and social practices, and that each temple has its own timetable to conduct ritual events on a daily basis as well as annually. And therefore, focusing only on the two towns I had selected would not have given me the scope to observe and participate in some of the functions which are peculiar only to certain temple communities in certain towns. For instance, the Ravidasi community in Bedford is comparatively more active than the Ravidasis in the towns of Southall and Wolverhampton. The birth anniversary of the saint Ravidas and other cultural and religious programmes are systematically organised annually by the Ravidasi temple in Bedford. This is not the case with the Ravidasi temples in other towns. Moreover, Bedford is also one of the places that is known for the religious and political struggles between the Ravidasis and Ambedkarite Dalits on the one hand and upper caste Sikhs and Hindus on the other. Keeping these analytical and historical aspects of these locations in mind, I chose Coventry and Leicester along with Bedford as additions to Southall and Wolverhampton.

I travelled back and forth between these towns based on the events happening in each town. I based myself in one town for about two months or so and simultaneously travelled across to other towns as I received information (in some cases invitations) to attend certain socio-cultural and religious events. When based in Southall, for instance, I often made short visits to Coventry and Wolverhampton via a famous bus service ("Bharat Coach"). The bus service is known only among Indians and typically used by them, mostly by first generation migrants, who commute occasionally to visit their relatives in the towns in the Midlands. The route – Southall to Wolverhampton via Coventry and Birmingham – consists of typical locations where family

networks and kin relations are spread among Indians. While travelling with the bus service, I often felt like I was in some town in North India. The elderly men and women passengers would typically bring with them food and snacks prepared at home and eat while sharing them with the person seated beside. The Punjabi songs would be played on the bus all the while, and when the destination came, relatives of the passengers (in some cases, a whole family) would be waiting to receive their parent or grandparent. I pursued the idea of the "field" based on the community and their social environment, which are not only confined to the place (town) they live in, but also spread across other towns with their relatives and community members. The location of the temple, in this regard, remained significant for me to locate the community with their social practices.

During my field work, I stayed in temples, organisations, and with families belonging to the Dalit community. In studies on caste, the location of the ethnographer as to where he/she stays during the field work has a methodological relevance in order for him/her to grasp the field reality from what Professor Kumar calls a "caste perspective" (2004, 2009). Ethnographies in the past reflect a "Brahmanical view" of society that indicates several methodological flaws, as pointed out by many scholars. MN Srinivas, who introduced the "field view" to understand caste reality, himself ended up staying in the house of a Brahmin village head without taking into consideration the narratives of the lower caste. He accepted the fact that one of the major limitations of his field work method was the negligence of the lower castes' point of view that led him to present the upper caste view of caste (Srinivas 1952, 1978). Taking departure from this conventional field approach, I based my field work approach on a "caste perspective" while staying on Dalit premises and simultaneously navigating through the premises belonging to high-castes.

There is also one obvious reason why I stayed on Dalit premises. This has to do with my own belonging to the Dalit community. When Dalit temples and organisations offered me a place to stay, they did not merely see it as a professional concern, but also as a larger cause to which they are committed. They considered me as a resource person who could contribute to their social activities. They occasionally invited me on their television programmes for conversations on Ambedkar and Phule. When they organised seminars and guest lectures in their temple and organisational premises, they gave me responsibilities in organising those events along with other Dalit activists. In their view, research of this kind are directly or indirectly contributes to their own social commitment and anti-caste struggles. During the time I was in the field, the

issues of caste attracted political and public debates in the UK. On the one hand, the issue was being discussed in the British parliament where the possibility of an "anti-caste legislation" was being debated. On the other hand, it was debated by the public, high-castes and Dalits over the existing issues of caste discrimination. In this context, studies of this sorts were seen as an important platform from the social point of view. Therefore, whenever I talked to the activists and ordinary Dalits who were associated with the Ambedkarite movement in the UK, I was often reminded that "I should make their struggles visible in my research". Ever since I encountered this view in the field, it guided me both as a methodological incentive and also as an inspiration to contribute and participate in their struggle as one of them. This may raise the question of bias in favour of one's own community. But I believe that in a situation of oppression and domination, what matters most is the viewpoints of the oppressed and the dominated. It is the personal choice of the ethnographer whether to join in their struggle or to remain neutral in matters of freedom and justice. I, by the virtue of my own belonging, could not afford the latter.

Throughout my ethnography and while writing the draft of this dissertation, I followed research ethics by keeping identities and names confidential as it was requested by a few interlocutors of mine. Issues of confidentiality mainly came up in the context of caste discrimination. When I met and interviewed some people who were said to have faced caste discrimination, they did not feel comfortable talking about their caste experiences. It was only when they realised the clear motive of my research and when they came to know about my own identity as one of them that they shared their views frankly. After my last visit in winter 2018, I kept in touch with the field via mobile and email contacts – with the Dalit activists, temple authorities, and priests – and eventually contacted them for the ongoing updates on political and religious activities in the UK.

Chapter overview

This dissertation consists of six chapters followed by a conclusion. Each of the following chapter is a progression of the previous chapters. The chapters are sequenced in a manner that indicates the chronological sequence and development of the empirical processes. However, the chapters can also be read individually on their own since they represent distinct themes reflecting the central theme of the dissertation. The argument of each individual chapter is connected to the central argument I make in the thesis as a whole, and is extended further in the

other chapters based on the theoretical ideas and context from these chapters. Collectively, the chapters explore how caste persists among Indian migrants in the UK. As a starting point in chapter 1, I explain how caste relations and identities are "lifted out" from native places and restructured in the context of migration. Tracing the post-colonial Indian migration to the UK, I discuss that caste has been an organising principle among migrants since their arrival in Britain. It changes at one point and is re-embedded at another owing to the practical tasks and difficulties the migrants faced in the host society. I explain that caste relations and practices represent change and continuity in the formation of social life among migrants. I argue that migration processes were inherently built on the family and kinship networks that organised social life based on internal caste differences and hierarchies. Focusing on Dalit narratives, this chapter also shows that the migration was not merely an economic phenomenon for individual freedom and well-being as suggested in the migration scholarship; it was also driven by a sense of obtaining freedom from caste domination.

In chapter 2, I demonstrate how caste is reinforced through the process of temple building and ritual practices. Drawing on everyday temple rituals, annual religious processions, and a host of other socio-cultural functions conducted in temples, this chapter shows how ritual purity is conceived as an important marker of superior status in caste hierarchy. I discuss temples as an important physical entity that manifests caste as a sacred practice while identifying with the Brahmanical religion and customs. How and why caste ideology is taken seriously in the religious domain is a question explored here. Building on Dumont's (1980) conception of "purity and impurity", I argue that the ritual activities are broadly aimed at displaying the status of ritual purity and social hierarchy in caste ranking. I illustrate that the diasporic rituals have undergone various changes in terms of ritual etiquettes and external appearances. However, the essence that represents the principles of purity and pollution attached to the ritual is unlikely to change or wither away. Focusing on religious growth and everyday ritual activities, I explain that the regular ritual performances are the modes through which the idea of "purity" is conceived and subsequently materialised while practicing the distinction between the "pure" and the "impure" in ordinary life.

In chapter 3, I demonstrate how the Brahmanical religion is contested through alternative religious traditions. Drawing on the stories, myths and symbols associated with Sikhism and the Ravidasia religion, I examine how the oral tradition of story narration invokes historical conflict between high-caste Sikhs and Ravidasis. I argue that the representation of stories is a

political and religious means to demonstrate social hierarchy and power domination on the one hand and to challenge this domination on the other. The alternative stories and images invented by the lower-caste Ravidasis operate as a counterforce against the dominant Sikhism which identifies itself with Brahmanical caste hierarchy. The idea of contestation reflects an important sociological dimension: imitation. The way in which the Brahmanical religion is challenged signifies an imitation of the high-caste religious traditions by the lower-caste religion. I refer to imitation as a process of "Sikhisation", which is conceptually different from the idea of "Sanskritisation". I argue that Sikhisation is a significant counterforce that challenges the reduction of Ravidas and his followers to their caste status. It rejects the Brahmanical religion by creating its own Ravidasia religion. However, its rejection of the Brahmanical religion is incomplete because it is affirmed theologically and yet reproduced in practice.

In chapter 4, I move on to discuss how social identity and relations are translated into caste prejudices and discrimination in ordinary life. I provide a detailed account of caste discrimination in religious institutions, schools and colleges, hospitals, and host of other public and private institutions. I also discuss how caste relations operate within personal relations (friendship, love). I demonstrate that caste has become an everyday "gaze" that represents an embodied perspective where caste relations are organised and practised among migrants in regular life. Drawing on the individual narratives from various caste and religious groups across multiple generations and genders, I discuss that caste humiliation and exclusion is so vocal and explicit that it represents the ontological drive among migrants to practise caste in everyday life. I also point to caste identity and prejudices being transmitted to new generations (British-born generations) as a cultural passing-on.

In chapter 5, I discuss the legal and political dimensions of caste in the UK. I explore the question as to why there has not been an anti-caste legislation in the UK. Drawing on my political ethnography among the activists and organisations who campaigned both for and against caste legislation, I discuss how caste attracted political attention in the British parliament and how the efforts to bring in anti-caste legislation were failed despite of the prevalent caste discrimination among migrants. I demonstrate how caste legislation was opposed by the Hindu lobby by disguising caste as "dharmic" identity, thereby projecting itself as a harmonious community without internal caste differences. The opposition to caste legislation is a strategic politics of denial of the gaze that represents the embedded perspective of exclusion and hierarchy. While caste is dominated by the hegemonic articulation of caste,

the alternative caste discourse suggests how the former is confronted nationally and internationally through legal and political intervention in caste.

In chapter 6, I explore the issues of Dalit identity and mobilisation while tracing the formation of the Ambedkarite movement in Britain. I demonstrate how the Ambedkarite-Buddhist identity remains a radical alternative to step away from caste. While the Ravidasia struggle against caste domination is confined to the ritual and spiritual domains, the Ambedkarite alternative provides a wider framework to challenge Brahmanism in all spheres of life. I explain how Ambedkarites in the UK practically followed Ambedkar's message on education and how they became conscious of their historical struggle against oppression; how that convinced them to "give up" their traditional identities while adopting a Buddhist identity. Caste is a system of humiliation and its embodied perspective (the gaze) in everyday life is a reason for Ambedkarites to give up the traditions and customs that reduce them to an inferior status. The Ambedkarite ideology provides an incentive to struggle for freedom from caste domination. While exploring the Ambedkarite movement in the UK, this chapter makes an ethnographic contribution while also adding a new dimension to the debate on the Dalit movement.

Chapter 1

Re-embedding of the Social among Indian Migrants: Marriage, Kinship, and Social Practices

The post-Independence migration of Indians to the United Kingdom has been an important phenomenon both from the perspective of the migrants and the host country. It provided the host country with the required industrial labour force as the demand for labour continued. The post-war economic boom and the expansion of industrial capital demanded a heavy work force in Britain, and India sought to be a suitable option to meet this demand (Bhachu 1985; Brown 2007). Grappling with the precarious economic situation caused by the poor agriculture and unemployment, the working class and the small-scale farmers conceived of migration as a potential means to relieve their existing predicament (Kalsi 1992; Singh 1998; Fisher et al. 2007). However, it was conceived only as a temporary remedy to get rid of the existing situation and hence the idea of "return" seemed implicit to it. The common perception of migration – that one would go to Britain for short period, earn some money, and then come back to continue farming and other livelihood activities – seemed practical enough for many to leave their homes (Kalsi 1992). But that return did not happen. As soon as the migrants arrived in the new land and started working and earning regular wages, their perception of the "return" changed. As they began to prosper economically, they found the host environment convenient to re-establish their social life while settling permanently there.

One of the crucial factors of Indian migration is the production and reproduction of the social in the host society. It shows how migrants advanced economically and moved on to constructing themselves socially into a community, while sharing common interests and values through which they remained conscious of their traditions. The context within which the "social" began to re-embed itself in the context of migration is an interesting phenomenon. It reflects how social habits and customs are "lifted out" from native places and reconstructed in the host society. The underlying factor in this "lifting out" is the "belief" in and consciousness of social identities and internal differences. Therefore, even after migrating to an altogether different social context and leaving their homes to move thousands of miles away, the migrants continued to identify and establish themselves within caste values. In the initial time, the migrants did not

mind mingling with each other irrespective of their caste differences. They worked together in factories, shared houses while living together, and also cooked and ate together. However, these changes (or rather adjustments) in migrants' lives were only a temporary phenomenon. As soon as they were joined by their families from India, their social and cultural patterns began to construct themselves in accordance with the beliefs and ideas that represented internal differences and hierarchies.

In his book titled *The Consequences of Modernity*, Giddens (1990) defines dis-embedding as "the 'lifting out' of social relations from local context of interactions and their restructuring across indefinite span of time-space" (Giddens 1990: 21). Dis-embedding is a process that explains how social identities and practices are reconstructed in a different social context after carrying them out from their original spaces. This transition is further described as "re-embedding", in which the social relations being "lifted out" are reinforced and re-appropriated (ibid.: 79-80). The processes of dis-embedding and re-embedding explain the change and continuity in a social structure that is produced and reproduced in a different context. While the dis-embedding informs the transition of the social structure, the re-embedding reflects the growth and reproduction of that structure in the new society. Migration is an underlying factor that gives rise to these processes. It remains a vehicle for the dissemination of social habits, customs, and beliefs in the new social context. The migration of Indians clearly indicates how certain traditions and customs are brought to a host society through migration. The process of dis-embedding is associated with modernity, in which the traditions, beliefs, and social lifestyle is transcended beyond a territory (Eriksen 2007: 16). The emphasis on "lifting out" in the above definition suggests the transcendent nature of social habits and customs and their "restructuring" in a new social context.

The way in which migrants established themselves in social life is a peculiar process. It represents how they carried their values with them and re-established their social identities and relations accordingly. The migration of Indians and their social practices demonstrates about the "belief" in caste that instructs them to carry their internal differences and caste consciousness across the migratory society. This gives rise to the formulation of social relations within caste and kin networks while migrants adapt to the host environment. The question as to how social relations are built through a process of adaptation and negotiation at one point while reproducing family and kin relations at another is important here. It helps one understand how belief in caste is embedded in the everyday social life of migrants. I argue that the process of

migration was driven significantly within caste and kin networks and that this eventually led to the sustaining of internal caste hierarchy. These hierarchies remained implicit in the earlier stages of migration and began to be decisive when the migrants' establishment in their family life began.

This chapter aims at exploring the re-embedding of the social, the process by which caste relations are reproduced among migrants. I examine how caste relations and hierarchy are maintained at one point and negotiated and accommodated at another. The process of dis-embedding resulted in the formation of the migrant community, which resembled a state of similarity in which social differences remained implicit, whereas the re-embedding suggests a state of dissimilarity in which internal distinction and social hierarchy became decisive in regular interactions. These processes collectively inform the production and reproduction of the social among migrants. Drawing on the post-Independence labour migration of Indians to the UK, I demonstrate how migrants became established in their social life while accommodating and negotiating with the host environment. The earlier life of the migrants reflects a great deal of practical difficulties and challenges in accommodating to the host environment.

This was also a time when the migrants faced the external challenges concerning racism and anti-immigration issues. To cope with these obvious difficulties, the migrants eventually cooperated among themselves by tolerating their internal differences. This scenario provided them with what Giddens (1990) calls an "ontological security" that represents a collective feeling that helps people respond to the external insecurity while creating a sense of solidarity within. The internal cooperation was a temporary phenomenon. It remained effective as long as racism and an anti-immigration atmosphere continued to be a striking feature of the host society. The migrants began to distinguish and identify with their caste upon the settlement of external problems. Caste as an organising principle began to play a decisive role in the reproduction of social and religious life thereafter. This scenario suggests an important transition in which the migrants became a diasporic entity that demonstrates the re-introduction of social customs, traditions, and beliefs (Brubaker 2005). I also point out that the migration was not only an economic phenomenon as seen in migration scholarship (e.g. Sahay 2009; Safran et al. 2009); it was also caused by social inequalities in the native places of the migrants. The Dalits conceived of migration as an escape from the caste dominance prevalent in the society they migrated from. Moreover, migration is not only a "movement for freedom and well-being" (de Hass 2021), but it is also a movement for freedom from caste inequalities.

While demonstrating the reproduction of caste through migration and the re-embedding of social relations, this chapter also tends to build a ground for the following chapters in the dissertation that reflect broadly on the reproduction of castes.

Migration – a historical trajectory

The post-Independence labour migration of Indians to Britain was primarily a Punjabi phenomenon. There are various reasons why the Punjabi migrants form a predominant majority among Indians in the United Kingdom. Common observations derived in the past few studies suggest that it was due to their affiliation with the British Army, to which Punjabi soldiers had made their presence significant in the World Wars (Searle-Chatterjee and Sharma 2003; Brown 2006; Myrvold 2011). Moreover, historical accounts of migration also suggest that the Punjab region had gone through economic distress caused by the frequent draughts and poor agricultural production. The nineteenth-century indentured migration of Indians to the British colonies in East and West Africa was phenomenal. It demonstrates the involvement of a vast amount of Indian labour force, including Punjabi migrants (Tinker 1974; Carter 1996; Vertovec 2000; Jain 2000). Apart from these common views, the people of Punjab also witnessed an in-and-out migration in the region and hence migration as an opportunity for a better life has been common among Punjabis (Hawley 2013). Migration shows us an important feature of modernity and globalisation that represents "human mobility" across the globe (Eriksen 2007: 105; de Hass 2021). The Punjabi migration reflects this human mobility through Punjabis' social and religious interconnections from the past centuries to the present (Bhachu 1985; Singh and Tatla 2006; Jacobsen and Myrvold 2011). The common saying that "Punjabis are everywhere" represents their historical presence and the interconnectivity between their native places and the places they migrated to.

The post-Independence migration of Indians to Britain is seen as an outcome of economic distress and political upheavals. On the one hand, there was the decline in agricultural production in India and the uncertainty about recovering from it in the near future, and on the other hand, political unrest further aggravated the condition of the farmers and the working class (Khan 2007; Hawley 2013). During early migration, the major source of country's income was agriculture and hence the decline in agriculture was immediately felt in the country's employment and other sectors (Kalsi 1992). Moreover, memories of the "Partition" of India and Pakistan in 1947 were still fresh in the Punjab region and for many the Partition scenario

remained a cause for economic and social distress (Singh 1956). Under these circumstances, migration was viewed as a potential way to get rid of the existing situation at least temporarily. Conceiving of migration as a temporary aspect of their lives, the migrants prepared their minds to leave their places with an expectations of overcoming their existing difficulties. My discussions with first-generation migrants reveals that their common perception of migration was that: they would go to Britain for a short time (though not sure how short as they recall), find work, earn some money, and then come back to re-establish their agriculture and businesses with which they were previously engaged with.

The context within which migration took place is a peculiar phenomenon. The requirement of migration was simple, it required nothing apart from managing the travel expense. Being Commonwealth subjects, Indian emigrants had reserved certain rights to travel freely to Britain, at least until the early sixties. The conditions of migration apparently changed when the British government put some restrictions on migration by introducing the Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1962. From the sixties onwards, the migration flow reduced significantly but it did not stop the required labour force that the industries needed, and hence it continued under the new regulations. A voucher was required which acted as a work permit for Britain, and to obtain it one needed prior contacts (with friends or relatives) in Britain. This did not seem much of a difficulty though, since there was interconnectivity between the people who had already migrated and the ones who wanted to follow in the former's footsteps. In short, those who could afford to pay for their travel were able to migrate. The general narratives tells us that air travel was relatively expensive and apart from that, one also needed some additional amount to survive in Britain until work was found and the first wages were dispensed. The migrants who came from a land-owning community did not find much difficulty in arranging their travel fare. They either sold a piece of land they possessed or borrowed money from their relatives to meet the travel expenses. However, it seemed difficult for the lower classes to arrange their travel expenses since they were dependent on the land-owning class for their livelihood and income.[3]

The conditions from which Dalits migrated inform both the economic and social dimension of migration. While conceiving of migration as a potential source of a better livelihood, they also imagined it as an escape from the caste hierarchy and dominance they were subject to. In the

[3] Dhanpatt recalls distinctly the sum of 1,827 rupees (today around $200) being paid for the flight from Delhi to Heathrow (London). To collect that much money for the families who had no source of livelihood seems difficult even today. And in the 1960s, it must have been beyond their imagination to manage this large sum given their precarious financial status. (My interview with Dhanpatt, June 2017, Bedford.)

Dalit situation, migration served a two-fold purpose. On the one hand, it gave the Dalits economic independence as they were relied on the land-owning class for their livelihood prior to their migration. On the other hand, it gave them a hope for escaping from the age-old caste oppression and social hierarchy in their everyday lives. The latter remained important as part of their social and political struggle ever since they came to Britain. Migration certainly provided a new avenue to build their social and economic life, but that could not help them escape from caste hierarchy. Caste identity and relations remained inherent to the process of migration in a way that represents how caste relations are "lifted out" from the native places to the host society.

Apart from the financial difficulties of managing the required expenses for migration, there was another obstacle that the Dalits encountered, regarding obtaining the required travel document (passport) from the local bureaucracy. It was not because of any technical problems that they could not obtain the document, but simply because the bureaucracy was occupied exclusively by upper castes who remained biased against furnishing the lower castes with the required documents needed for travel abroad. The Dalits who migrated in the fifties recall this scenario in which they obtained their passports, when, fortunately, a new passport authority was appointed, who turned out to be a Dalit himself. The name, Isher Dass Pawar, is fondly remembered by the Dalits who obtained their passports (in some cases their fathers') under this Dalit authority who served as the undersecretary for the passport office. He is said to have handed out many passports with an unconventional generosity during his service in the passport office.[4] This scenario shows how certain barriers were inextricable from the Dalit situation of migration. But despite of all these barriers they made their way to Britain like everyone else to make their fortune.

"The pavements of England are covered with gold"

Throughout the fifties and sixties, the demand for labour increased exponentially and as a result Punjab was swept away by what Roger Ballard calls the "migration fever" (Ballard 1994: 95). During this time, almost every household would think of sending at least one boy from their family to the UK since the whereabouts of the migrants were already a matter of discussion in the neighbourhoods from which they migrated. Not more than a few weeks after migration, the

[4] My conversations with first-generation Dalit migrants often furnished me with this fact about the passport officer. (My interaction with Arun Kumar, Dhanpatt Rattu, and Hukum Chand, June 2017, Bedford.)

good news of the migrants would fall on the ears of the people back home and that would give inspiration for others to follow in the footsteps of the ones who had already gone to the UK. When the growing demand for labour was at its peak, the workers in the factories and foundries were told by their supervisors and managers to bring more people from their native places. Accordingly, the workers would pass this message on their community back home and give their assistance in case any document or financial aid was required (the telephone calls once in a while would suffice to pass the word regarding the availability of work to their fellow friends or community members in their native places).[5] It was sheer "word of mouth" that spread the news of work and wages and the better lifestyle of the migrants, and that would provoke other people to migrate. Describing the excitement of the people about migration during this time, Sat Paul says that "we were led to believe that the pavements of England are covered with gold".[6] This popular dictum of the time demonstrates that the post-colonial migration to Britain was altogether a different phenomenon compared to the historical migration of Indians in the previous centuries; it provided a means for economic advancement as well as a hope for social change.

What was commonly heard about the migrants was mostly the positive and optimistic side of migration. It was the regular work, wages, and most importantly, these wages being sent to the families back home as savings, that convinced the people who were thinking of migration. Apart from what people would usually hear of the migrants, about their changing lifestyle, economic progress and so on, the occasional visits from those migrants to their native places would serve as a testimony of the economic progress they witnessed in such a short span of time. These occasional visits from the migrants were also indicative of certain other factors. While visiting their native towns in Punjab, the migrants would typically appear in their Western suits and boots while imitating English manners. They would impress upon their fellow friends and relatives. Witnessing this change in their personal and social life, there remained no doubt for others but to believe in the "golden pavements" they kept on hearing about. The changes in a migrant's family status brought on by economic advancement became a matter of the new status quo within the community. An elderly man whom I would meet occasionally in a Ravidasi temple in Bedford tells me, quite jokingly though, about the instance of his marriage. When his parents were looking for a match for him before he came to Britain,

[5] Dhanpatt tells me in those days (in the 1960s), there would be a long queue of people waiting at a public booth to make telephone calls to their families in India. This way, the news of available jobs was also spread.
[6] My interview with Sat Paul, August 2017, Bedford.

most of the girls' families approached by his parents did not show any interest in him. But when he visited his village for the first time after migrating to Britain and presented himself with his *vilayati* (Western) suit, the villagers were surprised by his look and manners. Most interestingly, the families of potential spouses lined up to show their interest in him as a potential bridegroom for their girls, including the families who initially rejected him as a potential match. A family member living abroad became a matter of pride, from an economic as well as from a social point of view, and migration provided an avenue to achieve such status and pride.

Migration, kinship, and production of social relations

Since the beginning, migration was driven by a peculiar pattern of family and kin networks among migrants. The patterns of migration shows us that the family and kinship relations played a vital role in organising migrants' life in the host society. It not only helped the migrants draw on their families' support during the initial preparation for migration, but also provided internal security for migrants while working in factories and living in the alien world of British society. Upon arrival in Britain, the migrant was received by his own kin or community members who were already settled there. He was provided with housing and food in shared living along with his relatives until he was established in his regular working life. All this operated within caste and community networks. This demonstrates that migration was rooted in caste and kinship networks even though caste was not explicit in the early years of migration. This also meant that the Dalits migrated within their own community circle. They, too, were helped by the migrants who had already migrated from their own community. Likewise, they were accommodated in houses occupied by the migrants from their own castes.

Dhanpatt Rattu, a Dalit who came to Britain in the early sixties, tells me that like the rest of the migrants who arrived in Britain through their family and kin networks, the Dalits also managed to establish contacts with their relatives and community members, from whom they received the required assistance. Dhanpatt was provided with a place to stay by his relative (uncle), who also helped him find work at the brickyard in the town of Bedford. He says that his uncle provided the required documents needed to obtain a voucher for working in Britain. When he settled in his regular work and wages, he, too, helped other newcomers who would end up in the same town. Through this process of mutual help and support, the community ties also began to strengthen. We see the emergence of socio-cultural fronts like the Singh Sabha (association), Ramgariah Sabha, or the Ravidasi and Valmiki Sabha, which were basically caste associations. They were aimed at looking after the socio-cultural affairs of their respective communities.

Activities like organising marriages and finding suitable spouses seemed to be the primary activity of these associations, especially the Singh Sabhas that eventually established the "marriage bureaus".[7]

This pattern of kinship-based migration, however, is not a new phenomenon as far as Indian emigration is concerned. Similar patterns also existed in the past, especially in the nineteenth century, during the recruitment of South Indian labour under the *kangani* system[8] of migration under British colonialism, in which the workers were recruited through kin networks (Sandhu 1969; Jain 1993; Clarke et al. 1999). The migration of Indians therefore reflects a peculiar pattern of family and kinship-based migration that led to the establishment of the emigrants within their social and cultural setting in the host societies. Studies on migration show the influence of kin and family-based relations in the process of migration (Fleischer 2007). South Asian migration particularly displays stronger caste and kin ties since their migration was driven by the kin relations. This scenario was further reinforced through endogamous marriages, which is another peculiar feature of the South Asian or Indian migration particularly (Ballard 1999). The family and kin relations provided the community with a sense of togetherness while they shared common beliefs and a sense of belonging to their own community and culture. The social atmosphere in the host society seemed inconvenient to carry on with caste distinctions in the beginning, especially when migrants had shared working places. But the kin networks and community spaces through which they were interconnected provided a ground to re-establish social relations based on their internal differences. The kin networks reinforced the migrants' identity while making them responsible for social duties and customs. It provided the migrants with an internal security with which they could feel secure in terms of their social beliefs and ideas; it made them feel "at home abroad", to use Ballard's (1994) terminology.

Another dimension of this internal security is the social and political environment in the host society. The racial atmosphere and the anti-immigration context in Britain created an external insecurity among migrants. The migrants dealt with this hostile context by creating a sense of "ontological security" that provided the confidence and internal strength to respond to the

[7] Some of the Sikh temples are still associated with these kinds of marriage bureaus established in the past decades. For instance, the Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha, a Sikh temple in Southall, still runs a marriage bureau. There is an office inside the temple on which a plate on the door reads: "Marriage Bureau Office".

[8] The *kangani* system through which workers were recruited was largely based on the family and kinship. The studies on the *kangani* system reflect on caste ties among the workers as a result of this recruitment.

hostile atmosphere (Giddens 1990: 92). This particular time shows that the migrants cooperated with one another while also tolerating caste and religious differences within themselves. The ontological security among the migrants therefore was an outcome of the external hostility towards the migrants as a whole. This process by which individual relations could transcend their caste and religious boundaries was not a "cognitive" process as Giddens (ibid.) explains. Therefore, when the issues of racism and anti-immigration began to settle gradually, the caste identities and differences became explicit among migrants. Their beliefs in and consciousness of caste became explicit when they began to organise their social and religious life based on their caste identities and hierarchy. The way in which the migrants encountered the host society in the beginning, and the way they accommodated themselves to the host atmosphere and within themselves, shows the reconstruction of the social and their beliefs in social hierarchy.

Encountering the *Vilayat* – external racism and internal casteism

One of the reasons that caste changes with migration is the practical tasks and challenges that migrants encounter in the *Vilayat*, the foreign land.[9] The external environment demanded that the migrants cooperate with each other with regard to their internal differences in order to deal with the issues of racism and anti-immigration prevalent at the time. While racial instances were countered by migrants collectively, their collectivism did not reflect their internal life, in which they remained distinct, while identifying themselves with their caste belonging. Moreover, the perception of racism differed significantly among migrants, in that their caste prejudices became an obstacle in overcoming their own racial prejudices towards Black people. This is to say that racism was countered but racial solidarity was not built with other people who are historically subject to racism. This also suggests that the belief in caste carried by migrants hardly allowed them to break the age-old social hierarchy. It remained an obstacle in overcoming internal caste prejudices and discrimination.

Housing and shared living

One of the main concerns for migrants' families back home was whether the person had found a place to stay upon his arrival in Britain. My interaction with the first-generation migrants informs me that even though it was quite easy to find a place to stay and start working, the

[9] The word is used to refer to a foreign country, especially to the Western world. The first generation migrants often used this word during my conversations with them. It is also very common in Indian Bollywood movies that depict Indian life in the Western world.

confirmation of accommodations and work was a relief to their families back home. It also gave prospective migrants an assurance concerning accommodation and work. The typical Victorian houses rented mostly in what were then called "run-down areas" became an important sign of the migrant settlements. This settlements were often referred to by the local whites as "ghettos" while emigrants were looked down upon as underdeveloped.[10] However, sooner than expected, these ghettos became important social and cultural hubs when the emigrants flourished in their culture and economy. They developed small-scale businesses, easily available manual services, and local restaurants that contributed significantly to the progress of the towns which were seen as "ghettos" (see Werbner 1990). The transformation of the emigrant "ghettos" into a society of migrants has become an important feature underlined in the scholarship on multiculturalism and diversity in Britain (Baumann 1996; Vertovec 2007). These run-down neighbourhoods settled throughout the industrial towns of the Midlands and parts of Western London, and eventually became important economic and culturally diverse centres. To this day these settlements remind one of the historical context within which the emigrants became a community.

A place like Southall, which was once called as an emigrant ghetto, is now known for its diverse cultural vibrancy as well as local market economy. It is an emigrant town, predominantly inhabited by a Punjabi-speaking population, along with other minorities from South Asia as well as from the Caribbean countries. The history, culture, economy, and politics of the town largely indicate the community's presence and its contribution in economic and cultural spheres. The Dominion Centre and Library in Southall possesses several booklets and archival material (newspapers, photographs, magazines) that tell about the emigrants' contribution to the development of the town. On the walls of a reading room, quotes from the early migrants are printed in colourful sentences indicating the latter's views on the town they lived in for decades.[11] The post-war history of these towns is essentially the history of the migration of the South Asian communities and their contribution to the local economy, politics, and culture. The people I met and talked to in these settlements, both in Southall and other towns in the Midlands, play a vital role in local politics and culture and are actively engaged in the latter. Their narration of their experiences of living in those ghettos reflects upon the kind of housing and

[10] There were certain manners and customs of the emigrants which were beyond the comprehension of the local populace, including food habits, their smell (due to hair oil) etc., for which the migrants were often looked down upon. The first-generation migrants recall these things about their food and smell quite jokingly today.

[11] Some of the quotes of the migrants read as follows: "The world wouldn't be the same today if it wasn't for Southall" (by Kuljit Bhamra). Another one reads: "Southall is a pilgrimage. This is where it all began." (by Meena Tah).

accommodation they shared with their fellow migrants. Dharampal Nahar, who came to Britain in the early sixties and settled in Southall, relates his experiences of living and working there.

> The house we were living in was rented from the white people (*gore log*). There were several rooms in that house. In each room at least four or five of us used to sleep. We were around 20 people living in one house. It was a very hard life: we had to get up early to catch the morning shift, some of us had evening shifts. There were always men sleeping in the rooms throughout the day and night. There were 24-hours of work. Sometimes our shifts kept on changing, so if this week I occupied the bed during the night, the next week I'd be sleeping during the daytime ... One wakes up, another takes his place … sometimes when we finished our shifts and came home some people would still be sleeping and then we would wake them up to get them ready for their shifts. There was nothing apart from working, sleeping and cooking ... we lived like that for years.

Since the living expenses in those places were affordable for every working man, there seemed to be enough potential for the savings from the regular wages they earned. Speaking of the wages and savings, Dharampal further narrates:

> The living expenses were minor because we shared houses. After spending 1 or 2 pounds for living and accommodation, we saved the rest of the money. And when we exchanged [the pounds] into the Indian currency that became a fortune for us [Dharampal says this with great laughter]. … I used to receive 15 pounds every week. We had to pay one pound for rent and another one for food, drinks, etc. There weren't any other expenses, so we used to save the remaining amount and send it to family (back home) … at the time there weren't any Indian restaurants. We never ate outside because the food was so different that we couldn't eat a bit of it. We would cook our own food together. Some of us didn't know how to cook but after a while everyone started cooking. Whoever remained at home had to prepare food for all ... we had *aata* and *daal* (wheat flour and lentils) collected in a big quantity, and it was quite cheaper that way to buy (food stuff) and cook together ... that time, we'd get whole sack of 10kg *aata* for one penny.

The migrants who came to Britain in the fifties were able to buy their own houses in the same decade. And when the emigration was at its peak from the fifties onwards, these migrants who possessed their own houses helped the new migrants with accommodation, food, and other required help. Hukum Chand, one of the early Dalit migrants in Bedford, says that his father was one of those few migrants who owned a house in the town. Apparently, his father was also one of those few migrants who returned home to follow his dream of purchasing a piece of land and cultivating it (during their migration, many Dalits imagined to purchase a piece of land and cultivate it after their return). After his father's return, Hukum Chand started working in the same brickyard his father used to work in. Being settled in Bedford with his wife, children and grandchildren, Hukum Chand now owns a luxurious house at the embankment, one of the

spacious localities in the town. While showing me photographs of his father, he recalls that his father helped many newcomers at the time while providing them with a place to stay in his own house.

> When my father came here [to Bedford], there were very few people who had their own houses. My father owned a big house at the time, and he helped many people ... provided them with accommodation, food until they found a job. There were only three of us living in that house. The house was all empty ... My father thought why not help those men who were in need [of accommodation] at the time ... there used to be more than 10-15 people living in two or three rooms, I remember. Everyone came for work. There was plenty of work but getting a place [to live] was quite difficult. The brickyard always needed men and many of them came from the villages [in Punjab]. When they [the newcomers] settled, they invited others from their villages and like that the whole town was full of Indians ... Everyone in those days worked in the brickyard.

The shared living basically led them to form a kind of community – a community of men driven by a common motif centred around a common lifestyle, common working conditions and a common means of earning. Such commonality resulted from shared living and seemed well suited at a time when migrants needed to cooperate with and support each other. This was a common situation at the time when migrants lived together while sharing places eventually with their own caste and community members. Their togetherness also seems to have engaged them in their regular work and common lifestyle that helped them overcome the longing for their family or loneliness. Additionally, the long working hours in the factories kept the men busy around the clock in different working shifts. Such a working and living lifestyle seemed complementary to one another in those times where there was hardly any scope for other activities except regular work without a break. There seems to be an analogy between the working places (foundries) and the living spaces they shared for living and accommodation. Both these spaces accommodated the workers around the clock through day and night shifts. One demanded nonstop work, the other provided shelter to rest and prepare food. The working shifts and the sleeping shifts in those shared houses thus ran in parallel.

The houses shared by the emigrants were mostly rented from the local British people who were already vacating these run-down places. Some of the earlier accounts on the housing matters of South Asian communities describe the housing condition during migration and how they changed when certain places primarily became emigrant colonies (Schaefer 1976; Werbner 1990). The towns in the Midlands and West London (Southall) naturally created a heavy demand for housing, especially when the emigration was on the rise. Upon the arrival of the migrants throughout the fifties and sixties, the local white population in these areas began to

rent out and eventually sell their properties. This way, the properties in these seemingly run-down areas acquired more value than ever before. But even after a significant increase in property value, the houses were still affordable to buy and rent for the emigrants, given the nature of their regular work and wages. The people I spoke to about the housing scenarios and their lifestyle during the times they lived in shared houses, eventually purchased these houses they once used to rent. Today, the workers who purchased houses in those run-down areas, relate their experiences about how they went on buying houses once they decided to settle in Britain. The neighbourhood in the industrial towns was poorly maintained in terms of housing, water, heating, and other facilities required in the houses. However, the infrastructure and facilities were barely taken into consideration by the workers, either while renting or buying the properties.

The Indian emigrant's and the Western notion of housing differed on a large scale, both in terms of its aesthetics and infrastructural values. The lack of anything more than the basic required facilities of water, toilet, and heating therefore did not seem to bother the migrant men until their families joined them. When the families were reunited, the migrants' idea of housing and living space began to change, in that the living space now began to acquire what Werbner (1990: 15) calls a "cultural and ideological" aspect. The idea of housing and living thus transformed significantly. While in the beginning migrant men accommodated themselves to the 'ghettoised' notion of housing and living, the emergence and establishment of family life significantly changed this notion. The "house" was began to be pursued in accordance with social beliefs, traditions, and customs that the family unit naturally demanded.

Overall, although the housing phenomenon provided a sense of a "shared lifestyle", it was largely organised within one's own community circle. Hence, the kin factor was inherent throughout the living and working lifestyle of the migrants. The shared accommodation was in no way an accident or a random phenomenon; men would not arrive and choose to stay anywhere with anyone. On the contrary, there appeared to be a network of channels within one's own community and caste circles, through which housing and accommodation was operated throughout the migration. The narratives in this chapter talk about this feature of migration. While the mainstream Sikh and Hindu emigrants established themselves through their own family, kinship, or community networks right from the beginning of their migration, the Dalits also formed their own community circle through which they managed their living and working life. The housing and shared living therefore shows the conditions under which

the workers lived and worked together and created their own social space. The working life in factories indeed kept the two classes – the lower castes and upper castes – in a proximity while working shoulder to shoulder. However, this proximity only signifies togetherness in physical spaces and not in social spaces. In the social space, the migrants distinguished themselves based on their caste identification. The racial scenario apparently brought the migrants together under one platform to share their common concerns about racial issues. But these concerns only provided an incentive to form a political unity and was unlikely to cross social barriers within the migrant community.

Migrants and the racial encounter

The racial phenomenon became visible mainly when anti-immigration rhetoric was on the rise in Britain's social and political environment. The socio-economic tension within British society in general coincided with the influx of emigrants from South Asia, in which circumstances the emigrants were persecuted as a danger by a section of British politics at the time.[12] This situation of blaming the emigrants for the existing socio-economic crisis became a mass perception, especially when anti-immigration tendencies loomed large in British politics. The problems concerning housing, health, education, and unemployment were seen as the "immigrant problems" (Brah 1996: 22). In this context, racial prejudices towards emigrants were essentially anti-immigrant tendencies borne out of political propaganda against the immigrants. Therefore, the racial scenario here seems to have mainly been an outcome of anti-immigration vibes rather than a structural entity, at least as far as the Asian emigrants were concerned.[13]

First-generation migrants recall their racial encounter and the way they confronted racism in their earlier life in Britain. A regular instance of the issues of racism confronted by Asians was a ban on Asians in certain public spaces like pubs and restaurants. Moreover, segregation of the Asian children in schools was also one of the major racial problems by the people who confronted it. Some people also recall a racial angle in buying and selling properties, due to

[12] In 1968 a conservative MP, Inoch Powell, made a well-known speech titled "Rivers of Blood", in which he alleged that the migrants were a threat to British society. This was also the time when immigration control laws began to emerge in Britain, especially when the Conservative government came to power in the seventies. The far-right nationalist groups who were against the immigration launched racial attacks against the Asian emigrants in the seventies and eighties. (My interview with Bishan Dass, a former mayor of the city of Wolverhampton, 12 December 2018.)

[13] In the British context, the term "Asian" basically means the South Asian (namely – Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis).

which, though the Asians were able to buy properties, they were sidelined on the racial grounds. Public places and properties were often displayed racial signs indicating a ban in those places on African Blacks and the Asians. An advert appeared in a shop in Southall in the late fifties, reading: "TO LET: Decent single bed-sitting room with facilities to cook in basement kitchen. Suit a working gentleman or woman. Only respectable people need apply. No coloured please".[14] These racial instances however did not go unchallenged. Retaliations against racial attack and segregation took place at various levels through the organisation of counterattacks as well as through demonstrations against racism. The young Asians, for instance, formed groups within themselves and launched counterattacks through community policing against racial attacks on the streets and in other public spaces. Moreover, some of the anti-racist groups also appeared in which Asians took part in writing and publishing activities. The above-quoted advert is taken from a book published by this anti-racist groups that worked along with the Institute of Race Relations which aimed at carrying out research and publishing activities on racial issues since its inception in the late fifties.[15]

The narratives of racial encounter describe further about how migrants individually confronted racial instances and how they eventually formed groups to counterattack racist groups. In the towns of Bedford and Wolverhampton, anti-racist youth groups were formed to react to instances of racism on the streets and in other public spaces. Bishan Dass, a former mayor of Wolverhampton, narrates the instances of racism he came across during his youth as well as when he was active in British politics. Recently, he penned his experiences of living in Britain in the form of an autobiography titled *Pride vs Prejudice* published in 2015. This book is a first of its kind since it represents the story of a Dalit emigrant, both from a racial and caste perspective. Speaking of the racial situation in the town, Mr Dass says that he was part of an Asian youth group which was formed mainly to confront against racial violence in streets and public places. He says:

> Those days in the sixties and seventies were the worst days – black days for the black people in the white country. There used to be gangs [of the British whites] coming from outside the town in vans and they would hunt for the black people, going around and beating them. Particularly, they targeted bus drivers and conductors, and the majority of them used to be Indians. In those days I was young and working. We organised our

[14] The advert appeared in a small book (p.8) titled *Southall: The Birth of Black Community*, published in 1981 by the "Campaign against Racism and Fascism", a group who led campaigns against racism in those days by organising the black people of colour (mostly Asians).
[15] The details of the Institute of Race Relations can be found on this webpage: https://irr.org.uk/about/ (Accessed on 23 July 2021).

> own gangs to go around in the city in cars, but not to fight. If anyone attacked black people, we used to come out and protect them. In the eyes of the *goras* [whites] we were all blacks!

In other cities also the Asian youth seems to have formed groups within the emigrant community to respond against such racial violence. Sat Paul's experience of living in Bedford and the kind of racial situation he was exposed to also tells us about the youth's attempt to fight back against racial instances. Sat Paul says:

> We were all united in fighting racism and that's why we were successful. I was the first secretary of the People of Bedford against Racism (POBA). The Indian contribution to POBA was minimal but it wasn't divided into different castes and religions like the present-day religious groups. It was combined as an Indian effort. It was the racial discrimination that pushed us into a corner … Of course, it was because we were rejected by the whites that we wanted to be organised, we wanted to be recognised.

Apart from the groups of adult men formed to confront against racial violence, there was also a front called the Indian Workers' Association (IWA) established in the mid-thirties by a rather privileged group of Indians who came to Britain as students, professionals, and businessmen.[16] Apparently, this was the first political platform of its kind that operated even before Indian Independence. The main activities of the IWA were therefore confined to Indian nationalism while joining in the homeland politics of Independence in the thirties and forties. From the fifties onwards, after India became free from British Rule in the late forties, the Association shifted its attention to the newly emigrated Indians to draw them under its platform, which never happened due to several reasons. However, the IWA kept on involving itself in social and cultural matters without bringing in its ideological or political views which most emigrants either disagreed with or disinterested in.

The IWA, being predominantly a high-caste Hindu and Sikh organisation, had no comprehensive ideological ground. At one point it projected itself to be leftist while at other times it supported the nationalist movement in India.[17] It kept on floating around the issues that emerged out of the emigration scenario in the fifties and sixties. When the racial phenomenon became visible, the organisation found a ground upon which emigrants were mobilised to protest racial instances encountered in housing, schools, and other domains of public and social

[16] Mr Bishan Dass says that the IWA was represented by the upper caste Sikhs and Hindus, and that Dalits were never included in its body. (My interview with Mr Dass, December 2018.)

[17] My conversation with the Dalits (now activists and writers) reveal that the IWA never bothered with the caste problems even though Dalits in the UK approached the organisation to take a stand on the matter, especially when the atrocities against Dalits were on the rise in the sixties and seventies.

life. The protests led by the IWA in the seventies and eighties concerning school segregation, racial attacks, and issues related to wages and so on were also supported by progressive political fronts and research organisations such as the Institute for Race Relations. Political fronts like the IWA are said to have brought the emigrants together on the racial problem under a single platform, but only politically. It was a "politics of solidarity" that appeared among the emigrants owing to the host environment and the issues of racism (Brah 1996: 13). It did not necessarily aim to integrate emigrants across racial, caste, or religious lines.

Racial slurs like "Paki" (lit. a person of Pakistani background) were referred indiscriminately to the people of South Asian background. However, not all Indians, especially high castes, would associate themselves with such slurs – neither literally, nor conceptually. On the contrary, in the upper caste imagination, the slurs like "Paki" or *kala* (African Black) remained as part of everyday vocabulary, intended to convey religious and racial superiority towards the Pakistani and Black people respectively. Hence, the racial phenomenon encountered by South Asians as a whole was confined within the caste and religious boundaries. A unified voice against racism as a structural issue therefore did not appear among South Asians in the matters of racism. In this scenario, the racial phenomenon and its confrontation by South Asians seems to have established what Avtar Brah (1996:13) observes to be a "political solidarity" among South Asians. However, it did not translate into an "organic solidarity" – to put it in Durkheim's (1984 [1893]) terminology – that signifies unity and social cohesion.

Therefore, though racism was experienced by Asian emigrants in general, the understanding of "racism" as a social construction was not reflected among the emigrants who identified with their caste-superior statuses. The Dalit experience of racism, therefore, differs significantly from high-caste racial experiences in that the latter did not share social space with the former, even though both reacted against racism. Moreover, when it comes to Black people who are the subject of structural racism, Indians (mostly upper castes) are themselves unlikely to be free of racial prejudices towards the former. The upper caste, being conscious of his/her own caste superiority, subscribes to racial superiority both on theoretical and practical grounds. Therefore, racial experiences of upper castes in general and those of African Blacks or even Dalits are fundamentally different. The Dalits and the Blacks responded against racism and conceived of a social structure free of caste and race – whereas the confrontation against racial prejudices by upper castes overlapped with their social norms and beliefs that kept alive the sense of racial superiority among themselves. This scenario also suggests as to why the Asians seemed to have

formed a "political solidarity" for the sake of protesting racism but failed to establish an "organic solidarity" that demands cohesion and integrity in social domains. The racial encounter of Asians or Indians in particular and their resistance to it, thus, largely operated within the confines of their social framework; it did not transcend ideological or moral perceptions to eliminate racism or casteism from their regular lifestyle. Therefore, the social inequalities that persisted among the emigrants did not seem to bend, even to the external forces like racism to which the emigrants were subjected to.

Restoring caste, habits, and social relations

The migration context so far has provided an understanding that the migrants paved their way to a foreign land under certain economic and social circumstances, and that their preconceived notion of migration was to work abroad for a short time and then return after earning some money. Moreover, we have also discussed that migration established a peculiar pattern of kin and family relations within which migrants organised as a community based on their social identities and differences. The working life of the migrants however did not provide much space to exercise these differences. In fact, the working environment in the factories deemed these internal social differences irrelevant and insignificant while demanding the required labour from the migrants (regardless of their caste or religion). This also meant that the workers had to cooperate with each other while building, to some extent, friendly relations, reliability, and trust. As a consequence, an ontological security was established which, in fact, was needed in order to accommodate to and feel secure against the host environment (especially when racism was on the rise). Therefore, the social differences which became implicit were confined to a specific time and space. As long as these differences remained implicit, they did not seem to cause a great deal of social distinction, but rather dwelled in the community of migrants under the ontological security. However, the consciousness of being a distinct social groups began to loom larger as the family life of the migrants became visible. This was the time when the migrants began to bring their families (wives and children) to Britain, whom they had left behind when they migrated. The perception of their migration as a temporary phenomenon began to change among the migrants when they were joined by their families. This scenario resulted in them establishing a social life in which the migrants began to regain their traditional beliefs and practices in accordance with caste and religious differences. The context within which the family as a social unit was established in the new land is complex. It informs how

local traditions and customs were brought ("lifted out") across territories and how they were sustained through a peculiar process of the reproduction of social practices, customs, and habits.

Adapting to and negotiating with the host environment

The earlier life of the migrants indicates that social norms and customs acquired little or no importance especially in terms of the practices in their regular lifestyle. Apart from carrying a sense of one's culture and religion, there was hardly any scope to exercise social practices concerning religious events or functions. Moreover, the busy working lifestyle of the migrant men and the absence of their families were hardly convenient for the celebration of any religious festival. The people I interreacted with tells me that often they lost the track of their religious festivals and would come to know about these events when these festivals had already passed. The social as an entity was rooted in religious and cultural values and therefore remained largely symbolic, but not absent as such, though the scope for material celebration was minimal. As time passed and when they became acquainted with the host society's milieu, they found certain moments in which they would come together and observe certain religious events though unconventionally. For example, whenever time allowed, the men would gather in pubs and restaurants and observe certain religious occasions as a social gathering. Some of the men I talked to mentioned that they would gather in pubs on the days of annual festivals (Diwali, *Sangrand* or harvest festival) and celebrate over a "toss of beer". The sense of cultural and religious belief at the time therefore operated symbolically rather than materially among the community of the men. The transformation of the "social" as a symbolic entity to its material practices is an important process that informs the belief in traditional norms and customs.

The absence of families meant the absence of traditional norms and values of the people of South Asia. Family being a primary repository of traditional norms and values not only assures its significant presence in the community but also the presence of the traditional values and customs on which it thrives. The community of men who appeared in the initial stages of migration seems to have been beyond the purview of these social norms. In fact, in the absence of family life the men did not find themselves accountable to any social custom or religious rules. This free-floating life of the men eventually undermined the social barriers inherent in their religious customs and practices. And therefore, even though they were conscious of their locations in the social hierarchy, they seem to have crossed their social boundaries by practising inter-dining, cooking, shared living, and social drinking. Moreover, they also negotiated with their religious outfits especially in case of Sikhs who eventually shaved their beards (one of the

five sacred symbols) and grew them back when things changed with regard to racism. In this context, let us understand further how and in what context the men adapted to a more general (or Western) lifestyle while eventually disregarding their religious norms and customs, and how they returned to their religious practices when the social situation demanded it.

The Dalit narratives indicate that adapting to the host environment seemed convenient and easy for the Dalits for no other reason than the "equality" they experienced in their working environment. And for the same reason, upper castes found it difficult to accommodate themselves to the host society. Tarsem Kaul, a Dalit migrant relates his experience of working in factories and accommodating to the host environment.

> There were Jatts, Brahmans, Muslims, Dalits, and even *gore* [white people] – everyone worked together in the factories. Some Jatts complained that the work was smelly and dirty, but they couldn't do anything about it. Everyone had to do the same work whether he was Brahman or Jatt ... When we used to gather in the pubs for drinks, at that time the Jatts would sit away from us [Dalits]. Everyone would receive their drink from the same bottles, same glasses. Some Jatts and high-caste Hindus couldn't digest this fact, but they wouldn't say anything. Everyone was equal here. We felt equality for the first time in our lives. Then we thought, if we're equal here then why can't we be equal there [in India]? This thought gave us inspiration to do something for our people in India.

The Dalits had worked as landless labourers for the Jatts back in the homeland, but the factory environment broke this feudal relationship between the landlords and the Dalits. This sudden and drastic change was beyond any comprehension in the minds of the upper caste. However, the factory working environment, or for that matter the host atmosphere in general, was such that there was no other way to adapt to it than making some adjustments and negotiating with one's own thinking. This negotiation and adjustment in personal thinking came from the view that whatever changes they had to accommodate to unwillingly were temporary, because they thought of returning after they had earned enough money. Owing to these temporary changes and negotiations, they began to tolerate their social differences. A Brahmin, for instance, being a "pure vegetarian" became a meat eater as the situation demanded of him.[18] Similarly, the instances in which Sikhs shaved their beards and long hair (the sacred wearing) became a normal thing whenever the situation demanded. Sohan Singh, a Jatt Sikh whose father came to Britain in the fifties, relates how his father had to remove his beard and cut off his long hair as a job requirement.

[18] My conversation with Ram Prashar (Coventry, April 2016). He tells me how being a Brahman he turned non-vegetarian when he found difficult to manage veg diet in the earlier time of his migration.

> There wasn't any compulsion to remove the beard, but since certain jobs demanded certain rules, people shaved their beards. My father worked in a catering service and the job always demanded cleanliness and hygiene. At that time there was no beard net, so the only option was to remove the beard. Now things are more advanced.

Reflecting on the working lifestyle, including his own, of people during the fifties and sixties and the changes that took place in the following years, Sohan Singh continues:

> Everyone came here for work. At that time nobody cared about their religion and caste ... everyone wanted to earn money. We came here for money. There was no rule we *had* to remove our beards. My father shaved his beard, it was his choice. No one forced him to do that. When the beard net came, no one had to shave their beard any longer. My father grew back his beard and hair. He never had to shave it again. It was necessary to adapt to these things in British culture.

The adaptation to the working environment therefore was a matter of necessity ("ontological security") owing to the external social atmosphere in the host society. It is however important to note that the changes in personal life, such as shaving beard in case of a Sikh, non-vegetarian diet in case of a Brahmin, and several other similar instances, were primarily the context-based, driven by the external factors in the host environment. These changes concerning religious beliefs were seen as a temporary adjustment to the existing working conditions. They were not necessarily the outcome of a transformation of attitudes and perception towards social differences. Therefore, as soon as the social atmosphere was ripe for exercising cultural and religious practices, the social differences began to become more visible. This is however not to say that there is dislike as such for the host or for Western values in an upper caste imagination. There is no doubt that Western values are adopted and cherished as a sign of modernity in the regular lifestyle. However, these modern values are cherished within the framework of religious beliefs and norms, for the latter remains the basis for the restructuring of the social.

Marriage, family reunion, and social practices

As discussed above, until the emigrants were joined by their families, emigration was primarily a male phenomenon and comprised married and unmarried men as well as men who had already attained a marriageable age. The conditions under which their marriages took place provides another social dimension to migration. While the married men were in the process of bringing their wives and children from the homeland once they were convinced they had settled in the host land permanently, the marriageable men were looking for suitable spouses. Visiting native towns and villages to arrange a marriage and then bringing wives along became a popular trend among the migrants in the earlier years that reflects an important dimension of family reunion.

In the meantime, weddings began to occur in Britain itself while bringing brides over from the homeland. Compared to going back and bringing the bride to Britain after the wedding, inviting the bride to Britain for the wedding became a convenient option, especially for economic reasons (in some cases, even men were brought over especially for marriages, when the bride's family in Britain would fix the match through relatives and close contacts).[19]

The narratives of the people who married in Britain tells us about the conditions in which marriages took place despite limited resources and absences of the expected cultural environment for a wedding. Moreover, these narratives also reflect on the significance of the marriage as an institution for the restructuring of the social life. The period of the fifties and sixties seemed quite inconvenient for wedding preparations, not only because there were no temples and gurdwaras (Sikh temples) – the ideal places for wedding rituals and sermons – but also because of some of the practical difficulties concerning the wedding preparations. These difficulties ranged from finding suitable clothing and jewellery for the brides and grooms to finding priests to perform the wedding rites. But nonetheless, despite of all these factors, the marriages took place with the help and cooperation of one's own community network. The requirements of temples were met by hiring local public places like school buildings and community centres, and makeshift arrangements were made to create an atmosphere compatible for a wedding. A Sikh couple who married in the town of Coventry in the sixties recalls their wedding ceremony:

> There were no gurdwaras [Sikh temples] in those days to perform weddings. For our wedding, our families hired a community hall in the town and that's where our wedding was held. There were very few people at the wedding. Only close relatives and a few people we knew were there. The wedding was so simple. No *band-baja* (music accompanying the wedding procession), no *mehman* (guests). One person knew about the *anand karaj* [the Sikh wedding ceremony] and he officiated at the wedding ceremony. After the ceremony, we went to a pub for celebrations with our relatives and friends.

These marriage functions were made possible under the unusual circumstances while accommodating to the limited resources in the existing situation. Temples, rituals, guests, and religious ceremonies are significantly associated with Hindu and Sikh weddings, but in the given circumstances people managed their weddings without temples and guests and even without priests. The ideal view of wedding ceremony was therefore somehow challenged by

[19] My conversation with Arun Kumar who told me that he came to Britain mainly to get married when he received a marriage offer from a family (from his own community) who had migrated to Britain and looking for a potential spouse for their daughter (December 2018).

the given time and context, while accommodating the host environment. It is important to note that even though there was a significant amount of change in the forms of wedding ceremony and rituals, the very essence of the marriage remained intact – namely, endogamy. The migrants established a network through which endogamous relations began to operate. The first-generation migrants who were involved in marriage issues recall that they created "marriage associations", which aimed at organising marriages within caste.[20] Marriages across caste were an idea that remained alien and unaccepted among the migrants. Therefore, whenever there was an inter-caste union (or love marriage) across caste, it was rejected, and the couples were not accepted by their families, especially of the upper caste (Chapter 4). Therefore, the marriage pattern among migrants was broadly an endogamous phenomenon and it continued as such in the subsequent generations. This also indicates how social habits began to transform and were reinforced stringently in accordance with caste values and practices.

The family reunification became a turning point for the reinforcement of social habits and customs among migrants. The family as a repository for traditional norms and customs naturally demanded a lifestyle in accordance with religious beliefs and practices. It is in this context that the community of the migrants began to transpose into a diasporic entity representing an important feature of the social. The social, which by and large dwelled in the mind, thus began to acquire material ground through regular religious practices. The formation of temples is another important turn in migrants' lives through which social habits began to further enhance traditions that reflected the predominance of religious beliefs in social and cultural life (Chapter 2 and 3). In short, the re-embedding of the social began to tighten its hold by reinforcing religious and cultural practices.

Conclusion

The re-embedding of the social is a part and parcel of the beliefs and social customs the migrants carried with them. I have demonstrated that the migrants brought their tradition and culture to the foreign land by "lifting" them out from their native places and reconstructing them in the diaspora. The underlying factor in this "lifting out" and the reconstruction of the social was the "belief" in and consciousness of caste hierarchy. Caste hierarchy and power relations operated as implicit and explicit among migrants. The initial time of migration and establishment in the

[20] Some of the Sikh temples are still associated with these kinds of marriage bureaus established in the past decades. The 'Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha, a Sikh temple in Southall, for instance still runs a marriage bureau. There is an office inside the temple on which a plate on the door reads: "Marriage Bureau Office".

new society were characterised by some of the obvious difficulties the migrants encountered. The issues of racism and the anti-immigration scenario led the migrants to cooperate with each other and tolerate each other's caste and religious differences in order to deal with the external hostility. This scenario resulted in creating an "ontological security" that helped them create a collective feeling of security to tackle the external insecurity and hostility. During this period, caste differences became implicit and operated in the consciousness rather than in social practices. When the external hostility and racism began to settle, the caste differences became explicit through social practices. I have argued that the process of migration was driven significantly within the caste and kin networks that established social relations based on caste. The beliefs in and consciousness of caste carried by the migrants remained obstacles to breaking age-old social practices rooted in caste hierarchy.

The transformation of the emigrants into a diasporic community is a characteristic feature of the re-embedding. I have demonstrated that the post-Independence migration of Indians was not only an economic phenomenon, it was also driven by the social inequalities in their native places. The Dalits pursued migration as an escape from social inequalities and caste hierarchy prevalent in the society they migrated from. For them, migration is not only a movement for freedom and well-being as pointed out by recent scholars on migration; it is also a movement for freedom from caste domination. I have pointed out that migration brought a sea change in the economic and social lives of the Dalits while providing them with the equal space in the host environment along with other migrants. This scenario significantly challenged the structural inequalities and caste dominance within the migrant community. These inequalities and social hierarchy and their confrontation by lower-caste religious groups is clearly visible in religious domains. The emergence of religious institutions (temples) is another important aspect of the migrants' life that informs the re-embedding of the social to a further extent. The performance of regular rituals and sermons in temples brought the community in a closer social proximity than ever before, and that ultimately led to the re-institutionalisation of caste through religious practices. In the next chapter, I will discuss how religious practices and daily rituals reinforce caste distinctions in regular life and how the Brahmanical principles of "purity and impurity" are reproduced through the belief in caste.

Chapter 2

Re-instituting the Sacred through Caste Purity: Temples, Rituals, and Beliefs

The establishment of temples is one of the crucial factors that signifies the growth of religious life in the diasporic community. Along with the daily rituals associated with prayers and sermons, rituals concerning the social functions like marriage, birth, and death ceremonies became common events in diasporic temples. This scenario of regular rituals reinforced the idea of the sacred in the everyday life of migrants. The distinction of pure and impure became more visible during these ritual practices. This means that distinguishing between the pure and the impure gained momentum while binding people together through religious norms, beliefs, and customs. This transformation in the religious domain began to reinforce the element of the social in a comprehensive manner, in that the purity of caste became an explicit feature. Caste as an ideology began to be taken seriously in social identities and cultural practices, for the temple as a physical entity became a potential space for re-instituting the sacred while invoking purity and impurity as an important feature of caste hierarchy. The everyday rituals and principles of relevance to caste, otherwise known to South Asia (Fuller 1992), are now taking place among migrants in the UK.

The French anthropologist Louis Dumont has argued that the distinction between "purity and impurity" is a central part of the caste system. He explains how caste relations are maintained through ritual purity and how Brahmanical superiority is reproduced through a hegemonic distinction between the pure and the impure (Dumont 1980). The ritual practices performed regularly in temples have gained momentum within the migrant community recently. These ritual events acquire symbolic importance because these religious activities display social hierarchy and caste distinction among migrants. The notion of purity and impurity remains a core element in the display of this social hierarchy while also demonstrating power relations that persist within different caste and religious groups. The symbolic representation of ritual performances therefore becomes an important means for the distinction of the social while invoking the idea of purity and impurity. Caste as an ideology remained implicit in the earlier lives of the migrants (as discussed in Chapter 1). However, it became explicit when temples as

a socio-religious space began to organise and solidify community relations and caste identification in accordance with traditional beliefs and customs in the caste hierarchy.

In this chapter, I argue that the formation of temples on caste lines represents social hierarchy through ritual demonstrations within Sikhism. The notion of purity and impurity is made visible through Sikh rituals and religious practices which identify with the Brahmanical principle of ritual purity. This indicates that caste is not only confined to the Hindu religion, but also spills over into other religious communities including Sikhism (McLeod 1989; Oberoi 1994; Ram 2017). Daily temple rituals and religious processions are the major ritual functions that display caste hierarchy and power relations. It is the "belief" in the purity of caste that drives migrants to regain their social statuses in accordance with the Brahmin principles of purity and pollution. Ambedkar in his 1936 essay on the "annihilation of caste" makes it clear that the belief in caste has its origin in the ancient texts and since the latter are deemed sacred, caste is practiced as a divine entity (Ambedkar 2014). Building on Ambedkar's thesis of caste as a belief, Berg (2020) argues that the religious sanctity creates the "grip of caste" that gives rise to the "ontological desire to practice caste" (Berg 2020: 64). The belief in ritual purity signifies the belief in caste. Ambedkar's emphasis on the belief in caste supplements Dumont's focus on the pure and the impure in the caste system.

Dumont's (1980) work on caste demonstrates that the opposition between the pure and the impure is the founding feature of caste hierarchy. His analysis is that this opposition ultimately leads to the establishment of superior and inferior statuses and power relations that govern the separation of the two extreme classes in the caste system (Dumont 1980: 59). Moreover, he also observes that these classes are direct oppositions in the social hierarchy and their caste statuses are mutually dependent on each other, even though one governs the existence of the other. Drawing on this opposition, he argues that "the impurity of the untouchables is conceptually inseparable from the purity of the Brahmins". It is due to this complex relations between the untouchable and the Brahmin that Dumont conceives that the untouchability can be removed only if "the purity of the Brahmin is itself radically devalued" (ibid.: 54). While his analysis points at the fundamental principle of caste, that is, hierarchy, and while he also suggests the hegemonic relations between the pure and the impure, the limitation of his approach is that it does not show how hegemonic relations manifest between the Brahmins and the untouchables in a regular lifestyle.

Moreover, Dumont's (1980) observation of caste relies mainly on his structuralist approach that tends to view caste as a holistic system based on the principle of exclusion. In his view, "values and ideas are indispensable to social life" and the caste system is governed by those values though in a hierarchical manner (ibid.: 20). Observing the village social structure, Dumont also maintains that caste is "rigid and stable", and is unlikely to adapt to change (Fuller 1996: 10). This is a problematic thesis as far as the caste system is concerned. For this reason, his approach to caste is largely questioned and criticised by sociologists and anthropologists today. Dumont's method of analysing caste is primarily based on the "book view", which is dismissed by the sociologists MN Srinivas and Andre Beteille in favour of the "field view" or the empirical approach (Srinivas 2004, 2005; Beteille 1975, 1991). However, their empirical approach to caste is unable to explain the religious rootedness of the belief in caste. Ambedkar's systematic analysis of caste as a belief remains important to understand the reproduction of caste.

While Dumont (1980) is considered outdated in the recent debates on caste for the reason mentioned above, his analysis on certain aspects of caste, namely the notion of purity and impurity, still remains relevant. He maintains that purity and pollution are the manifestation of the scriptural beliefs in caste hierarchy and therefore the separation of the Brahmins from the untouchables is an outcome of the sacred belief in caste purity. The rituals practised among South Asian migrants in the UK clearly indicate the relevance of ritual purity in regular life. Dumont's observation of caste supplements Ambedkar's (2014) analysis of caste. Ambedkar explains the psychological dimension of caste in which caste is reproduced as a "state of mind" (ibid.: 68). Therefore, for the elimination of caste, Ambedkar takes a much more radical approach than that of Dumont's by attacking the scriptures that inculcate the "belief" in caste (ibid.: 2014). While caste is a multidimensional entity in modern times, the notion of purity and impurity has arguably diminished its hold on the conventional practices of purity (Jodhka 2002, 2004). However, the re-embedding of caste in the diasporic context precisely shows us the significance of the notion of the purity and impurity practised in regular rituals. Dumont's (1980) analysis is important in order for us to understand how the sacred is re-instituted in diasporic spaces and how purity and impurity have regained their traditional form in which caste superiority is reinstated through identification with the Brahmanical tradition.

This chapter examines how the sacred is re-instituted through the notion of purity and impurity in the diasporic context. Drawing on everyday temple rituals as well as the religious processions, I illustrate the manifestation of ritual purity as an outcome of the belief in the caste

system. In Hinduism, the ritual and social practices are inherently driven by the essence of caste purity as instructed by the scriptures, and hence the re-institution of the sacred seems to be a direct outcome of the religious notion of caste. Sikhism does not subscribe to caste hierarchy as far as its doctrinal foundation is concerned. However, the social and cultural practices in Sikhism resonate with the Brahmin principles of purity and caste hierarchy. Ritual events and religious processions are viewed as a display of ritual competition and power relations within religious groups (Jacobsen 2008: 4). Sikh ritual displays not only represent power relations and communal strength, they also invoke the Brahmin principle of purity and caste superiority while identifying with the Brahmanical religion.

In what follows, I first explain how purity is invoked through a display of rituals in religious processions, for I draw on the annual religious processions in Sikhism. The processions not only display social status and caste hierarchy, but they are also intended to perform ritual purity. Second, I examine how the sacred was transcended among migrants and how the scriptural beliefs and customs began to take shape in their regular lives. Here, I discuss a historic instance associated with a Hindu king and his voyage to Britain. This incident shows how the Hindu notion of the sacred transcended geographic space and how such instances provide a framework for the contemporary diasporic community to revive and reclaim their ideas of purity and impurity while dwelling in the religious belief in caste. Lastly, I explore how the sacred is materialised through daily temple rituals associated with Sikh prayers (*ardas*), and how the latter also demonstrate purity through rituals will be illustrated.

Invoking purity and caste hierarchy through the religious procession

Thousands of Sikh devotees gathered in the streets of Southall (West London) in the early morning of Sunday the 18th of November, 2018, to celebrate the 549th *Gurpurab*, the birth anniversary of Nanak, the first of the ten gurus and the founder of Sikhism. The religious procession (*nagar kirtan*) commenced from the Sikh gurdwara located on Havelock Road and, marching through King Street, it arrived at the Southall Broadway, the central location of the town. The spectacular display of the procession was led by a combination of various ritual and spiritual activities including performances of singing and chanting the holy hymns and salutations in the name of *Waheguru*, the God Almighty. At the centre of the procession *palki*, the palanquin was carried in a special processional vehicle, which was decorated with colourful garments, flags, and flowers (see Figs. 1-5 below). A small makeshift altar had been made in

the *palki*, in which the holy book was placed. The *granthis* (preachers) surrounding the altar were chanting the holy hymns while subsequently waving at the holy book with a whisk (*chaur*) as a sign of reverence. The *panj piare*, the five beloved holy men, holding long swords in their hands pointing upwards, were leading the *palki*, which was a sign of protection and honour to the holy book.[21] Another group of holy men were walking barefoot by the *palki* while holding long triangular saffron-coloured flags (*nishan sahib)*. On the front and back side of the *palki*, which was the central attraction of the procession, other processional vehicles appeared carrying groups of *granthis* and temple dignitaries. A vehicle ran at the front of the procession displaying military articles like the swords, draggers, a rifle, shield, etc., attached to a dark blue hoarding which read: "Akal Sahai" (lit. the Lord protector). The salutations – *Jo bole so nihaal, sat sri Akal* (the one who utters God's name is blessed) – and the uttering of the words, *Wahegur, Wahegur* (as an act of *naam simran* or recalling God) were continuous among the participants, suffusing the entire atmosphere of the procession with a peculiar devotional rhythm.

The martial art performed by school children and youngsters was another attraction of the procession. Dressed in dark blue aprons and turbans with white coloured kilts, the children performed various stunts with the swords, long sticks, and several other weapons that signified the importance of the Khalsa tradition associated with Sikhism. The ritual acts performed by the lay volunteers, the holy men, and the devout followers who surrounded the palanquin, heightened the spiritual atmosphere of the procession. One of these ritual acts was sweeping the road right in front of the palanquin as it proceeded. Voluntary service (*seva*) was carried out in the form of preparing and distribution of food (*langar*), water, and other beverages, for which kitchen stalls were placed on either side of the street through which the procession was advancing.

The ritual acts performed throughout the procession indicate both the spiritual and communal strength of the community. In fact, the combination of the two – the spiritual and the communal – is constitutive of almost every ritual within or outside of the temple. It represents an essence

[21] The *panj piare* (five beloved holy men) are believed to be the first five persons who were initiated in the baptism ceremony under Gobind Singh. There are various stories associated with the *panj piare* regarding their social location and their sacrifices for the Khalsa. Most of the stories, including the mainstream Sikh stories, say that they belonged to lower castes and that therefore Sikhism is considered an inclusive faith for this reason, among several other reasons.

of the Sikh philosophy, encapsulated in the words, *miri piri*, which represent the communal and spiritual power of the community.[22]

Some people watched this entire procession from a distance, from their houses standing in balconies and windows as it proceeded. Meanwhile, the Sikh news reporters and TV channels were broadcasting the event and updates about it appeared immediately on the social media. News reporters asked the procession followers basic questions such as – what does this event meant to you; how do you feel to be part of the *Gurpurab*; and what message do you want to give to our *sadh sangat* (the Sikh community) – were enthusiastically entertained by the youngsters with their typical Punjabi-English accents. Walking on the edge of the procession, one could also see displays of booklets, magazines, and some artefacts reflecting the Sikh history and culture. The display of booklets (in English and Punjabi) had a specific purpose. They were "aimed at spreading awareness of Sikh history and culture among the younger [British-born] generation," says an old man at a book stall. As I skimmed through some of these booklets and magazines, they appeared to be an axiomatic analysis of the short stories, biographies and certain martyrial events connected to the Sikh founders and martyrs (*shahid*). Broadly, this material aimed to inform people of the spiritual as well as the martyrial history of Sikhism.[23]

[22] The tradition of *miri piri* was started in the seventeenth century by the sixth guru, Hargobind Singh, who is said to have carried two swords – *miri* and *piri* – representing the community power (*mir*) and the spirituality (*pir*) as an important features of Sikh philosophy (my conversation with a *granthi* at Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Southall, November 2018).

[23] These booklets and magazines are printed and published in Punjab and imported and distributed in the libraries associated with Sikh temples across Britain.

Figure 1: Nagar kirtan (procession) carrying the palki, the palanquin, on King Street, Southall, West London (Photo by author)

Figure 2: The panj piare (five beloved men) leading the palki, the palanquin (Photo by author)

Figure 3: Another group of the panj piare (five beloved men) carrying swords, parading barefoot in front of the palki (Photo by author)

Figure 4: Schoolchildren performing the martial art (Photo by author)

Figure 5: A vehicle representing "Ramgarhia" as a caste identity in the procession (Photo by author)

Displaying caste hierarchy and ritual purity

Ever since the formation of temples, not only have daily prayers and worship have been routinised as regular events, but also the festivals like *Gurupurab* and *Vaisakhi* have become popular public events among migrants.[24] The symbolic acts and rituals performed during the procession signify how ritual purity is invoked as an essence of caste hierarchy. To illustrate how ritual purity is invoked through the procession described above, I draw on a symbolic act of sweeping that remained explicit throughout the procession – the ritual act of cleaning. The act of symbolic sweeping was performed continuously from the beginning to the end of the procession in the proximity of the palanquin which carried the scripture. A human chain of the volunteers (who put on them the road safety jackets) was made on either side of the road in order to prevent the laypersons from entering the area where the sacred act of sweeping was performed. The act seemed beyond the usual volunteering because it required a qualification in the form of being an *amritdhari* (baptised Sikh) unlike other voluntary services like food

[24] There are two major processions organised annually in Sikhism. One marks the celebration of Guru Nanak's birth anniversary (*Gurpurab*), which is occurs in the month of October-November on a full moon day each year, according to the Indian lunar calendar. The other is the commemoration of the Khalsa, the founding day of Sikhism under the tenth guru, Gobind Singh. The latter event is also celebrated as *Vaisakhi* (or *Baisakhi*), the spring harvest festival which occurs in the month of April and is also celebrated as the new year in Sikhism. These events are the major religious festivals in Sikhism and also remain cultural celebrations for the Punjabi population as a whole.

distribution, etc. The baptised men and women carried long brooms in their hands, and a group of five or six performed the sweeping barefoot together, even though there was practically nothing on the road to clean. And in case any object ("dirt") was caught up in the broom, it was treated differently from the regular dirt. The very act of cleaning indicated that the atmosphere around the scripture, which is considered to be the "living guru" must be pure and holy, for which the act of symbolic cleaning serves its purpose. The dirt that was found in this act of cleaning became a dirt of sacred nature and hence was treated as such. To treat it otherwise as normal dirt was to invite the profane into a sacred sphere and to avoid the entry of the profane, the dirt itself was treated as sacred when encountered in the ritual act of cleaning.

The act of cleaning in the procession or in temple premises, for that matter, is not merely the usual act of cleaning and disposing of waste. It involves a religious dimension, which means the cleaning makes the temple a sacred space. Therefore, the waste that is come across during this ceremonial cleaning is not treated as "waste", as such. It is rather treated as a sacred object that needs to be handled and disposed of differently from regular waste. The brooms used in the procession acquire a sacred feature when out in public. And therefore, when a volunteer (*sevadar*) passes a broom on once his/her turn of sweeping is over, the another receives it with great respect, starts the symbolic act of cleaning, and then passes it on to others as the round of passing on continues the sacred act of cleaning. In the process of this ritual act, the ordinary objects are treated as sacred objects in the religious domain and one's involvement (or touch) with them is considered a holy act.

In her seminal book titled *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas (1966) examines the notion of "dirt and defilement" and explains how "dirt" acquires a "sacred" character in a religious context. She maintains that even though every religion has its own ideas of dirt and defilement, it is unlikely to blend the "sacred" and the "unclean" together, for the unclean (or dirt) is no longer seen as "unclean" even though in the normal course of events it would be treated as such. The dirt encountered in the symbolic act of cleaning in the procession, or the waste generated while cooking and cleaning the temple, are not treated as normal dirt. They are treated as sacred objects by sanctifying them with a sacred identity to it. In Douglas' (1966) words, the dirt that is defines itself by its association with a religious notion (of purity and pollution) becomes sacred. And therefore, "so long as identity is absent, rubbish is not dangerous" (ibid.: 161). Furthermore, she illustrates that the "dirt" is not merely a material but a psychological phenomenon, wherein the distinction starts in the "mind" at one stage and translates into

material form at another. Douglas' argument in this scenario resonates with Dumont's (1980) views; Dumont observes the distinction of purity as a founding principle for the superior status of the Brahmins who segregate the untouchables as inferior (ibid.: 55- 56).

The ritual act of cleaning clearly represents this psychological dimension in which the idea associated with the dirt belonging to sacred spaces (temples or processions) is differentiated from the regular perception of dirt which is encountered in non-religious domains. The sacred or religious notion of dirt or impurity therefore remains at the core of the belief in caste purity. For Dumont (1980), the execution of impure tasks by the impure bodies (untouchables) is required to maintain the purity (of the Brahmins). But the diasporic space re-embeds the aspect of impurity quite differently from the conventional way. While the task of cleaning impurity is associated traditionally with the untouchables' bodies, the diasporic space is unfavourable for the indulgence in impurity in a structural sense. Meaning, it is unlikely or even impossible in diasporic spaces to have impure tasks executed by the untouchables (lower castes); for there are no impure tasks in the strict sense of the term, nor untouchability in material form. Menial tasks such as cleaning (toilets, roads) in the caste system are forced upon the lower castes, but in diaspora these tasks are carried out even by the upper castes, and hence there is no space for impurity based on occupation. However, the belief in impurity or pollution is indispensable in the religious domain in order to showcase the status of the pure. And therefore, the dirt is treated symbolically while being indulged by the creator of that dirt, the upper castes. That is to say, that the symbolic act of sweeping the road in the procession by the so-called "pure" bodies was deemed important, which simultaneously demonstrated the status of ritual purity.

When I asked a Hindu priest of the Ram Mandir (Southall) about the source of the *tirtha*, the holy water, of which he was pouring spoonfuls into the hands of devotees, he told me that on a particular (sacred) occasion the idols in the temple are washed and what he was offering as *tirtha* was nothing but the remains of the idol cleansing (the dirt).[25] In another instance, one day, I was accompanying a *granthi* to change the carpets on the altar at a Ravidasi temple in Leicester, where I was staying during my field work in the town. Together we removed all the carpets which were to be sent out for cleaning. While we were doing this, a friend of the *granthi's* who was also present observed that while I was handling the carpets on my end, they fell on my feet. Witnessing this rather unusual scene, the man shouted, saying that that was not the way to handle the sacred material (the carpets). Seeing that I was also wearing socks and

[25] My conversation with a Hindu priest in the Ram Mandir (temple) Southall (November 2018).

moving around the altar (the sanctum sanctorum of the temple), his temper worsened and he asked me immediately to leave the praying room. The old carpets (dirt of some sort) were taken out for cleaning, but the dirt that does not belong to the temple (socks or dirty feet) was differentiated from the temple dirt and was a potential danger to the idea of purity.

Therefore, the dirt encountered in the procession or on the temple premises is differentiated from ordinary rubbish in order to avoid the "danger" of the defilement. In fact, the dirt, which is associated with temple premise – either with cleaning carpets or washing idols – is distinguished from the regular dirt by sanctifying the former as having a sacred character. As Douglas (1966) points out, the "differentiation" and "identification" of the dirt based on its origin and location is rather essential. In other words, there cannot be a sacred entity if there is no profane to be identified and differentiated from. Similarly, Dumont (1980) argues that the caste hierarchy is based on a principle where the untouchable is classified as the impure opposite to the Brahmin who is the pure. In other words, he argues that hierarchy is a result of this principle where the pure and the impure are distinguished and kept apart. Douglas and Dumont were part of a generation of scholars who made these claims. However, recent scholars like Mikael Aktor (2002) have criticised this generation for emphasising the pure and the impure, relying mainly on the ancient texts. But nonetheless, this contested distinction is still relevant in the context of caste in the UK today.

The procession on the day of *Gurpurab* was organised by the Jatt Sikhs who consider themselves superior in caste ranking, though historically they are one of the "backward" or lower-caste peasant communities (Jodhka 2004; Ram 2016). The historical context within which they acquired social mobility is another matter that is about the social history of the Jatts and their origin in a lower social order (the *sudras*) and hence their inferiority in the eyes of the caste Hindus. The awareness of this historical fact gives the community an opportunity to display their ritual and spiritual power in public events like processions which were otherwise deemed secondary to the ritual roles and customs in the Brahmanical caste system. Therefore, on the one hand, procession aims to convey ritual superiority within the religion of Sikhism, and on the other hand, it is also intended to challenge Brahmanical superiority, though emulating the ritual acts and beliefs of the latter. According to the Brahmanical caste structure, Sikhs are treated as lower caste subjects, but the latter's socio-economic dominance has helped them acquire a superior position on the caste ladder and hence they strive for ritual purity as a sole indicator of caste superiority. In this context, Sikhism identifies itself with the Brahmanical

religion as far as ritual purity is concerned. By imitating the Brahmanical notion of purity and impurity, it adheres to caste hierarchy within, even though its religious foundation preaches equality beyond caste.

Therefore, the processions and the regular rituals in Sikh temples are beyond exercising their power and strength; they are essentially a struggle for ritual purity in order to distinguish oneself from other castes. While the procession was moving at its pace, a vehicle suddenly ran through the procession with a big banner on the front which read "Ramgarhia Sabha Southall". This indicates that though the Ramgariahs (artisan caste like carpenters, etc.) showed their respect to the occasion by participating in it, they did not participate in the ritual acts performed by the Jatt Sikhs who organised the procession. Similarly, for lower caste Sikhs, though this event marks an important occasion in the Sikh tradition, it is not celebrated as a grand event the way that Ravidas' or Valmik's birth anniversaries are celebrated by these communities. The procession therefore signifies an important religious event in Sikhism. Marked by various symbolic rituals and performances of the *seva*, the event remains an important occasion to demonstrate the ritual and cultural belonging of the community. It represents the social hierarchy and power dynamics within Sikhism while also challenging the ritual dominance of Brahmanical Hinduism. The symbolic acts in the procession, such as sweeping the streets, revering the sacred men and holy objects, and distribution of communal food, are all directed at the "other" (essentially, the socially "other") while invoking purity in the public domain. While the sense of pure and impure is constitutive of the regular rituals and the processions, it is important to see further how the element of the sacred is transcended in diaspora. Moreover, how the concept of holy and unholy (derived from the Hindu scriptures) demarcates physical spaces as pure and impure, and how this distinction persists in diasporic spaces, will be examined in the following section.

Transcending the sacred

In the past few decades, the question concerning the transcendence of religion in diaspora has attracted some scholars who studied rituals among diasporic Indians. These studies discuss about the changing nature of rituals and the way religion in everyday life is practised among migrants (Burghart 1987; Jacobsen 2008; Orsi 2012). Richard Burghart's (1987) edited work particularly remains a basis for us to understand the changing nature of religion and its diffusion and transplantation into the new geographical context. Kim Knott's essay in this book

particularly sheds light on diasporic rituals and analyses how certain rituals have accommodated with the new environment through the process of "adaptation" and how they acquired "new meaning" in the new social and geographical location (Knott 1987: 178). Based on her ethnographic study in Hindu temples in Leeds, Knott analyses the rituals concerning *aarti* (prayer) and *havan* (ritual burning of offerings like ghee, grains, camphor, etc.), and argues that "the process of adaptation with regard to Hindu rituals is itself a process of reinterpretation" that results in the "transplantation" or transcendence of Hinduism in diaspora (ibid: 178-179).

Knott's (1987) essay provides an understanding of the changing nature of rituals and religious traditions when they transcend from one social and geographical location to another, and the way these rituals and traditions adapt to the new environment. While it is clear from her study that religious traditions are subject to change when they are on the move, it is also important to understand what this change meant in the social lives of the people, given the hierarchical nature of rituals and religious practices of the South Asian religions. It remains to be known as to what this changing social and geographical context meant to religious groups who believe in ritual purity as the sole basis of their social position. Moreover, it is also important to know whether the "adaptation" of rituals to the new environment also resulted in the adapting and accommodating of social hierarchy and differences pertinent among the diasporic community. Most importantly, we are yet to know whether the "reinterpretation" and "transplantation" of rituals was meant to distort the original meaning and essence of the changing rituals and traditions, or if the latter remains intact with its meaning despite its adaptation to the diasporic environment.

Analysing regular temple rituals as well as annual religious and social events (marriage, death rituals, etc.) performed on temple premises, I argue that even though certain rituals have undergone a significant change, they are unlikely to deviate from their original meaning and the essence of purity and pollution attached to them. What is seen as the change and adaptation of rituals in the new environment is essentially the changes in the external forms and appearances of those rituals rather than a change in their meaning. In other words, a ritual may not appear in its ideal form in terms of its objectivity (i.e. with the required paraphernalia) as performed by holy men or priests. However this does not necessarily take away from its subjectivity or from the meaning and essence the ritual is intended to perpetuate. In the last decades, even the objective conditions of the rituals have been brought in conformity with the

ideal (scriptural) notion associated with them. The emergence of temples in the diaspora and importation of priests from the native place (holy land) reflects how ritual practices are brought under the scriptural notion of purity and pollution. The rituals associated with Hinduism demand purity of (physical) space as well as ritual objects such as holy water (*tirtha*) or even the presence of the holy cow. The absence of these objects in the past decades made the rituals adapt to the existing diasporic environment.

The socio-geographical context within which Knott's (1987) study took place shows precisely this condition in which the diasporic community (Hindus) in Britain was still implementing their religious (ritual) lifestyle while adapting to the external surroundings. However, over the last two decades, rituals and temple activities have been performed in an organised manner, in that the traditions and customs associated with these rituals are given primacy. Temple authorities are even trying to authenticate the ritual events by invoking the (Vedic) scriptural sense behind these rituals. For instance, the cow is a sacred and holy animal in the Hindu notion of "purity and pollution" and the absence of the "holy cow" in the diasporic space has made the Hindu practices of purity and impurity digress from their scriptural form. But that is no longer the case, at least as far as some Hindu temples are concerned. A priest in a Hindu temple in Leicester tells me that recently cows have been imported from India and that they are taken care of by special volunteers who have built a cowshed (*goshala*) located a few miles away from the town. The place is visited by Hindus on special occasions to offer prayer (*puja*) and cow service (*gau seva*).[26]

Reinventing purity through Brahmin principles

To understand the existing practices of ritual purity, the history of migration provides a framework as to how the ideas of purity and pollution were maintained whenever Indians migrated to a different part of the world. The nineteenth-century indentured migration of Indians to the British colonies in East and West Africa show how the idea of purity and pollution was maintained among Indian emigrants. While the indentured labour phenomenon challenged caste hierarchy and the idea of purity to some extent, especially during the voyage and also while working together in the colonies as labourers, the post-indentured life of the emigrants in

[26] The webpage provides details of the activities that inform the reader about how cow services are done and why the animal have an important place in Hinduism. The *goshalla* page is available here: https://goshallainleicester.org.uk/about-us (Accessed on 3 August 2021).
The town, Leicester is known for the predominance of Hindu communities among the diasporic Indians. It represents dozens of Hindu temples of various denominations (Swaminarayan, Krishna, Sanatan temples, etc.).

the colonies they settled in witnessed the re-embedding of ritual purity and caste hierarchy in accordance with scriptural beliefs (Sandhu 1969; Tinker 1974; Jain 1993; Carter 1995; Lal 2000; Brown 2006). According to Hindu scriptures, the crossing of the black sea (*kala pani*) is prohibited since it is considered as impure and polluted in the religious sense, and therefore the scriptures instruct Hindus of a higher caste rank abide by this scriptural rule. But migration of Hindus across the black sea never stopped. This indicates a breach of the scriptural rule, but only partially, because the latter did not mean to undermine the idea of purity. In fact, as and when the social life of the migrants was established in the host society, the religious practices of ritual purity and pollution were reinstated in a significant manner.

In this context I point out that the history of migration provides a framework for the contemporary diasporans to maintain the aspects of ritual purity while also maintaining their caste identity and social hierarchy. To illustrate this point further, let me draw on another popular instance concerning the crossing of the black sea in 1906 by an Indian royalty, Madho Singh the king of Jaipur. The voyage of the king took place against his will as it entailed a great deal of distortion of the scriptural rule that prohibited the touch of the black sea. But at the same time it was also undeniable because he was invited as a dignitary to be present at the coronation event. How, then, the king crossed the black sea and how he pursued the notion of purity throughout his voyage is a matter that acquires historical importance. Moreover, it also provides a context for the present diasporic community retaining the matters concerning ritual purity while transcending their holy land.

Madho Singh II (1862-1922), an Indian royal, the Maharaja (king) of Jaipur, was invited by the British Crown to attend the coronation of Edward VII in London in 1906. Since he was a Hindu king and an exemplar of religious purity in his kingdom, crossing the black sea was imagined to be a potential danger to his purity. But there must be some way out! The coronation should be attended, and his purity should not be compromised! The king then prepared to cross the black sea while taking along his entire holy universe in the ship: water from the Ganges for his daily ablutions, sacred cows and the required ritual paraphernalia which consecrated ritual ceremonies initiated by Brahmin priests. In short, the king created a parallel (holy) universe to that of his holy land, India, in the vessel itself, through which he began his voyage towards the West. On his way, he would follow the prescribed ritual etiquette conforming to the laws of the universe as instructed by his ideal, Brahma – the creator of universe according to Hindu scriptures. The king's preparation, however, may not appear as an exaggeration especially when

viewed in regard to his perception of the "other" universe (the Western world) he was sailing towards through the ("unholy") black water. For the king:

> "impure and unruly beings are not part of Brahma's order; they are therefore not part of the universe ... beyond [Brahma's] periphery lies the Black Sea, and the small island of Vilayat [Britain] where live the race of barbarians who call themselves Englishmen. The English eat the flesh of Mother Cow and have no 'social order'" (Burghart 1987: 2).

This vignette from the past century signifies how matters concerning purity were dealt with while crossing through a polluted space, the black sea, as per the scriptural belief. Though crossing the black sea was deemed inauspicious by the Hindu notion of purity, the migration of Hindus across the sea never stopped; it continued either through creating a parallel universe as directed by Brahma or by reinstating ritual practices in the land of migration (in the case of the indentured Indians). Moreover, even post-Independence migration also represents similar belief patterns in which crossing the black sea is deemed inauspicious and hence ritual purity is sought as a remedy to resume scriptural beliefs (Burghart 1987; Werbner 2000). This is to say that even though the scriptural notion of crossing the black sea is a sign of breaching the rules of purity, the latter never obstructed the overseas movement of Hindus. On the contrary, such movement across the black sea provided scope for the migrants to reinterpret and reinvent ritual practices in accordance with their core religious beliefs while preserving the ideas of purity and pollution.

Therefore, though ritual forms and etiquettes have undergone certain changes during migration as observed by a few scholars (Knott 1987; Jacobsen 2008), the subversion or distortion of the very essence and beliefs concerning that ritual are unlikely to be seen. In other words, the belief in purity and caste hierarchy remains inherent to the ritual practices prevalent within the diasporic community. Even though religious rules consider the sacred to be a part and parcel of the holy land while demonising the foreign land as "unholy and unruly", the prohibition of migration as such remains beyond the scriptural reach. This is probably because the latter never meant to obstruct migration as an opportunity for a better life; it rather provided space to seek an alternative to reinstate purity in the land of migration. Therefore, the scriptural and practical notion of the "sacred" may appear to be overlapping and often contradictory in terms of their ritual codes and conducts. However, they are unlikely to deviate from the core values associated either with the scriptural notion or the traditional beliefs and practices of purity and pollution.

Women and ritual (im)purity

There is another dimension of purity and impurity driven by the scriptural belief concerning the women's bodies. The "laws of Manu" in the *Manusmriti,* (a sacred text in Hinduism) dictate that "the untouchables, the menstruating women and impotent men" are inherently impure and hence their presence in temples is forbidden (Doniger 1991: 68). Recently, the Supreme Court in India delivered a judgement that ruled against the "social exclusion of women based on menstrual status" at the Lord Ayyappa temple in Kerala for violating the Indian Constitution (Berg 2020: 93). The ban on menstruating women or untouchables in Hindu temples is an age-old practice which is still visible in India. This practice also resonates among diasporic Hindus albeit differently, without necessarily banning the entry of menstruating women in the temple, but rather by reminding them of the status of impurity associated with a woman's menstruating body according to the text of the *Manusmriti*. To illustrate how the Hindu notion of impurity associated with women is reinstated in the migrant land, I will draw on the ritual practice associated with a Hindu temple (Ram Mandir) located on King Street in Southall.

During my regular visits, I entered the temple like any other devotee: taking my shoes off, paying my respects to the idol of the Hindu god Ganesha at the entrance of the prayer hall, and then approaching the altar and paying my respects after dropping some coins into the donation box placed in front of the altar. The altar contains the idols of the gods Rama, Laxamana, and Sita on the front side of the altar, and the idols of Shiva, Parvati, Vishnu, Krishna, Radha, and a host of other gods and goddesses arranged in a row on the left side of the altar, including a *lingam* (representing the symbol associated with the god Shiva) in the left corner of the prayer hall. The deities are all decorated and adorned with colourful garments and ornaments from head to the toe, along with their *shastras*, the weapons in their hands (Rama and Laxamana with bows and arrows and Vishnu with his *chakra* or wheel as well as other deities with their musical instruments such as the flute in Krishna's hands). At the exit of the prayer hall, a priest sits with a small kettle-shaped bronze mug which contains *tirtha*, the holy water. When one finishes one's round of paying respects, before leaving the prayer hall, a spoonful of *tirtha* is offered by the priest to the devotees. It is received in the palm of the right hand supported by the left. The *tirtha* is sipped instantly and one's wet palm is touched delicately to one's hair while also running it over the eyes and the forehead as a typical gesture of receiving the holy water. These rounds of paying respects to the deities, offering coins, and then finally partaking

in the *tirtha* are an ongoing event throughout the day from the opening of the temple to its closing after the evening *puja*, the prayer.

There is another idol among those mentioned above – the idol of the deity, Baba Balak Nath (see Fig. 6 below). When I observed the devotees regularly entering the temple, paying their respects to the deities and partaking in the *tirtha*, there was one stark difference between the men and women paying their respects, especially to this deity. While the men would usually move in a row and offer their obeisance to the deity, the women would either skip this deity or move farther from it while paying their respects from a "distance". While the other deities were approached by the women bowing down, touching the feet of the deities, and placing coins in front of them, the deity of Baba Balak Nath was approached from several feet away as instructed. There was a written sign placed next to the deity, which read:

> "Ladies are requested to pay their respects to Shri Baba Balak Nath Ji from a distance. You must not approach the murthi [the idol]" (emphasis original).

When I asked the priest about this instruction, he did not entertain the question much apart from saying that he (the deity) was a *brahmachari*, a bachelor and celibate, and that the women are not supposed to touch the idol. It has been an age-old tradition in India that women are not allowed to enter this deity's temple, like several other temples in general. However, recently this tradition seems to have been challenged by revoking such rules, at least in few cases concerning the temples of Baba Balak Nath.[27] But in the diaspora, beliefs concerning the deity and women's association with the former are still retained through regular rituals. The issue of women not approaching the idol is not merely confined to the deity's bachelor or celibate status, but rather the root of this belief lies in the scriptural belief that assigns women's bodies a polluted status. It is scriptural sanctity and the belief in the former that dictates the rituals, beliefs, and practices in everyday lives. The diasporic space may not allow strict laws of banning the temple entry of women or untouchables. But it reminds the latter of their social origin and impure status as dictated by the scriptures. Therefore, it can be said that the ritual forms and etiquettes are subject to appearing differently from the original form of the rituals as prescribed in the scriptures. However, the essence of ritual purity remains at the core of the regular ritual practices. The sign attached to the idol of Baba Balak Nath retains the idea of the impurity associated with women's bodies as per scriptural belief and hence the dichotomy of

[27] Recently, the old tradition was broken in India when a temple of Babal Balak Nath's was opened for women's entry. The details of the news are available here: https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/woman-enters-baba-balaknath-temple-cave/article8574069.ece (Accessed on 30 July 2021).

pure and impure coexists in regular life. Therefore, the temple as a physical entity plays a vital role in regaining ritual purity and a sense of the sacred, thereby segregating the impure and unholy as instructed by the scriptures. While the sacred is encountered through scriptural beliefs, we will move further to analyse how the sacred is materialised through regular temple rituals.

Figure 6: Murthi, the idol of Baba Balak Nath in Shri Ram Mandir, Southall (Photo by author)

Materialising the sacred: temples, priests, and daily rituals

Having discussed the ways in which the idea of the sacred gained momentum through ritual beliefs and practices, we will now turn to analysing the material aspect of the sacred. The emergence of temples in the migrant land is an important phenomenon that began to reinforce regular rituals in a comprehensive manner. The rituals associated with marriage, birth, or death ceremonies once conducted in temporary spaces (hired buildings) found a regular space in the form of temples. This scenario naturally brought the community closer than ever before in the social and religious domain. In fact, the temple is an important "cultural entity" (Appadurai 1981) that intensifies social relations and the organisation of the community. While the

diasporic temple acquires important space for community organisation in social and religious domains, it is not to be considered *the* sole entity for these, either physical or cultural. The practices of ritual purity and the demonstration of caste hierarchy takes place through regular rituals and other religious functions in which temples undoubtedly play a vital role. However, the multidimensionality of caste also suggests a modern feature of the re-embedding of caste-based networks through virtual spaces, in which the communities are connected through the Internet and online platforms while extending their contacts globally within their own groups (Kumar 2009; Hardtmann 2009).[28] But nonetheless, physical association with the temple through regular temple activities is common especially among Indians in Britain. Moreover, the process of the formation and growth of temples demonstrates the embeddedness of the community in the social and cultural domain, which ultimately reflects how the practices of purity and pollution were materialised through regular temple rituals. In this regard, I will draw on the processes of building temples and the way priests were appointed while importing them from the homeland. Further, I examine how daily temple activities began to retain the beliefs in ritual purity and how the sacred is materialised through regular ritual performances like daily prayers and sermons.

Temples and importing priests

The question as to how temples were established in the migrant land and how priests were (and still are) appointed while importing them from native places is important. It shows the context in which the diaspora's rituals began to take shape in a concrete manner, in that the idea of ritual purity became explicit. Most importantly, importing the priests from the native place (the holy land) is another sign of the maintenance of the authenticity of ritual purity. The native is associated with the "holy" and pure while the host is treated as "unholy" and impure. And in order for migrants to acquire the "purity" element in regular rituals, the presence of a priest from the holy land possesses a symbolic importance that attributes an "authentic" and pure status to rituals and customs (Werbner 2002). The temple as a physical entity therefore plays a vital role in authenticating the rituals and reinforcing the idea of the sacred associated with them. As the narratives of the older generation show, the formation of temples in the UK was a peculiar process. It reflects both the socio-political and cultural dimension, while representing the internal power dimension as well as caste hierarchy, due to which each caste built its own

[28] More recently, during the Covid-19 pandemic, temple activities are also digitalised. The Ravidasi temples in Bedford and Wolverhampton, for instance, broadcast their regular prayers and sermon sessions on their official Facebook pages when mass gathering at the temple was prohibited due to the pandemic.

temple to demarcate itself from the temples which were initially built representing the homogeneity of the community in the religious domain. But the latter did not last more than a few years due to the internal caste dimension that resulted in the formation of temples on caste lines.

The narratives of Ravidasi followers reflect a common trend in almost every town, where the first common Sikh temple was built for all Sikhs, including lower-caste Sikhs (Ravidasis and Mazhabis). In Bedford, for instance, the first Sikh temple was built by purchasing a building with the collective contribution of the Sikh community, including lower-caste Sikhs. However, as temple activities began to take concrete shape while regular prayers and other social programmes were performed, the lower-caste Sikhs found themselves excluded from temple events as well as from the central body of the temple.[29] As a consequence, the Ravidasis built their own temple and became an autonomous religious group. This scenario is also found in other intermediate castes within Sikhism who, as a result of the caste and power dimensions, separated from the mainstream Sikhs and built their own temples (see Sato 2012). The Sikh temples therefore represent the particular caste that they belong to. The very names of the temples indicate the belonging to a particular caste (for example – Singh Sabha gurdwara, Ramgarhia gurdwara, Ravidasi gurdwara, etc., in which the initials indicate caste belonging, either higher or lower in rank).

The present temples in Britain were originally buildings and houses of various sorts, purchased from the government as well as from private authorities. This includes local council buildings like post offices, cinema houses, and theatres, as well as old industrial buildings. Moreover, some communities purchased defunct churches and turned them into mosques and gurdwaras. Some of the buildings purchased via auction from the government were already a heritage-declared sites, and hence from the outside they still appear as such, since their construction and renovation is limited to the internal part of the building only and does not include the external. This indicates why each temple appears different, even within the same religion, in terms of its external appearance, and does not necessarily match its ideal shape in terms of art and architecture.[30] The Ravidas temple building in Bedford, for example, was originally a post

[29] My conversation with the Ravidas temple committee members, Bedford (June 2017). The members were the contributors to the common Sikh temple built in the town.

[30] Exceptions to this are the Singh Sabha gurdwara in Southall and the Buddhist temple in Wolverhampton. These temples were built on the land purchased by the respective religious groups in their towns, and therefore, the shape, art, and architecture of the temples match the ideal Sikh and Buddhist temples. These temples are relatively new,

office, and since the building has a heritage status, the external part of the building needs to be maintained as such without disturbing its original artistic and architectural style. In this case, it is the signs and symbols outside the building, for example, in the form of a flag (*nishan sahib*), that indicates the presence of a temple. This scenario is common across Britain as far as the history of temples is concerned. By and large, the temples were established and built in the places purchased by each community through its collective contribution.

The formation of temples and the expansion of rituals into social and cultural domains naturally demanded the continuous presence of priests in temples. Amid the growing social and cultural activity and the related rituals attached to it, the need for priests became more visible than ever before. Apart from the conducting of regular rituals, the presence of a priest was also needed to look after the temple. Some of the temples had started running economic activities like parking businesses and renting out community halls for social functions like wedding parties.[31] These additional activities were to be maintained by the priests (*granthis* in Sikhism). Owing to all these activities associated with temples, the priests were appointed regularly either on a temporary basis or permanently, depending on the temple authority.

Each temple functions in its own way when it comes to congregation and ritual programmes, which are held either regularly or occasionally. While some temples perform their rituals on a daily basis while also serving daily *langar* (communal food), some of them hold the congregation and *langar* only once a week (usually on Sundays). This scenario depends on the size of the community in a particular town. Accordingly, the number of the priests in these temples varies; the more the temple is involved in ritual activity, the greater the number of the priests and vice versa. The Sikh temple owned by the Jatt community in Southall, for instance, has appointed over a dozen of priests since the temple has activities going on throughout the day for the whole week, including social functions like marriages etc. The *granthis* work there on different shifts and they are paid on an hourly basis. While some priests hold a permanent position in the temple, some are appointed on a temporary basis and paid accordingly based on their working contract. Apart from serving the community (or religion) through one's service as a priest, their profession is also seen as a potential source of livelihood.

built in the early nineties, while the rest of the temples, which appear in various sizes and shapes were built in the decades of the sixties and seventies.

[31] The Ravidasi temple in Bedford and the Buddhist temple in Wolverhampton, for example, rent out their community halls for social functions.

How then did priests (*granthis*) continued to be imported and using what criteria, and what does it mean to the diasporic community to bring priests in from the homeland? In my analysis, the notion of sacred is associated with the homeland ("holy land") and importing priests to the diasporic land provides a space to authenticate regular rituals and customs. While each temple has its own process of importing and appointing a priest, the common trend of appointing the priests suggests that the latter are brought from the native places in Punjab on a contract basis for a definite period, and the process of recruiting and appointing the priests continues accordingly.[32] To understand the process of recruitment, let us take the case of the Ravidasia temple in Bedford. The temple appoints priests through a formal process of recruitment. The temple authority has its own reasons as to why it appoints priests formally through a recruitment channel. According to the temple authority, one of the major reasons behind recruiting priests in a formal manner is to create an employment opportunity within the community and give a chance to learned people (*granthis*) who are interested in serving the religion. The temple has been employing two priests regularly for over two decades. Showing me the list of the selected priests who served in the temple in the past decades, the treasurer of the temple, Nirmal Sondhi, provides me with the details of the recruitment which I summarise below.

The priests are recruited for a period of six months to two years. Following the tradition of recruitment, the temple authority issues a notice concerning the new appointment months before the termination of the current priests' tenure. The post is advertised through local Punjabi newspapers in India (mostly owned by the community) and based on that, applications are received via post. Applications from Punjab range from young to elderly men who are interested in coming to Britain and serving the temple for the stipulated time period. After the recruiters scrutinise all the applications, eligible candidates are called for a telephonic (recently, video) interview and then a final selection is made. One of the important criteria is expertise in the areas of scriptural understanding, singing, and playing traditional instruments (harmonium and *tabla*) as part of the requirements for preaching (*kirtan*). Prior experience of serving in temples in the capacity of a priest is also counted for a potential candidate. Their remunerations are fixed as per daily working hours and paid on a weekly basis. Compared to the normal daily wages, the money received by the priests is significantly low, but the economic aspect is beyond questioning since the job is done in the name of serving the religion.

[32] Some temples have permanently appointed priests who were invited to Britain decades ago for a fixed duration and eventually acquired permanent status when they settled in Britain with their families (My conversation with the *granthis* in the Sikh temple in Southall).

The vocation of priests is pursued both as religious service as well as a source of livelihood by *granthis* (especially by the young *granthis* who are recruited on a contract basis). Like laypersons, the *granthis* live a family life and along with dedicating their time to religious service, they also bear a responsibility to support their families. In this context, their priestly engagement is pursued as a means of earning, supporting, and looking after their families. A *granthi* whom I stayed with in a Ravidas temple in Bedford tells me that he is the sole breadwinner in his family (wife, daughter, and his parents) and one of the reasons he came to Britain was to seek a further life opportunity while also fulfilling his desire to engage with and contribute to religious service (*dharam di seva*). Reflecting on his past involvement in temple functions and the way he acquired priestly knowledge, he further tells:

> Ever since I was young, I have been interested in religion. I did not take any [formal] training to acquire knowledge in the *Granth Sahib* [the Sikh scripture]. I used to accompany old *granthis* in singing and playing music in the gurdwaras in my town. Gradually, I also started reading *Granth Sahib* on special occasions and that's how I learnt a lot about it. … I heard that some *granthis* were going to Britain and serving there in the temple. When I read the news [about the recruitment], I thought why not give it a try. I thought it would be a great opportunity for *dharam di seva*, plus it would help me earn my living and support my family. I was also excited to see England!

The priestly profession, as it may be referred to, operates within one's own caste and kinship networks and it represents what Bourdieu (1977) refers to as a "symbolic capital", confined within the community resources. This scenario further reinforces social habitus in which the religious values and beliefs are maintained through common interests, while also serving the individual goals of finding the life prospects and opportunities for a better life, as the diasporic priestly phenomenon indicates. It is however important to note that the institution of priesthood in Sikhism is quite different from that of the Hindu priesthood. Indeed, there is no "institution" of the Sikh priests in the strict sense of the term. They, unlike Hindu priests, do not occupy a position of power either in ritual or in religious matters or even in regular social life. They are laypersons living a family life like rest of the Sikhs in the community. Most importantly, Sikhism as a religion does not promote a priestly class like Hinduism does (Oberoi 1988; Mann 2004). The persons referred to as *granthis* in Sikhism are basically the readers of the scripture who are also custodians of the temples, looking after almost everything from cleaning to performing rituals. While the rituals are mainly conducted by (male) *granthis*, the presence of women on the altar is also common especially during the ceremonial reading (*akhand path*) of the scripture. A lay Sikh possessing the knowledge of reading the scripture can fairly initiate

rituals concerning social functions like marriage, as it used to be in the past when there were no temples and *granthis* in the migrant land.

The formation of temples and importing of priests resulted in the concretisation of rituals that clearly signify the adherence to ritual purity. The temples built on caste lines represent social hierarchy, for regular rituals demonstrate hierarchical relations within Sikhism. Particularly, the notion of purity and impurity is made visible in the manner in which the community of Sikhs identifies itself with the Brahmanical notion of ritual purity. But nonetheless, Brahmanical practices of ritual purity are contested by lower-caste Sikhs, who do this by establishing parallel rituals and religious events based on their own religious beliefs and cultural practices. Importing their own priests and inventing their own ritual and cultural programmes in religious domains has further provided space for the lower-caste Ravidasis to exercise their autonomy over their religion while challenging Brahmanical practices of ritual purity (this point will be illustrated in detail in Chapter 3). To demonstrate further how regular temple rituals reinforce the essence of the sacred, and how the latter is materialised, I will turn to everyday temple rituals, particularly the *ardas*, the Sikh prayer. In the following pages, I will explain What constitutes the *ardas* in terms of its ritual norms and etiquettes, and what the latter represent, and how certain norms associated with the prayer signify the essence of ritual purity. Understanding the prayer in details also tends to show how Sikh ritual practices invoke ritual purity while subscribing to the Brahmanical notion of purity and pollution.

Ardas and daily rituals in Sikhism

The display of the daily prayer is aimed at displaying the power and status of the community within the religion it represents. Moreover, the prayer is also a means to display ritual superiority in order to showcase one's association with the larger structure dominated by Brahmanical norms and customs. The display of everyday ritual is therefore not only aimed at the material representation of religion, but it is also a struggle for pure status in the structural hierarchy of the caste system. While the foundation of Sikhism does not promote purity of status and hierarchy, the rituals performed in temples clearly indicate how the element of hierarchy and purity that invokes a distinction between the sacred and the profane. From the opening of the temple in the early morning to the end of the day in the late evening, the rituals and sermons are ongoing activities. Moreover, a Sikh temple is a place where communal food (*langar*) is served throughout the day, which keeps the flow of visitors continuous. The evening session of the prayer remains the most important ritual event of the day for certain reasons.

Since it begins in the evening, it is convenient for many to attend it after their regular work and hence becomes a mass event.[33] While each temple has its own timetable of daily (or weekly) rituals depending on the community who owns the temple, I will focus on the Singh Sabha gurdwara in Southall to illustrate the performance of *ardas.*

The *ardas* is basically a set of prayers which consists of three parts. The first part represents the glory and honour of the Sikh founders (ten gurus). The second part is dedicated to reciting the bravery and triumph of the Khalsa tradition, and the last part is the salutation and praise of the divine name (*Waheguru*). The prayer is performed as part of the worship in Sikh temples. It is conducted on various occasions, such as a birth or naming ceremony as well as marriage and death-related rituals, apart from the morning and evening sessions of the prayer. The first prayer begins with the rituals connected to honouring the scripture when it is escorted from the *sukh asan*, its resting place around 5:00 am. The first appearance of the scripture is referred to as *prakas*, the light. And upon the dawn of sunlight, the *hukumnama*, an edict, is received by randomly opening a page of the holy book. A hymn that appears on the right side of the page is taken as the edict, which is also referred to as the order (*hukum*) of the day given by God Almighty, *Waheguru*. The order broadly reflects the basic tenets and philosophy of Sikhism. The order then appears both in the written and digital form on the boards and screens displayed on the temple premises. The morning ritual of *prakas* is mostly performed by the *granthis* themselves. The *prakas* is followed by a morning prayer with the *sadh-sangat*, the congregation, around 8:00 am. The prayer accompanies the devotional singing (*kirtan*) performed by a group of *granthis*. As the devotional singing begins, gradually devotees begin to approach the temple for *mattha tekna*, the act of paying their respects to the holy book. Meanwhile, the *langar*, the communal food is prepared in the temple kitchen by the groups of men and women volunteers who arrive at the temple as early as when the first ritual is conducted.

The act of *mattha tekna* is one of the basic and significant acts that reflects one's affiliation towards *Waheguru*, the Almighty God (whom the Sikh gurus referred to). The way the act is performed symbolises the ritual, spiritual, as well as the sacred notion associated with it. In fact, the intention of the act is to invoke its sacred nature in the way it is performed individually in front of the altar, amid the whole congregation. When devotees enter the prayer hall, they face

[33] This also depends on the temples since some of the temples conduct the mass prayer event on every weekend and accordingly the food (*langar*) is also served once a week.

the altar right in front of them at a few yards' distance, the altar being located at the other end of the prayer hall. Upon entering, a devotee approaches the altar to pay his/her respects (*mattha tekna*) as a common but most essential act of reverence. While being watched by the whole congregation, the act of paying one's respects demands a certain code of conduct – moral, ethical, as well as behavioural and bodily conduct. With head covered and slightly bowed, the devotee approaches the altar while walking modestly and steadily with folded hands. Dropping coins as an offering in the donation box, the men and women kneel and touch the floor with their foreheads while placing their hands on the ground on either sides of the heads. While going back to the standing position, then, a circumambulation of the altar is made in the clockwise direction, and then one finds a place to sit with the rest of the congregation on the floor, on either side of the altar (usually the men on the right and women on the left side of the altar). The act of *mattha tekna* is an ongoing activity throughout the day. At the entrance of the temple there is an arrangement to remove one's footwear (wooden footwear shelves) and buckets of saffron and blue-coloured handkerchiefs and scarves of different sizes are kept at the entrance for men and women separately, to cover their heads before stepping in to the temple while also washing their hands at the basins located at the entrance, where the urinals and toilets are also located.

Meanwhile, during the day, other ritual activities like marriage, birth, and death rituals are performed as the occasion arises. The *akhand path*, unbroken reading of the scripture (48 hours' reading) is also simultaneously going on as a family-sponsored ritual (in Ravidasi gurdwaras, the *akhand path* usually starts on Friday morning and ends on Sunday morning). The holy book is also voluntarily read in parts by devotees on an everyday basis. This latter reading is referred to as *sehaj path*, i.e. the reading in parts or based on one's own convenience (The Singh Sabha gurdwara has a special arrangement of the wooden cabins installed on either side of the altar for the voluntary reading of the scriptures). Then in the evening comes the time of the *samapti*, the closing of the day that starts around 7:00 pm. The day ends with the final *ardas* preceded by a *kirtan* session. The evening prayer acquires a special significance because it is attended by large numbers. From the late afternoon *kirtan* session to the final evening prayer, the congregation begins to grow thicker. The Singh Sabha gurdwara is a special attraction for the evening prayer, preceded by a singing session that attracts visitors beyond the Sikh fold. The hymns and holy verses (reflecting the teachings of the Sikh gurus), sung in sharp, melodious, and devotional tones by professional *raagi* singers in their classical manner, unravel the simple reality of life in a philosophical manner. This simplicity captures the masses' attention while

telling them the moral and ethical aspects of their lives' reality. As soon as the evening kirtan terminates, the *granthis* preside over the final prayer to lead the congregation with the *ardas.*

Figure 7: The Sikh scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, is carried to its resting place (sukh asan) after the termination of the final evening prayer at Ravidas temple, Bedford (Photo by author)

As the prayer session continues, the devotees keep joining in until the end of the session. The final part of the prayer (salutation and praise) fills the temple atmosphere with spiritual devotion combined with the chanting of hymns by the *granthis*, and eventually followed by the congregation with silence. The temple authorities and dignitaries showcase their presence during this final session. As the *granthi* reaches the final verses, the whole congregation arises with firm and steady bodily gestures, looking slightly downwards in the direction of the altar. Meanwhile, the *panj piare* (the five beloved men) appear as a sign of protection of and reverence to the scripture. A group of youngsters with traditional musical instruments (drums, bronze horns, and *dholak*) gather around the altar to perform a music that resembles a kind of coronation ceremony. Likewise, another group of youngsters appears in Khalsa (military) outfits and begins to show their martial performance as the prayer approaches the end. Upon

recitation of the final verses of the prayer, the congregation stands and continues its *naam simran*, the reciting of the name of God (*Waheguru*).

As the musical display settles down, the preparation to escort the Guru (the scripture) back to its resting place (*sukh asan*) begins. The scripture is wrapped diligently in a piece of cotton cloth covered with another piece of shiny garment and carried it on a *granthi's* head with the recitation of *Waheguru*'s name (see Fig. 7). The *granthi* with the scripture on his head is followed by another *granthi* who keeps waving the whisk at the scripture until it reaches its resting place. While taking the scripture to its resting place, the temple dignitaries also join the *granthis* while walking in a queue. As the scripture is carried to its resting place, the congregation moves a bit closer towards the altar and watches the scene meditatively. The moment in which their beloved Guru (also referred to as the King)[34] passes by turns the *darbaar sahib*, the kingdom, to sentimentality. As it is escorted in the company of the *panj piare* on the one side and a group of *granthis* on other side, the congregation suffuses with a feeling of spirituality. Taking the *karah prasad*, the sweet offering at the exit of the prayer hall, the congregation then proceeds to the kitchen hall for the communal meal (*langar*). The final meal at the temple, thus, terminates the day around 9:00 pm, just like every other day.

The performance of the prayer with such grand ritual practices indicates the community's power and status. The community of the Jatts, who represent the Sing Sabha gurdwara, displays its socio-economic dominance over the rest of the social fabric in Punjab, including the Brahmins. However, in the ritual (or broadly religious) domain, the Jatts are treated as ritually impure in the Brahmanical system. And therefore, in order for them to project themselves as ritually superior in the caste hierarchy, they see the daily rituals as a way to display their ritual superiority in line with Brahmanical ritual purity. Ritual purity is an indicator of one's superior status in the caste hierarchy, which is conceived by emulating the Brahmanical notion of purity and pollution. Therefore, each caste demonstrates its superior status to the one who follows it in the structure of the caste system. And at the same time, it remains inferior to the one which it imitates (the idea of imitation in caste will be discussed in the next chapter). Ambedkar describes this hierarchy as "the system of graded inequality" (Ambedkar 2014: 167-168). Though the rituals in Sikhism represent their own religious tradition, the idea of ritual purity is

[34] The use of the term "King" has a particular context here. It refers to Sikh scripture which is placed on the *takhat*, the throne (on the altar). The *darbar sahib* is referred to as the "court" of the Guru (or scripture), and hence the terms such as "court" and "King" are used interchangeably to "kingdom" (*darbar*) and "Guru" respectively, especially during ritual sessions in Sikh temples.

the emulation of the Brahmanical notion of purity. The ritual norms and etiquettes observed during worship, or the acts of *mattha tekna*, as well as during prayer sessions, reflect how Sikh ritual practices represent the essence of Brahmanical purity.

Conclusion

Regular rituals and processions are important religious activities to reinforce and reinstitute the sacred in a diasporic community. As this chapter shows, however, the Sikh religion is reinstituted also by introducing "the Brahmanical point of view" where it identifies with notions of caste and distinguishes between the pure and impure through its religious practices. The rituals performed in temples organise communities within their own social spheres and reinforce religious customs in accordance with scriptural and traditional beliefs in purity and pollution. Religious processions remain occasions to display social hierarchy and power relations within diasporic religions. Both these occasions, the everyday rituals and the annual processions, form an important basis for the reinstituting of the sacred while identifying with the Brahmanical religion. The formation of temples and importation of priests has been another important aspect of religious growth among the South Asian community, in that the rituals not only became an everyday temple phenomenon, but also the community began to establish its traditional norms and customs in accordance with the scriptural beliefs and practices that represent social hierarchy. I have demonstrated that the establishment of temples is rooted in a caste belonging that represents social hierarchy through regular rituals and social practices within Sikhism. The ways in which the notion of purity and impurity is made visible in Sikhism demonstrates its identification with the Brahmanical religion.

The transcendence of the sacred in diaspora indicates another important dimension of the sacred. It shows how rituals are sustained among migrants through a peculiar process of "reinterpretation" of and re-adjustment to the host environment. However, the reinterpretation does not distort the essence of the ritual that aims to maintain the dichotomy of the pure and impure. This is an important feature of caste in the modern context, in which it changes at one point and reproduces at another, without subverting the scriptural beliefs in hierarchy and ritual purity. The diasporic context provides a space to invent new rituals while accommodating with the secular and modern values. As I have shown in this chapter, the ritual practices performed in diaspora appear differently in terms of their forms, but they are unlikely to subvert their original meaning and essence. Arguably, the idea of purity in Sikhism lies in egalitarian values,

in which purity of thought and action is conceived of as more important than the purity of caste (MacLeod 1989, Nesbitt 2005a). But ritual practices in Sikhism resonate with the Brahmanical notion of purity and pollution while undermining the doctrinal values of Sikhism. This is also prevalent in Christianity in India, where the Brahmanical principle of purity overpowers religious principles by remoulding caste practices (Mosse 1996, 2012). This suggests that caste is not only confined to the lives of Hindus, but is also part of the social fabric of non-Hindus. But nonetheless, caste practices and ritual hierarchy in Sikhism are challenged by alternative religious cults within Sikhism. In the next chapter I shall discuss how the socio-cultural hierarchy inherent in the Brahmanical religion is contested by alternative religious practices.

Chapter 3

Contesting Brahmanical Religion through the Ravidasia Alternative: Myths, Stories, and Symbols

Myths and symbols have been an integral part of human society from its early stages. Passed on from one generation to the next, the tradition of the myth and folklore carries the blueprint of the cultural process (Smith 1959: 312). Classical anthropology talks about the important role that myths and stories played in the primitive societies. Ever since Malinowski's (1922) study on the "Trobriand" and Evans-Pritchard's (1937, 1940) work on the "Azande" and the "Neur" people, the analysis of myths and magic has come to be known as a methodological imperative to make sense of primitive society. In fact, the study of myths and folklore remained a central aspect of the ethnographic field work that became a founding feature of anthropology as a discipline (Pandian 2019). Myths and symbols as a belief system, however, are not only confined to the primitive societies, but are also integrated into the modern world (Levi-Strauss 1978).

In anthropology, myths and stories have been studied from structuralist and functionalist perspectives, which gives an idea of the social values and cultural practices based on which primitive societies functioned (Malinowski 1916, 1926, 1984; Levi-Strauss 1955, 1978). Moreover, these perspectives also reflect the performative and pragmatic dimension of culture, for the myths, magic, and rituals make explicit the nature of the social and moral universe of primitive humans (Strenski 1992). Myths in primitive society served as the basis of a moral code and belief system. In the modern context, myths represent dominance. On the one hand, the myths and stories associated with mainstream Indian religious traditions are intrinsic in representing social and cultural dominance. On the other hand, this dominance is challenged by the alternative stories prevalent among the lower-caste religious cults. Myths in Indian tradition therefore are a "symbolic representation" of social hierarchy that informs the hegemonic articulation as well as the counterhegemonic articulation of social hierarchy (Laclau and Mouffe 2001). Given this hierarchical nature of myths and stories, they need to be analysed beyond the structural-functional perspective.

In this chapter, I examine how myths and stories serve as an important basis both for the depiction of social hierarchy and its contestation through alternative stories. Apart from their narration in temple rituals, the myths associated with the Indian tradition are the symbolic expressions of the hegemonic relations between the Brahmanical and non-Brahmanical tradition. How stories, symbols, and imagery reinforce an alternative religious space, and how they challenge the Brahmanical culture and religion, is a broader question this chapter deals with.

Taking stories and imagery as a locus of enquiry, I analyse how mythical tales reproduce Brahmanical supremacy and how the latter is challenged by the alternative stories and imagery prevalent within the lower-caste religions. Drawing on myths, symbols, and imagery associated with the religious practices within Sikhism and within the lower-caste Ravidasia cult, I examine how the caste hierarchy prevalent in the Brahmanical religion is maintained in Sikhism and how it is countered by the Ravidasia religion through the process of inventing alternative myths. I argue that the myths and stories are important means both for the reproduction of the social hierarchy as well as for challenging these hierarchies. The stories associated with religious founders and saints revolve around the ideas of ritual purity and their spiritual greatness. However, the story narration has become a political means through which upper castes display their caste dominance and power relations while rejecting the ritual and spiritual space that lower-caste saints achieved in the past. In the rejection of the saint Ravidas' spiritual engagement and his egalitarian (caste-free) social vision, mainstream Sikhism has reduced the saint to his untouchable (Chamar) caste while also treating his followers as such. This scenario is mainly associated with the Brahmanical religion, in which saints like Ravidas who challenged the Brahmanical caste and ritual purity are reduced to their caste statuses. Sikhism has significantly subscribed to this Brahmanical approach towards lower-caste saints and their followers.

However, the reduction of Ravidas to his caste and the social exclusion of his followers has been challenged for generations. The Ravidasis in the UK have been more vocal about contesting this historical dominance by creating alternative ritual practices and stories and by deconstructing Brahmanical superiority in religious domains. They have adopted a similar means of story narration and ritual performances, in which they revived the stories and myths associated with their own saint, Ravidas in order to counter Brahmanical stories and rituals (Zelliot 1992; Omvedt 2008; Ram 2016). The legends of Ravidas counter Brahmin principles

of purity while deviating from established norms and customs. They challenge the Brahmanical monopoly over the spiritual domain by breaking caste rules. I argue that the stories and myths created by the lower castes serve a two-fold purpose: on the one hand, they pose a significant challenge to the Brahmanical religious practices concerning ritual purity and impurity, and on the other hand, they reinforce an autonomous cultural and religious identity. I also find that even though Ravidasia as an alternative religion rejects Brahmanical supremacy in the religious domain, its rejection is incomplete because it has affirmed this rejection theologically and yet reproduced Brahmanism in practice by adhering to the rituals and religious practices that keep alive the essence of the Brahmanical religion.

The tradition of story narration and symbolic representation in lower-caste religions is a historical phenomenon. It emerged as a response to the upper-caste dominance perpetuated through mainstream religious stories and symbols (Zelliot 1992; Omvedt 2008). The means adopted by the lower castes are similar to the means through which caste hierarchy is produced (i.e. rituals, stories, and symbols), a point frequently pointed out in scholarly literature – that there is a great deal of imitation of the upper castes by the lower castes. In his book on *The Laws of Imitation*, the sociologist Gabriel Tarde (1903), has described "imitation" as a natural tendency in human beings, in that imitation always "flows from the higher to the lower" (Tarde quoted in Ambedkar 2014: 19). Referring to Tarde's description of imitation, Ambedkar has shown how the caste system is spread by the imitation of the superior castes by the inferior ones. While Tarde emphasises imitation being a "natural" and voluntary human tendency, Ambedkar observes that imitation is not only a natural and voluntary act, but also an act that forces the "belief" in the superiority prescribed in the scriptures. Referring to the British economist, Walter Bagehot, Ambedkar makes this clear by explaining that imitation as an act is driven by "belief" in superiority (Ambedkar 2014: 18). The imitation of the caste-superior by the caste-inferior is an outcome of the "belief" in caste ideology. According to scriptural beliefs, the caste with a higher rank is deemed worthy of imitation. The scriptures being considered ideal and supreme, imitation flows within the prescribed conducts determined by the scriptures. Tarde and Ambedkar explain imitation as an important aspect in the reproduction of social hierarchy. However, we are yet to know further how imitation could also be a potential means to establish an alternative culture and religion, thereby challenging social hierarchy. Drawing on the idea of imitation, I discuss how Ravidasia as an alternative religion produces its own autonomous rituals and cultural practices through imitating high-caste Sikhs, while also challenging caste inequalities among the latter.

Decades after Ambedkar's observation of caste and imitation, the idea of imitation appeared in MN Srinivas' theory of "Sanskritisation" even though the latter does not seem to have made any reference either to Ambedkar or Tarde. Contrary to Ambedkar, Srinivas suggests imitation as a way for lower castes to achieve superior status by "adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism" while also imitating the Brahmin principles of purity (Srinivas 1956: 481). While Ambedkar explains imitation as a result of the "belief" in caste as sanctioned by the scriptures, Srinivas undermines the scriptural rules of caste that forces people to follow what is deemed pure and superior in caste. The Sanskritisation theory does not explain why Brahmin castes are imitated by non-Brahmin castes and how the scriptural prescription of superiority and inferiority operates in regular life. Moreover, it also falls short in explaining the imitation aspect that is prevalent in non-Brahmanical religions like Sikhism. The imitation of the high-caste Sikhs by the Ravidasis is not aimed at achieving an upper rung in the caste hierarchy, as the Sanskritisation theory suggests, but rather at rejecting the Brahmanical hierarchy (Ram 2011). Being conscious of their culture and history, Ravidasis have deemed such purification and pursuit of status to be an illusion prevalent in the Brahmanical social order.

To make sense of imitation in the Ravidasia context, I opt for the term "Sikhisation". Mark Juergensmeyer (1982) first made reference to this term by pointing at the imitative practices of the lower-caste Sikhs (Ravidasis). He considered the Sikhisation of Ravidasis to be parallel to the Brahminisation of lower-caste Hindus. However, the recent changes in the social and religious lives of Ravidasis show that their emulation of Sikhism goes far beyond what Juergensmeyer observed decades ago. Ronki Ram, the political sociologist, observes that the "adoption of high-caste iconography and practices among Ravidassias is more symbolic of a social protest than of cultural emulation" (Ram 2011: 669). He rejects the idea that Ravidasis' imitation is just Sanskritisation because the former is intended to offer symbolic protest against caste and ritual purity. Ram's observation helps us understand the response of the Ravidasis to the hierarchical system. However, he takes imitation as a symbolic means for granted without explaining how Ravidasis have invented their own stories and symbols in order to represent themselves as an autonomous religion. Drawing on the myths and symbols in the Ravidasia religion, I examine how Sikhisation provides an imperative to invent new stories and rituals, thereby countering the Brahmanical religion. While examining the dimension of confrontation, I also point out that Ravidasis' confrontation of the Brahmanical religion is an incomplete project, a partial success. Sikhisation certainly helps the Ravidasis establish an autonomous religion while denouncing dominant Sikhism. But it does not help them step away from the

rituals and religious practices that are submerged in the Brahmanical religion itself. Illustrating the idea of Sikhisation, this chapter contributes to the debates on Ravidasia as an alternative religion and examines the way it challenges the Brahmanical religion.

Stories are part of the regular conversation among the diasporic Indians. They are narrated both in formal as well as informal discussions among friends, among religious groups, and on temple premises. The stories and imagery presented in this chapter are gleaned from various temples via regular rituals and sermons through participatory observation. I attended regular preaching sessions in Sikh, Hindu, and Ravidasia temples where story narration is a popular way of delivering religious doctrine. My stays in Ravidasia temples and interactions with *granthis* (preachers) were helpful in acquiring in-depth details of the stories described in this chapter. A significant part of the information on these stories was also collected from social media platforms (Facebook pages of temples and TV channels run by religious groups). The pamphlets and booklets issued during certain religious festivals remained supplementary to this information.

Myths and legends – conceptualising the historical conflict

"... But how is it possible for anyone to make a stone float on water?", asks a Jatt Sikh interrogatively of his Ravidasi friend in an informal conversation while referring to Ravidas' "stone floating" (*pathri taran*) story. "If someone can stop a falling mountain with his hand, then why wouldn't it be possible to make a stone float?", replies the Ravidasi man in a similar way, referring to Nanak's "mountain" story.[35] This counter-remark not only answers the question which was posed repeatedly by the Jatt man throughout the discussion, but is also intended to assert the historical narrative that, "... the stone will continue to float as long as the falling mountain is stopped by the hand", as the Ravidasi man adds to his above reply. Nanak is the protagonist of the "mountain" story associated with the "Panja Sahib" gurdwara in Hasan Abdal (now in Pakistan), which is one of the most popular pilgrimage destinations for the followers of Sikhism; whereas the miracle performed by Ravidas, the protagonist of the "stone floating" story, is associated with the latter's birthplace, Varanasi (or Banaras). These legends eventually slip into a discussion taking place among a group of mostly Ravidasi men, including an upper-caste Jatt Sikh, at the Ravidasi temple in Bedford. Though the references made to the

[35] The written and visual accounts refer to this legend as "Nanak and the boulder". But the *granthis* who narrated this legend in the Sikh temple referred to it as the "mountain" story. I therefore prefer the latter.

legends are indirect, they remained a basis for the arguments and counter-arguments, commencing rather a lengthy debate.

The two friends, one lower-caste Ravidasi and the other, a Jatt Sikh or a so-called upper caste, entered into a discussion on religion and politics, drawing on the current affairs in Indian politics. Eventually, the discussion was narrowed down to the religious aspects of Sikhism, in which their way was paved by matters of caste and the cultural differences pertaining to Sikhism. The latter, the Jatt Sikh, continued to explain how Sikhism is an "all-encompassing faith" while citing everyday practices of *langar*, the communal food, and that how Sikhism's founder Nanak preached and practiced equality in his lifetime. The Ravidasi man, on the other hand, continued to refute his friend's claims of equality in what he stressed as "practical" Sikhism, though he agreed with the founding principles of Sikhism. While invoking a comparison between "practical" and theological Sikhism, the Ravidasi man further brought a great many everyday details into the discussion, through which he tried to explain how "practical" Sikhism has digressed from its doctrinal principles and how Sikh (socio-cultural) practices are submerged in traditional caste hierarchy and dominance. "... The lower castes in Sikhism are treated no better than they're treated by caste Hindus. Sikhs are no different from Hindus in their practical life," he said emphatically, even correctively, referring to his Jatt friend's claims of "equality" in Sikhism.

The question posed repeatedly by the Jatt man was intended to dismiss Ravidas' stone floating story and hence the latter's spiritual glory, whereas the Ravidasi man's reply seemed assertive as to *why* the stone should float. Not *how*, but *why* the stone should float is the underlying essence that reflects the existing social and political conflicts between Ravidasis and mainstream Sikhism. The stories and legends connected to Ravidas' life serve as a powerful means to counter Brahmanical hierarchy, with which "practical" or everyday Sikhism identifies itself. Moreover, these legends are also conceived as an important means to construct an alternative social vision based on Ravidas' philosophy while discarding the Brahmanical conception of Ravidas, which reduces the latter to his caste identity. The claim of the Ravidasi man that "... the stone will continue to float as long as the falling mountain is stopped by the hand" is an alternative imagination that challenges the Brahmanical religious notion that keeps lower-caste untouchables from engaging in spiritual matters. It also invokes an autonomous cultural and religious space reflecting the saint Ravidas' egalitarian vision.

For the Jatt Sikh, Nanak's story was an obvious event cherished by mainstream Sikhism and hence beyond any doubt in terms of its occurrence. However, he categorically rejected Ravidas' legends throughout the discussion. Not that his rejection of Ravidas' story relied on a rational or scientific basis, or even on historical accuracy for that matter. He rejected Ravidas' legend because the protagonist of the story happened to be a lower-caste Chamar (an untouchable). If he had assumed a scientific approach to rejecting Ravidas' story, he would not have believed in Nanak's story either, because the latter's "mountain" legend, too, leaves enough scope to question how a person could possibly stop a collapsing mountain with his bare hand. But he did believe in Nanak's legend and, in fact, backed his arguments based on it. His repeated insistence on the *how* concerning Ravidas' legend is aimed at the individual ability to perform the miracle of "stone floating", which according to him is impossible because of Ravidas' lower-caste origin. Moreover, equating Ravidas and his spiritual merit with that of Nanak's through the stone floating legend was seen as an offence by the community of the Jatt man – upper-caste Sikhs. It was because of this sense that Ravidas was being reduced to his caste identity, and that his followers were being treated in the same way, that the followers of Ravidas began to claim and assert their autonomous religious and cultural identity while denouncing the dominant ("practical") Sikhism.

The assertion of the alternative religion needs to be understood in the light of "practical" Sikhism. While the founding principle of Sikhism is acknowledged and employed within the Ravidasia religion, the latter dissociates itself from the practical or everyday social and cultural practices of Sikhism. This dissociation of Ravidasis from mainstream Sikhism is an outcome of the prevalent caste hierarchy and power relations within Sikhism (Jodhka 2004; Ram 2016). The religious path asserted by the Ravidasis offers a significant alternative that challenges the internal caste hierarchy and power relations. Therefore, what concerns the Ravidasis is the "practical" equality in everyday life rather than merely the theological principles of equality.

The stories and myths connected to Nanak's and Ravidas' life are popular oral traditions associated with Sikhism for generations (Briggs 1920; Omvedt 1973; Zelliot 1992; Maren 2007). They are narrated at regular rituals and sermons given by the *granthis* in the Sikh and Ravidasi temples. These stories invoke a wide range of morals and ethics related to regular life and hence acquire important space in the everyday life of the common masses. Along with daily rituals, such as prayers and worship, the narration of the stories is an integral part of the regular temple rituals. A *kirtan* (preaching session) in Sikh and Ravidasi temples is composed of

singing the holy verses, poetry, and hymns (which are collectively referred to as *bani* or *shabad*), accompanied by the stories and legends associated with the Sikh gurus, Sikh martyrs, as well as the *bhagats* or the followers like Ravidas. The status of Ravidas as "*bhagat*" within Sikhism, however, is not accepted by his followers, who rather portray him as their "guru" in line with the gurus of Sikhism. Therefore, the way Ravidas is depicted by his followers through his legends and imagery reflects another dimension of confrontation. It shows how the Brahmanical depiction of Ravidas is confronted by Ravidasis portraying him in such a way as to rebel against his Brahmanical portrayal, of being subservient to caste hierarchy and purity (Juergensmeyer 1982: 88-90; Ram 2011). The stories narrated in temples are therefore more than rituals; they represent the historical dominance and the way it is countered by alternative stories. To illustrate further how stories and mythical tales represent caste hierarchy and power relations, let us draw on the legends of Nanak and Ravidas.

The legends and depiction of caste hierarchy and power relations

It was an afternoon in July 2017 when I arrived at the town of Bedford to continue my field work after my Southall visit. An activist from an Ambedkar association in the same town helped me get permission to stay at the Ravidas temple from its president. When I arrived at the temple that day, a young *granthi* took me to the temple office where several men were sipping their afternoon tea. Most of them were old men in their sixties and seventies who have been part of the temple activities ever since its formation. When I entered the office and settled in a chair, the *granthi* offered me tea while serving another round of it to the rest of the men who were busy with their routine conversations about politics and temple matters. Meeting in the temple was a regular routine for these men who were also the office bearers of the temple. My entry into the office seemed to disrupt their conversations for a moment but they resumed their chat immediately afterwards.

Meanwhile, the president, whom I had corresponded with over the telephone about my arrival and who had agreed to provide me with accommodation and other fieldwork-related assistance, asked me to introduce myself to the other members present in the office. I mentioned briefly that I was researching social and cultural aspects of the migrant community and that I would be observing temple rituals and other cultural events among the Ravidasis in the town. I also mentioned that I would be interested in understanding caste issues among migrants and that I need some assistance in reaching out to as many people as possible. As soon as I finished my introduction, a member who was seated across me began to speak about caste and religious

matters, recalling his experiences. He said right away that the caste discrimination has been a "common thing" ever since Indians came to Britain and that it was very much a part of temples and religion. He went on to further express his views further about the Ravidasi temple in which we were sitting, and which, according to him, was an outcome of the caste conflicts between the Ravidasis and the Jatt Sikhs. One of the reasons behind establishing a separate Ravidasi temple, he said, was the "caste attitude of the Sikhs towards us [Ravidasis]". This issue of "caste attitude" then was instantly countered by another man, who was none other than his Jatt friend whom I mentioned above. That is when the discussion between the two friends – the Jatt and the Ravidasi – sparked a lengthy debate while the rest of the temple officials and I remained seated in our places, listening and nodding in agreement and disagreement, and eventually adding a sentence or two of our opinions and observations to what they were discussing.

By and large, the debate between the two friends invoked the historical conflict associated with Sikhism and the way Ravidasis denounce "practical" Sikhism. However, before I embark on discussing the conflict and the denouncing of Sikhism, the legends the two friends were referring to would be worth mentioning. These legends are the common tales narrated during religious sermons (*kirtan*) in Sikh and Ravidasi temples and occasionally in a public gathering (inter-faith meetings, etc.). The legends are connected to the lives of Guru Nanak and the saint Ravidas, depicting the spiritual, moral, and ethical values associated with the teachings of the two protagonists. There are several versions of these stories which differ slightly from one another. I will describe the most common versions I came across in temples, in personal conversations with *granthis,* as well as on media platforms (Sikh TV channels). The "mountain" story associated with Nanak's life goes as follows:

> Once Nanak and his companion, Bhai Mardana, went on a journey as wanderers and preachers. On their way they gave sermons to the villagers. One afternoon while they were treading their path, Mardana felt thirsty, but he couldn't see any trace of water nearby. Nanak, then, directed him to ascend the mountain they were walking by, where Mardana would find water. Accordingly, Mardana ascended the mountain and found a well which happened to be owned by the sage Quandhari. Mardana requested the sage to quench his thirst by offering some water, but the sage refused to give him water and rather hurled abuses at him and his companion, Nanak. Mardana returned without water and narrated this unfortunate incident to Nanak. Seeing the situation, Nanak again asked Mardana to go and ask the sage for water. This time, too, Mardana faced the same situation he faced on his first attempt. After repeated attempts and not getting any water, the exhausted Mardana finally told Nanak that 'he would rather die but would not go to the sage for water – the sage who not only denied him water but hurled words of abuse and humiliation at him. Witnessing the critical condition of his companion, Nanak then uttered the name of *Waheguru*, the Almighty God, and lifted a stone from under his feet,

from where a stream of water emerged. As a result of this miracle, the well of the sage Quandhari dried instantly. When the sage realised that his water source had disappeared as a result of Nanak's miracle, he felt jealous, being offended by Nanak's act. Furious and impatient, the sage lost his temper and pushed the mountain in anger in the direction of the place where Nanak and Mardana were resting. Sensing the disaster, Nanak turned around and stopped the collapsing mountain with his right hand, thus leaving the permanent mark of his fist, the *panja*, on the rock of the mountain.

Figure 8: Nanak and the "mountain" story (photo: Sikhnet.com)

The city of Hasan Abdal (now in Pakistan), where this miracle is believed to have happened, has become a pilgrimage destination for the followers of Sikhism. The place, the Panja Sahib gurdwara, derives its name from the above story in which the *panja* (lit. fist) was imprinted on the mountain (see Fig. 8 above). The gurdwara is visited annually by Sikhs from India as well as diasporic Sikhs. Along with narration in temples, the legend is also digitalised and broadcast on Sikh television channels as a cartoon story for children.[36] Apart from Sikh temples, Nanak's story is also occasionally narrated in some Ravidasi temples (in Coventry, Bedford, and Leicester), but Ravidas' legend is never told in any Sikh temples, let alone his celebration as a saint (*bhagat*) in Sikhism. The "stone floating" story narrated in Ravidasi temples goes as follows (see Fig. 9):

> While walking on the bank of the Ganges and chanting hymns, Ravidas crossed paths with some Brahmin pandits. Hearing the (sacred) hymns and seeing Ravidas in his typical sage's outfit, the pandits felt jealous and offended by his saintly appearance. According to the Vedic scriptures and shastras, the lower castes are forbidden to recite sacred verses or engage in any spiritual matters. But denouncing the Vedic rules, Ravidas is said to have walked the path of spirituality while refuting the Brahmanical monopoly over it. This defiance by Ravidas was opposed by the Brahmins who, by witnessing the Ravidas in such a defiant mode, rushed to the king and pleaded with him to punish the untouchable Ravidas for not obeying caste rules. The king (a Muslim emperor), in order to resolve the matter, asked both parties – the Brahmins and Ravidas

[36] The cartoon version of the "mountain" story is circulated on You Tube, available on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yFaVHT2ZpV8 (Accessed on 5 August 2021).

– to show their spiritual merit, by which method he was to decide whether Ravidas would withdraw himself from his spiritual engagements. Upon hearing the king's demand, Ravidas threw his *pathri* (the heavy stone used as a surface for cutting leather) in the stream of the Ganges and made a promise to make the *pathri* float. The *pathri* began to float in the Ganges and was witnessed by the king and his court. When the Brahmin's turn came to prove their spiritual merit, they failed in their attempt. They threw *janeus* in the water, the sacred thread they wore on their bodies. The threads were supposed to float but sank immediately.

Figure 9: On the left – the "stone floating" legend of Ravidas (Photo: Facebook page, Ravidas temple, Bedford). On the right – the wall poster hung at the Ravidas temple, Bedford, indicating the veneration of Ravidas by king after the "stone floating" miracle (Photo by author)

Like Nanak's story, Ravidas' story also invokes the idea of true devotion as a sign of the spiritual merit. In both the stories there is an element of the miraculous power that projects the superhuman powers of the protagonists. It is however interesting to see that these stories as such do not contradict one another; neither is there any reference in one story to the other, since they are two different instances that occurred in different places as per the legends. But nonetheless, they are treated by their respective proponents as a political means to demonstrate and contest their social differences and caste hierarchy. While narrating Nanak's legend and portraying the superhuman powers of the protagonist, upper-caste Sikhs identify themselves with the Brahmanical portrayal of Ravidas as a lowly and inferior saint, thereby treating his followers as such. And to challenge this Brahmanical portrayal, Ravidasis, too, employ a similar means of story narration by invoking the superhuman powers of Ravidas through his legends. In this scenario, the myths become a political means to either represent social dominance or to counter it, respectively.

The denial of Ravidas' legend by the Jatt man reflects his association with Brahmanical beliefs in which lower castes are deemed inferior in terms of engaging with spirituality. Following the Brahmanical tradition of denying lower castes a ritual and spiritual space, Sikh socio-religious practices have significantly digressed from Sikhism's founding principles. The legend of Nanak

described above reflects his superhuman powers in blocking the mountain. But in the invention of this miraculous aspect of Nanak, the teachings are also reduced to a supernatural phenomenon. This is peculiar to Brahmanical practices in which local saints and reformers who challenged Brahmanical hierarchy were re-described as part of Brahmanical religion by attributing supernatural phenomenon to them. By adopting a similar means of story narration, the Ravidasis indeed denounce ("practical") Sikhism and its dominance, but that does not make them step away from Brahmanical practices, due to their own indulgence in rituals and stories that represents Brahmanical tradition that ultimately reproduces hierarchical relations.

Denouncing Sikhism and social hierarchy

The Nanak-Ravidas conflict prevalent among the followers of Sikhism is basically a cultural and political conflict. It has its origin in the process of the adoption and denunciation of Sikhism by the lower-caste Ravidasis (ex-untouchables) in the twentieth century. It is not an individual conflict between the two protagonists per se, nor is it an ideological clash between the two. In fact, the narratives around these protagonists among the lay followers of Sikhism demonstrate that Ravidas' teachings and social vision are on par with the teachings of Nanak and vice versa. Both conceived of the principle of equality beyond caste and creed and preached it throughout their lifetime. Both believed in spiritual and social equality irrespective of one's birth in a caste – higher or lower. In short, both protested Brahmanical hierarchy and spiritual monopoly while professing equality as a founding principle of their social and spiritual vision. The inclusion of Ravidas' teachings (forty hymns) in the Guru Granth Sahib, the scripture of Sikhism, therefore, may not be an accident. It indicates Ravidas' egalitarian social vision that forms the basis of Sikh philosophy, and his ideological and spiritual resonance with Nanak.

But this is largely a theological view that reflects the founding principles and teachings of Sikhism as per its scripture. Practically, Sikhism appears quite differently from its doctrinal foundation. What is invoked as "equality" beyond caste and creed is confined to one's own caste within the faith. Khushwant Singh (1977) argues that, Sikhism's crusade against caste inequality was only a partial success. As soon as the "guru" tradition terminated, caste-based identity and social practices were retained within the social and cultural fabric of Sikhism (Uberoi 1996; Nesbitt 2005; Singh and Tatla 2006). It is these socio-cultural relations and practices which are the main concerns of the Ravidasis, given their subordinated status within Sikhism. Therefore, the denouncing of Sikhism by Ravidasis is essentially the rejection of the social and cultural practices in Sikhism, which are dominated by the Brahmanical element of

caste hierarchy. The Ravidasi identity in this context can also be viewed as an outcome of the social protest against the Brahmanical practices that persist in Sikhism. The question as to why Ravidasis denounce Sikhism informs the persistent caste hierarchy encountered by lower castes within the Sikh fold.

The denunciation of Sikhism is a cultural and political matter, in that the Ravidasis reject "practical" Sikhism, but themselves subscribe to the theological principles of Sikhism. They worship the same scripture as the Sikhs do. When asked about their relation to Sikhism, Ravidasis response indicates that their conception of Sikhism seems complex. While some consider themselves to be "true Sikhs", others among them consider themselves as "Ravidasis" while also adhering to the Sikh religion. The assertion of the "Ravidasi" identity indicates the historical struggle of the Chamars against the Brahmanical culture and religion. Broadly, the Ravidasi identity is not necessarily devoid of the Sikh identity. In everyday social life, the Ravidasis are recognised as Sikhs of a lower social order since their religious customs and rituals emulate mainstream Sikh practices. But many Ravidasis prefer identifying themselves as "Ravidasia" (or "Ad Dharmis") which denotes their historical identity and social protest against Brahmanical oppression in general and the Sikh dominance in particular. The process of Sikhisation, therefore, provides a space for the Ravidasis to uphold Sikh values and adopt Sikh rituals and traditions on the one hand, and for them to challenge the Brahmanical caste hierarchy prevalent in Sikhism on the other. While the alternative stories and myths are important for challenging the Brahmanical religion, the stories narrated in the Ravidasia cult are now celebrated as regular annual events. That means the stories which were so far narrated in rituals and sermon sessions have now become cultural events, like several other annual events celebrated within the Ravidasia religion. The annual celebration of the myths and stories as cultural events further reinforces the Ravidasia struggle against the Brahmanical religion.

Transforming the legends: from story narration to story celebrations

Analysing the sacred stories among the "Numic-speaking" people, Daniel Myers, argues: "[N]ot only does myth validate and reinforce on-the-ground ritual, but is in itself a ritual form" (Myers 2001: 47). The recent story celebration practices among Ravidasis demonstrate precisely this scenario in which the myth and story has not only given birth to certain rituals, but also it has acquired an explicit "ritual form" by being celebrated as a cultural programme. While the stories of Ravidas are primarily an oral tradition passed on for generations, the

Nanak's stories emerge from his autobiographies (*janam-sakhis*). The autobiographies being largely compilations of the traditional myths associated with Nanak's life, they reveal a strong influence of Hindu mythology (Oberoi 1988; McLeod 1989). The colonial scholar, Max Arthur Macauliffe's writing on Sikh history is primarily a hagiographic account based on Nanak's biographies which are largely mythological tales and stories (Macauliffe 2013, Vol.1). Rooted in everyday life, these myths are "cultural reflections", to use Franz Boas' (1916) terminology, that demonstrate how Sikh beliefs and practices are mired in the tradition of Hindu mythological beliefs.

Post-colonial scholars, however, have refuted the mythical account of Nanak and Sikhism while critically analysing the life and history of Nanak as the founder of Sikhism (McLeod 1989; Singh 1998). But in the community of Sikhs or for the Sikh religious authority particularly, a critical approach to Nanak's life or to Sikhism is dismissed as blasphemy (McLeod 1999: 381-389). This indicates that what is traditionally practised and believed of Nanak's life and Sikh history has a primacy over a rationalist approach to Sikhism. In a nutshell, it can be said that the stories associated with Nanak's life resonate with the Brahmanical approach rooted in the belief in the "purity and impurity" of caste (Dumont 1980). This is another paradox pertaining to Sikhism. The purity of caste as a criterion for social or spiritual devotion was rejected by the founder of Sikhism, Nanak, but has been reproduced among his followers. The Ravidasis began to celebrate their stories as a new ritual, taking a step beyond the Sikh ritual of story narration. This innovative approach to myths provides an occasion to cherish an alternative religiosity while also deconstructing the Brahmanical conception of ritual purity.

Deconstructing Brahmanical purity

In the town of Bedford, the way Ravidasis have recently been fashioning their story celebrations is an interesting phenomenon.[37] A particular day is chosen as an auspicious occasion to celebrate the stories connected to their saint's life. The event is announced a few days prior to its celebration to the regular congregation. The financial contributions for the event are collected at the daily gathering (mostly during the evening prayers) and in the meanwhile

[37] The public celebrations organised by the Ravidasi community in each town depend on their numerical strength too. In Bedford, Leicester, Southall, and Coventry, the Ravidasis amount to a significant number among Indian migrants and hence, the annual programmes organised in those temples are considerably bigger than in other places where Ravidasis are low in number. This is also one of the reasons that some temples operate regularly in terms of daily prayers and rituals while some conduct their rituals only on weekends (on Sundays).

publicity for the event is generated through digital pamphlets on social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.) as well as through vernacular (Punjabi) newspapers and TV channels. The cultural event (singing/dancing) is organised, for which the performers are often brought in from Punjab. Community members (mostly friends and relatives) from the neighbouring towns are invited and they appear as special guests for the event. On that day, a special *langar* is served with a large variety of food items and traditional sweets. Like several other cultural festivals, the story celebration is also becoming one of the popular cultural events in the Ravidasia community. In what follows, I illustrate on two stories concerning Ravidas which have been celebrated as cultural events. One is celebrated as the *Pathri Taran Divas* ("Stone Floating Day") organised in the summer in July or August, and the other is celebrated in April as the *Damri Bheta Divas* ("Coin Offering Day") of Ravidas, which is celebrated in April. I demonstrate how the process of story celebration provides space for the Ravidasis to deconstruct the Brahmanical notion of purity, thereby cherishing their ritual and spiritual autonomy.

To illustrate my observation of the occasion of *Pathri Taran Divas* ("Stone Floating Day"): two pamphlets were published – one in English and another in vernacular Punjabi – and circulated via the Facebook page of the Ravidas temple. The details of the event were also spread personally through phone calls and messaging. The pamphlets containing the timetable and other details of the event were pasted on the temple premises. The vernacular pamphlet provided the details of the musical programme, which was to be presided over by a young singer from Punjab. Her picture on the pamphlet, along with Ravidas' in the top right-hand corner, was placed next to a description of the programme (see Fig. 10, left). The English pamphlet briefly informed the reader of the legend of Ravidas, with a picture displaying the scene of the stone-floating miracle. A nymph-like figure (*jalpari*) was shown emerging from the holy water (of the Ganges) with folded hands, paying her respects to Ravidas for the miracle he had performed (see Fig. 10, right). A description of the legend appeared in the English pamphlet titled "PATHRI TARAN DIWAS – FLOATING OF THE STONE" and it read:

> "Thousands of people gathered at the water's edge of the river Ganga because the ruling king VEER BAGHEL SINGH had summoned Guru Ravidass and the Pandit priest to prove the truthfulness of their worship of God by floating their Thakurs (idols) or stone on the water. The Brahmin Pandits were disappointed and embarrassed when their Thakur sank. Guru Ravidass Ji closed his eyes in prayer to God and placed his stone on the water. To great astonishment of the on-lookers the stone (Pathri) is seen floating majestically supported by the holy water of Ganga. The king seated Guru Ravidass Ji in a golden palanquin and travelled in a procession through the city to his palace. A

gala-function (mela) was organised in the court yards of the palace because the king and member of his family were initiated and became followers of Guru Ravidass Ji" (A pamphlet, Ravidas temple Bedford, 12 August 2018). [sic]

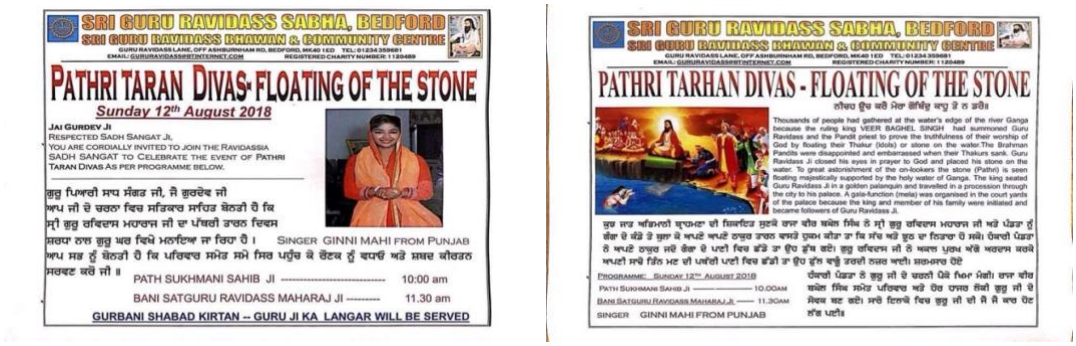

Figure 10: Posters publishing the celebration of Ravidas' "stone-floating legend" (Photo: Facebook page, Ravidas temple, Bedford)

Similarly, for the occasion of *Damri Bheta Divas* ("Coin Offering Day"), celebrated annually as a cultural event, publicity was generated through pamphlets. The English pamphlets circulated on this occasion described the legend with photographs comprising of the four sacred articles: a *kangan* (golden bangle), *kathauti* (stone pot), *damri* (a medieval coin), and female hands (supposedly of the mother Ganges) wearing bangles and henna designs. The Punjabi pamphlet informed the reader of the events that took place on this occasion with photograph of the place, Haridwar, where this event is believed to have happened according to the legend (see Fig. 11, left).

In this legend, Ravidas is portrayed as a lay person, a worker who earns his living with the traditional caste occupation of leather work. The English pamphlet (Fig. 11, right), titled "GURU RAVIDASS JI'S (OFFERING) BHETA OF ONE DAMRI TO GANGA MATA", described the legend as follows:

> "Guru Ravidass Ji gave one Damri, the earnings of his honest labour to Pandit Ganga Ram with a request that he should offer it to Ganga Mata only if she accepts it by taking her hand out of water. The Pandit was inwardly amused as he thought in his mind that for centuries devotees have offered money, gold, silver and precious jewels but Ganga Mata has never accepted these offers by taking her hand out of the water. This was unheard of and impossible. At Haridwar, after taking his bath Pandit Ganga Ram not expecting any response said, 'Ganga Mata Ji, Ravidass Chamar has sent a Damri as his offering for you'. To the astonishment of the Pandit, Ganga Mata, decorated with henna and wearing beautiful bangles lifted her hand out of water and gratefully accepted the Damri (kseera) sent by Guru Ravidass Ji. This extraordinary phenomenon is authenticated by Bhai Gurdass Ji. In return, Ganga Mata gave a golden Kangan (bangle) to the Pandit to give to Guru Ravidass Ji as her offering. Pandit Ganga Ram returned home, his greed had taken the better of him and he gave the Kangan to his wife. His wife insisted the kangan be sold to elevate their poverty. The Pandit took the Kangan to

the goldsmith who was astonished to see the precious jewel, the likes of which he had never seen before. Suspecting the Pandit of dishonesty, the jeweller informed the king. The king Raja Chandar Partap showed the stunning bangle to this queen Rani Rattna. She liked it so much that she wanted an identical pair for herself. The king ordered the Pandit to get another matching bangle, failing which he would be put to death. Pandit Ganga Ram broke down and explained the whole episode as to how he came to have this bangle. To get to the truth the king ordered the Pandit to take them to this Ravidass Chamar. When they arrived, Pandit Ganga Ram told Guru Ji how Ganga Mata gave him a Kangan in return for his Damri offering. Pandit deeply repented for his dishonest act and respectfully begged Guru Ji to save his life by giving the queen a matching Kangan. Compassionate, generous, and ever forgiving Guru Ji pointed them to the kathauti (stone pot containing water), which he used for soaking leather. To their amazement, Ganga appeared, flowing within and there were countless Kangans floating in the water. Guru Ji asked the king to pick only one. By a spiritual flash, the queen was blessed with enlightenment and no longer desired earthly wealth. They were all extremely attracted to the spirituality of Guru Ji that they humbly asked for initiation. Guru Ravidass Ji, ever merciful, forgiving and generous, blessed them all with the Divine gift of NAAM [chanting of god's name], through which all human beings can acquire oneness with God." (A pamphlet, Ravidas temple Bedford, 19th April 2015). [sic]

Figure 11: Posters publishing the celebration of the "coin offering legend" (Damri Bheta Divas) on the Facebook page of the Ravidas temple, Bedford)

The legends described above reflect on a broader social and cultural dimension. They show how the untouchables were kept outside of the spiritual domain under the Brahmanical caste system and how they were excluded from social spaces based on their caste occupation which was deemed impure and unworthy. This scenario points to Dumont's (1980) explanation of Brahmin principles in which the opposition of the pure and the impure is maintained. This opposition ultimately leads to the establishment of superior and inferior statuses and power relations that govern the separation of the Brahmins and the untouchables (ibid.: 59). The Sikhs identify themselves with the Brahmin principles of purity and exclude Ravidasis from social and religious spheres. The legends of Ravidas counter social exclusion and Brahmanical dominance while deviating from established norms and customs. They challenge the Brahmanical monopoly over the spiritual domain by breaking caste rules. Moreover, they

deconstruct the Brahmanical notion of purity that attributes an impure status to the occupation of the Chamars (as leather workers). Invoking the morals and ethics based on individual freedom, loyalty, and truthfulness, the legends discard the conventional morality driven by caste inequality.

The objects associated with the caste occupation of the Chamar (*pathri*, leather, *kathauti*, etc.) are deemed polluted by the Brahmanical conception of purity. However, the legends of Ravidas attribute to these objects a sacred status and redefine the notion of purity. The legends invoke purity through loyalty and the earnestness of labour. In the caste system, Chamars are associated with leather work (tanning), which is deemed "impure" in the Brahmanical conception of purity. The skin of a dead animal is deemed impure and polluted by the caste system and hence the person associated with the leather work is treated as impure and untouchable, a person who literally cannot be touched. Therefore, being born as a Chamar, there was no question of Ravidas visiting holy sites like Haridwar and making an offering, since these rights are reserved exclusively for high-castes. The legends of Ravidas challenge this Brahmanical monopoly by breaking the traditional caste norms and treading upon the path of spirituality and worship. Ravidas' idea of "purity" challenges the conventional notion of purity rooted in Brahmanical ritual practices. By demonstrating the equal value and importance of physical labour and righteous earning, Ravidas redefines purity, as portrayed in his legends.

The celebration of these stories as cultural events also remains politically relevant in the context where Sikhism identifies itself with the Brahmanical principles of purity and pollution. By challenging the Brahmanical conception of purity, the legends of Ravidas ultimately counter the ritual and spiritual dominance of high-caste Sikhs. The denial of Ravidas' legend by the Jatt man as discussed above is an indication as to how Sikhism is infused with the Brahmanical beliefs in caste purity. In their denial of Ravidas's story and thereby the dismissal of his spiritual attainment, upper caste Sikhs subscribe to the Brahmanical beliefs in caste hierarchy. The celebration of the legends as cultural events on the part of the Ravidasis therefore remains important, both socially and politically. The legends of Ravidas provide an alternative space to construct the awareness of history and culture by negating the Brahmanical culture and religion. Referring to Antonio Gramsci's work, Roger Keesing (1989) observes that the subordinated class can achieve self-awareness through the process of "negation" or repudiation of the hegemonic culture (Keesing 1989: 25). The alternative stories of Ravidas in this context counter and repudiate the Brahmanical culture in precisely this manner by creating a self-awareness of

history and culture through Ravidas' egalitarian social vision. This demonstrates how the tradition of myths becomes an important aspect of modern life, in which the myths and stories not only indicate the performative and pragmatic (functionalist) aspect of modern life, but also the social conflict that persists among migrants.

Signs, symbols, and alternative religion

Systems of signs and symbols play an important role in the growth and development of culture (Schneider 1968; Geertz 1973; Sahlins 1976). Symbols represent an historically transmitted cultural pattern embodied in religious and cultural practices (Austin 1979). Symbols remain an important marker in distinguishing social identity and cultural practices within Sikhism (McLeod 1989; Oberoi 1994). The temples in diaspora remain an important space for distinguishing one community from another through various religious and cultural symbols as well as images and wall-paintings. The display of the historical artefacts (medieval coins, swords, letters, maps) as sacred objects in the museums and libraries located in Sikh temples is one of the common symbolic displays that inform the visitor of the social and cultural history of the community. The symbolic representation in the mainstream religion however largely reflects the popular narratives of culture and history that maintain the dominance of one community while undermining the cultural narratives of the marginalised religion. The lower-caste religions have begun to adopt their own religious signs and symbols while revisiting their own history and culture. The alternative signs and symbols invented by the lower castes are part of their collective struggle against the hegemonic religion and cultural practices.

Iconography and re-enforcing religious autonomy

Signs and symbols became an important basis for marginalised religions to re-enforce their religious autonomy while also dissociating themselves from the hegemonic religion (Zelliot 1992; Omvedt 2008). The system of symbols helps the lower castes reinforce their social and cultural identity while creating new signs and imagery associated with their saint, Ravidas. My discussion with the *granthis* reveals that the *nishan sahib* (Sikh religious flag) acquires a historical importance in the Sikh tradition. It has been inseparably associated with Sikh temples ever since the latter came into being. "Wherever there's *nishan sahib* there's a gurdwara" says a *granthi* reflecting on the importance of the flag as a symbol that represents the Sikh community. Hoisted in front of Sikh temples, the triangular flag is placed on top of a long, erected flagpole covered entirely with saffron cotton. The circular emblem in the middle of the

flag represents a double-edged *khanda*, a sword encircled by two daggers or *kirpans.* A double-edged dagger is then also fixed atop the flag. Both these, *khanda* and *kirpans*, are joined together at the base, and together represent the military symbol of Sikhism. The two *kirpans* have a special meaning as they represent the Sikh philosophy of *miri piri* – the military and spiritual power respectively (see Fig. 12, left). The flag is a sacred symbol in Sikhism. It is replaced every year on an auspicious occasion with community participation in it. Men and women are engaged in a flag replacement ceremony in which the flagpole is anointed with milk and butter and then wrapped entirely from the bottom to the top with a new saffron cloth to ceremonial singing.

Figure 12: The Sikh flag (nishan sahib) on the left and the Ravidasia insignia and flag in the centre and on the right (first two photos by author, photo on the right from https://www.gururavidassguruji.com/apps/photos/photo?photoid=44908583)

The Ravidasia flag, on the other hand, though its shape is similar to that of the Sikh flag, differs in its appearance, fundamentally in terms of its insignia and the meaning attached to the latter (Fig. 12, extreme right). The Ravidasia flag contains the "Harr" sign (indicating the *Hari* or God, *Waheguru*) written in the Gurmukhi script at the centre of the insignia. The outer part of the insignia represents a sun-like circle with forty rays of sunlight pointing outwards. These forty rays around the circle represent the forty verses of Ravidas (which are part of the Guru

Granth Sahib, the Sikh scripture).[38] The centre of the circle with the sign "Harr" is encircled by a couplet from Ravidas' *aarti* (prayer), which reads: "*Naam tere ki jyoti lagai, bhayo ujiyaro bhavan saglare* (With the flame of Your Name, the whole world is illuminated)". The flame (*jyoti*) is placed above the "Harr" symbol, pointing upwards representing the "light" that appears in the form of the forty rays around the circle (see Fig. 12, centre). The metal form of the insignia is fixed on the top of the flagpole in a similar manner to the Sikh insignia that appears on top of the Sikh flag. The Ravidasia flag remains an important symbol both, ritually and politically, and has become the official emblem. The flag replacement ceremony indicates another distinction between the Sikhs and Ravidasis. While the Sikhs perform the flag replacing ceremony either on the day of *Gurpurab* or *Vaisakhi*, the Ravidasis have intentionally chosen their own saint's birth anniversary for the flag ceremony, in order to deviate from the conventional Sikh tradition (likewise, the Mazhabi Sikhs replace their flags on the birth anniversary of Valmik). This indicates the negation of conventional Sikh practices by the lower-caste religious cults, which ultimately reinforces their religious autonomy. Like the Ravidasia religious flags, the images and portraits of Ravidas displayed in temples are another important symbolic aspect that shows the counter-narrative struggle against Brahmanical dominance.

Colourful portraits of Ravidas are found in temples and the Ravidasi households in various sizes ranging from life-size portraits to the most common one (A3-size). The common-size frame is usually hung in temples and also placed in front of temple altars along with Nanak's portrait of the same size. A Ravidas portrait is also commonly found in the pamphlets, booklets, temple letter-head papers, and several other official documents and websites, including the official Facebook pages of Ravidasia temples.[39] As portrayed in the picture (Fig. 13, left) Ravidas is seated in a calm and quiet posture with his eyes half-closed like a sage in a deep meditation. His posture, resting one hand on his folded legs and the other on a wooden hand-holder, reminds one of his saintly being. The neatly unshorn (black) long hair and long beard, with a red mark of vermilion on his forehead, is a unique combination, with a white-coloured shawl wrapped around his sage-style clothing. He is clothed in a white linen clothing of white kameez (shirt) and saffron salwar (pants) and wears a long *japji mala* (necklace of prayer beads)

[38] The Sikh scripture contains forty hymns by Ravidas in it. The insignia of Ravidasia represents these forty verses and a couplet. Apart from the Ravidasis whom I talk about in this research, there is another group with a handful of followers of Ravidas, who distinguish themselves from the rest of the Ravidasis as they consider Ravidas' forty verses and a couplet as a separate scripture, which they refer to as "Amritbani Guru Ravidas Ji". (My conversation with Saroj Binder, a woman who leads a group of Amritbani followers in Southall).

[39] Along with the Facebook pages of the Ravidas temple in Bedford, Wolverhampton and other places, the portrait of Ravidas is shown on some of the websites that provide information on Ravidas' history. For example: https://shrigururavidasji.com/site/index.php (Accessed on 8 August 2021).

around his neck, indicating his association with the Bhakti and Sufi traditions which existed during his time. In the second picture (Fig 13, right) Ravidasi is seen holding a rosary (*japji mala*) in one hand and reading the holy verses from the sacred book held in the other hand, displaying a repudiation of ritual and of the spiritual monopoly of the Brahmin castes. The articles he carries and wears on his body represents both the Hindu and Sikh appearance of Ravidas. This portrayal of Ravidas is quintessentially an image of the sages of his times. His followers intended to project precisely such an image of Ravidas in order to challenge the Brahmanical monopoly that kept lower castes outside of the spiritual realm by not allowing them to wear descent clothing and not allowing them to worship and spirituality. Portraying Ravidas in a saintly manner discards the Vedic rules that kept untouchables from ascending on the spiritual path.

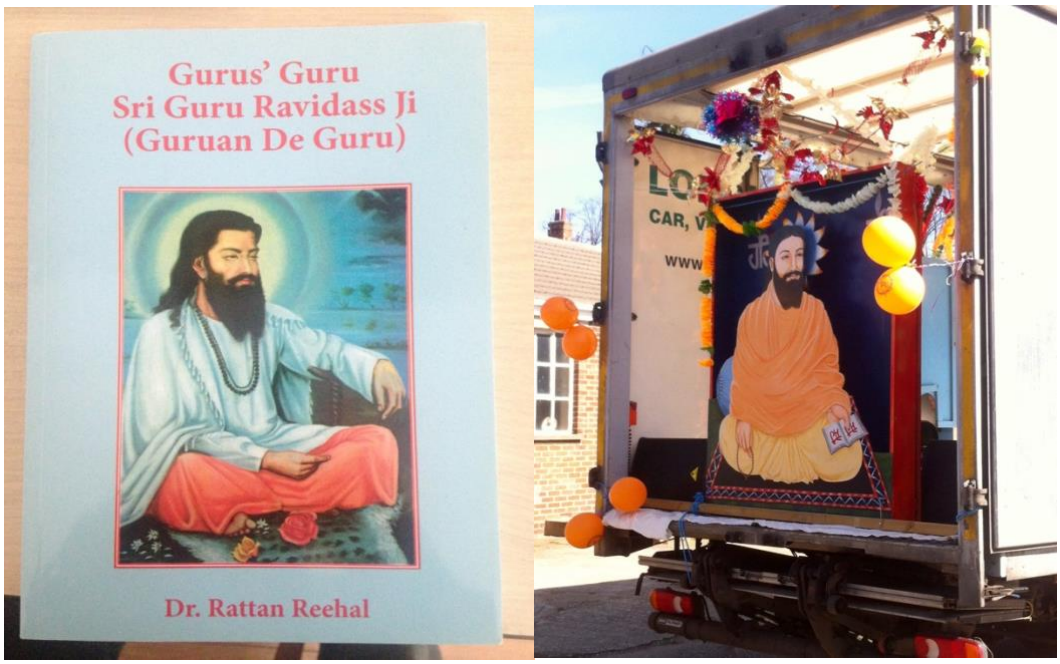

Figure 13: On the left – a portrait of the saint Ravidas on a booklet received at the Ravidas temple in Wolverhampton. On the right – a hoarding of the saint carried in a "nagar kirtan" (procession) on his birth anniversary celebrated by his followers in Bedford (Photos by author)

Another portrait depicts the historical meeting between Ravidas and Nanak. According to the portrayal, the meeting is believed to have happened when Ravidas was on a journey towards the north (present-day Pakistan) with his three fellow companions – namely, Kabir, Sain, and Trilochan. The portrayal suggests that *langar* is being served to these four saints by a young Nanak (see Fig. 14 below, left). While Ravidas and others are seated on the ground under a tree, Nanak gives his assistance serving them food. While the three companions of Ravidas in the

background are shown with taking a bite of the food, Ravidas, with his right hand, is blessing the young Nanak for his generous act of *langar* service.

The story associated with this image is often narrated in Ravidasia temples at regular sermons. There are several versions of this story. But the popular one suggests that the tradition of *langar* came into being after this historical meeting of Nanak and Ravidas.[40] While explaining the image hung at the Ravidas temple in Bedford, a *granthi* tells me how the langar tradition came into being and how Nanak's encounter with Ravidas remained a turning point in the former's dedication of his life for the service of humanity. He further mentioned that the foundation of Sikhism greatly reflects the egalitarian vision of saints like Ravidas and Kabir, but the followers of Sikhism, according to him, show no regard for this historical fact. Through this portrait, Ravidasis also try to establish a connection, saying that Nanak was impressed by Ravidas' spiritual path and that the former also chose his spiritual path following Ravidas. Broadly, the Ravidasis believe that their saint Ravidas inspired Nanak in one way or another and that the foundation of Sikhism is directly or indirectly connected to Ravidas. The portrayal of this meeting between Nanak and Ravidas is now celebrated publicly in places like Bedford through the display of a hording in public processions (Fig. 14, right).

Figure 14: The portrait (on the left) indicating the historical meeting between Nanak and Ravidas. On the right, a hoarding of the Nanak-Ravidas meeting is carried in a processional vehicle on Ravidas' birth anniversary in Bedford (Photos by author)

It has been mentioned earlier in this chapter that the temples in diaspora are an important space for distinguishing one community from another through various religious and cultural symbols. Similar distinctions are prevalent also in temple interiors, especially in terms of the altar, wall paintings, and portraits. The altars in Ravidasi temples are typically decorated with Ravidas'

[40] A *granthi* in the Ravidas temple in Wolverhampton, tells me that the langar tradition emerged after the historical meeting between Nanak and Ravidas (My conversation with the *granthi*, December 2018).

portraits along with Nanak's portraits, and the latter are usually placed on one side of the altar. Above them, the front side of the altars is carved with Ravidas' hymns, including the Ravidasia emblem (with the "Harr" *nishan* or sign) on either side of the altars – whereas, in the Sikh temples the couplets on the altars represent Nanak's and other Sikh gurus' messages. Moreover, the wall paintings and portraits displayed in Sikh temples are a special attraction that represents the martyrial history of Sikhism. The stories associated with the paintings and images of the gurus and the warriors like Tegh Bahadur (ninth of the ten gurus), Banda Singh Bahadur, Baba Deep Singh, and a host of other martyrs (*shahids*) are proudly narrated in Sikh temples during regular sermons.[41] The martyrial aspect of Sikhism is a matter of great pride that is expressed through temple imagery as well as the stories and myths narrated in temples. Sikhism as a faith emerged in a socio-political context when Islam was a dominating power in the Indian subcontinent and hence the history of the foundation of Sikhism is inextricably interwoven with the battles against Islamic domination (Macauliffe 2013). The foundation of the Khalsa by the tenth guru, Gobind Singh, signifies the importance of the Sikh army in protecting the community of the Sikhs from foreign rulers (Singh 2000; Mann 2004; Nesbitt 2005). In the British colonial history of India, the Sikhs were recognised as a "martial race" and were recruited in the British Army during the First and Second World Wars (McLeod 1992).

This military status of the Sikhs from the previous centuries up to the British empire in India remains a matter of great pride for contemporary Sikhs. On the one hand, their military history invokes their martyrial history, and on the other hand, it provides grounds to retain their Kshatriya (warrior) status that signifies a dominant position in the caste hierarchy. The reduction of Ravidas to his caste status as seen above is also a feature of this aspect of Jatt dominance. This is an example of graded caste hierarchy which is peculiar to the Hindu caste system and also produced in Sikhism. This scenario shows how the "belief" in caste became prominent in Sikhism. It is in this context that the Ravidasis began to challenge the Jatt dominance, not necessarily through dismissing the military history of Sikhism but rather through refuting the Brahmanical construction of social superiority, because of which the Sikhs identify themselves with a higher caste ranking while tracing their Kshatriya past.

[41] Gurdwara Shri Guru Singh Sabha, Southall represents the Sikh martyrial history on its temple walls and in its imagery. One of the paintings represents the "battle of Amritsar" in which the martyr (*shahid*) Baba Deep Singh was decapitated while fighting against the Afghan army. He is believed to be one of the bravest Sikh soldiers and kept on fighting even though his head was separated from his body (says a *granthi* during a sermons on Baba Deep Singh's "Shahid Divas", Martyrdom Day, on 13 November 2018).

The symbolic depiction of Ravidas has the potential to invoke his idea of purity by redefining the Brahmanical notion of purity, which is based on false claims and ritual practices rather than the value of labour. Likewise, though the portrayal of Ravidas as a saintly figure appears simple, it has profound effects as it counters military arrogance (especially of the Jatts) without calling on any counter-military vocabulary nor by undermining the Khalsa history of Sikhism. Instead, the portrayal of Ravidas is intended to retain the egalitarian tradition of Sikhism, of which the equality of labour, worship, and commensality became the founding principles. The display of the historical meeting between Nanak and Ravidas, for instance, is an effort in the direction of retaining the ideological unity between the two protagonists. But for the community of the Sikhs, ideological and doctrinal principles are superseded by the social and cultural practices dominated by a belief in caste. While the principle of equality is preached during regular rituals and sermons in Sikhism, the Sikh social and cultural life continued in the practice of inequality, influenced by Brahmanical caste hierarchy. The struggle of the Ravidasis against mainstream Sikhism is essentially the struggle against this inequality, which they find in "practical", everyday Sikhism rather than in the doctrinal foundation of Sikhism. Stories and symbols as an alternative means provide the scope to reinforce the autonomy of the Ravidasia religion while denouncing the Brahmanical religion that persists in Sikhism.

Discussion and analysis: Sikhisation, Sanskritisation, and caste

Ravidasia as an alternative religion emerged in the early twentieth century upon the rise of the "Ad Dharm" movement led by the Dalits from the Chamar caste in Punjab (Juergensmeyer 1982; Omvedt 1993; Hardtmann 2009; Ram 2011). The emergence of the Ravidasia cult was an outcome of the socio-cultural conflict between high-caste Hindus and Sikhs and lower-caste Ravidasis (Juergensmeyer 1982: 33-63). This alternative religious cult inclined ideologically towards the saintly tradition of the medieval India and therefore it naturally resembled Sikhism. In fact, it began to follow the ways and customs of Sikhism both in the ritual and social domain. In so doing, the Ravidasis only emulated the rituals and customs of Sikhism but not the content of those cultural and ritual practices. For instance, the Sikhs greet each other while uttering "*Sat Sri Akal* (Almighty, the timeless truth)". The Ravidasis have emulated this way of greeting each other but not the greeting as such, for they invented their own by uttering "*Jai Gurdev* (Hail the guru, Ravidas)". Moreover, the celebration of *Gurpurab* as an annual event has also been adopted by Ravidasis. But for Ravidasis it is not the birth anniversary of Nanak as the event is commonly understood; it is instead the birth of Ravidas which is celebrated as *Gurpurab* by the

Ravidasis, thus imitating the processional styles and ritual activities of the mainstream event, but not the reason for its celebration.

This invented element in the Ravidasia religion becomes a challenge to Sikh dominance in regular life. Therefore, Sikhisation is conceptually different from imitation, for the reason that it confronts the caste hierarchy within Sikhism. The Ad Dharm movement, which led to the foundation of the Ravidasia religion, shows how it adopted the saint tradition of Sikhism. During the time of the Ad Dharm movement, its followers declared that they were no longer Hindus and began to carve out their own religion by imitating Sikhism while also distinguishing themselves from the latter (Juergensmeyer 1982). They even went on create an alternative scripture equivalent to the Sikh scripture by compiling Ravidas' hymns exclusively. However, this effort failed as the majority of the Ravidasis did not find any reason to reject the Sikh scripture, which already contained Ravidas' hymns (ibid.: 83-91). Sikhisation, therefore, is a process that gives rise to alternative religiosity while also denouncing caste hierarchy in Sikhism.

As discussed in this chapter, the ways and manners of the story narration and symbols associated with Sikhism are imitated by Ravidasis while they also invent their own stories and symbols. Unlike in Sanskritisation, the imitation on the part of the Ravidasis is not necessarily to acquire a higher social position in Sikhism. It is rather a means to protest the Brahmin principles of purity which Sikhism identifies with. Moreover, it also provides a space for the Ravidasis to reinforce their religious alternative which emerged a century ago in the form of the Ad Dharm movement. The process of Sikhisation suggests a radical change in the Ravidasia religion. Pointing at the imitative nature of the Ravidasis, Juergensmeyer (1982) and Hardtmann (2009: 271) viewed Sikhisation as a mere emulation of Sikhism like, Sanskritisation, without further explaining what it constitutes and what it means to the Ravidasis. Recent studies suggest that though the emergence of the Ad Dharam movement was driven by the element of emulation of the saint tradition (both Hindu and Sikh), it was significantly different from Sanskritisation (Ram 2011: 668-670). As seen above in the portraits of Ravidas in which his appearance resembles that of an upper-caste sage (wearing prayer beads, putting vermilion on his forehead, clothing in a saintly manner, etc.), he is not trying to imitate in order to acquire a high position in the social ranking. On the contrary, his imitation, as Ronki Ram (2011) rightly argued, is intended "to cross the prohibited boundaries of the restricted social domains separating the polluting ex-untouchables from the so called holy

Brahmins" (ibid.: 669). While tracing the roots of Ad Dharm as an alternative religious cult, Ram (2011) points out an important aspect of the imitation of Ravidas as a way to counter Brahmanical supremacy. However, in taking imitation for granted among present-day Ravidasi followers, assumed to be like that of Ravidas' emulation of the higher castes, Ram undermines the aspect of invention which is intrinsic to imitation among contemporary Ravidasis. It is this particular aspect of invention that remains central to the process of Sikhisation and that helps the Ravidasis maintain their cultural and religious autonomy in the face of the Brahmanical religion.

Srinivas (1956) proposed the term "Sanskritisation" to describe the emulation of the Brahmanical ways and customs by the lower castes in order to achieve a higher social rank (Srinivas 1956: 481, 485). He argues that the process of Sanskritisation helps the lower castes acquire upward social mobility while climbing the ladder of social hierarchy (Srinivas 2005: 200-219). Notwithstanding Srinivas' (1956, 2005) argument, Ronki Ram, observes that despite any structural change in the lives of the lower castes, Sanskritisation "reinforces the structural logic of Hinduism" by making the lower castes "internalise" the very Brahmanical structure that they intend to counter (Ram 2011: 648). Similarly, Gopal Guru, the political scientist analyses Sanskritisation as a "pacificatory process of cultural containment [that] helped the socially dominant class to contain the overflow of dalit consciousness that was potentially subversive of Brahmanical social order" (Guru 2013: 95). The process of Sikhisation, in this regard, differs from Sanskritisation in that the former invokes a self-awareness of history and culture while distinguishing itself from the Brahmanical customs.

The Ravidasis not only differ from Sikhism but also counter the socio-religious dominance of the latter through the process of Sikhisation. This is not the case with Sanskritisation, in which lower-caste Hindus imitate their upper-caste counterparts in order to be accepted by the latter. Therefore, the fundamental difference between Sikhisation and Sanskritisation is the sense of consciousness and self-awareness. The imitators in the former are conscious of their imitative action while distinguishing themselves from the dominant culture – whereas the imitators in Sanskritisation, are pointed out by Guru (2013), reflect the absence of their historical and cultural consciousness that reduces them to a subservient status. Ravidasis, being conscious of caste oppression, are unlikely to be the imitators in Srinivas' Sanskritisation model. On the contrary, they refute this model while posing a challenge to the Brahmanical social structure.

Sikhisation, in this regard, remains a defiance of the Brahmanical social order rather than a compliance with the latter.

It is clear that the alternative religion provides a space for the Ravidasis to identify themselves as an autonomous community while also countering the Brahmanical religion. This religious alternative is mainly rooted in Ravidas' philosophy that resonates with the Bhakti tradition of medieval times. As far as the Dalit history and struggle is concerned, the Bhakti movement was a radical alternative that posed a challenge to the Brahmanical hegemony. However, it had its own limitations, too. It was rooted broadly in socio-cultural and ritual practices which were confined to the religious domain (Zelliot 1992, 2004a; Omvedt 1993, 2008). While the saint tradition of the Bhakti movement offers its challenge to Brahmanical practices, this challenge is largely confined to religious spheres concerning the equality of worship and spirituality. It is unlikely to confront the Brahmanism which is prevalent in the modern lifestyle. Similarly, Ravidasia as an alternative theology is a way to counter the Brahmanical religion, but it is unlikely to step away from the customs and traditions that are infused with the rituals and beliefs that sustain its Brahmanical element.

Conclusion

The stories and myths associated with Ravidas are an important oral tradition that signifies the struggle of the untouchables against the Brahmanical social order. The legends of Ravidas discussed in this chapter are an important means of providing an alternative through which Ravidasis can invent their own autonomous ritual space while countering the Brahmanical hierarchy in ritual and spiritual domains. The stories associated with the saint inform the historical struggles against caste purity and social exclusion. I have demonstrated that the phenomenon of alternative religion gives rise to an important dimension of imitation: Sikhisation. The imitation of Sikhism by Ravidasis is conceptually different from the imitation of Brahmins by lower-caste Hindus. Sikhisation is a conscious process that informs the struggle against oppressive religion. Sanskritisation obstructs the consciousness of the lower classes towards hegemonic culture. I have argued that even though the Ravidasia religion has been a counterforce against Brahmanism, its rejection of the latter is incomplete because the rejection is affirmed theologically and yet Brahmanism is reproduced in practice. It has kept alive, through ritual and spiritual practices, beliefs and customs which are akin to the Brahmanical religion. Therefore, it is unlikely to overcome caste-based identities and practices which are

intrinsic in everyday rituals and religious practices. Caste as an identity thus remains at the core of the Ravidasia religion even though the latter tends to counter it.

As it will be shown in the following chapter, caste as a belief has gained momentum in everyday life. It organises social relations and interactions among migrants based on caste identities. These identities and social relations are manifested in caste prejudices and discrimination in daily life. The belief in caste has become an everyday "gaze" that re-institutionalises social relations where everyday forms of humiliation and exclusion play a part. The belief in caste has created an "ontological drive" that represents caste superiority and its implications in the everyday lives of migrants. The issues of caste identity and humiliation are not only confined to first-generation migrants. The belief in caste hierarchy is also inculcated in the minds of the subsequent generations who identify themselves with caste and religious identities that clearly indicate their caste consciousness.

Chapter 4

"Caste Still Dwells in Their Minds": Caste Identity, Marriages, and Everyday Discrimination

Along with the reconstruction of social and religious life in the UK, caste distinction and prejudices became more pronounced among migrants. The formation of temples and the celebration of rituals and social functions like marriages are driven by caste-based relations and hierarchy. The reconstruction of the social reflects community independence in cultural and religious matters, in that caste identity begins to play a decisive role. Temple spaces clearly indicate the belonging to a particular caste that is higher or lower in ranking. Similarly, endogamy practices are reproduced by reinforcing kinship relations that represent an important feature of caste belonging. With this development in social and religious spheres, the materiality of caste is also reinforced in the regular lives of the migrant community. In consequence, the caste distinctions and hierarchy prevalent in temples and religious activity have now become visible through caste prejudices and discrimination in the everyday lives of migrants.

The way caste prejudices operate among migrants is peculiar to their socio-cultural habits. Caste prejudices operate directly by judging someone's caste identity and treating them accordingly in public and private spaces. Moreover, they also operate indirectly (or invisibly), in which case, a person faces discrimination based on his/her external appearance. The belief in and consciousness of caste therefore plays a vital role in regular conversation and becomes a decisive element in social interactions. An ordinary conversation revolves around personal information such as family names (surnames), religious affiliation, ancestral occupations, as well as turning one's "gaze" on a person based on his/her body language, skin colour, and manner of speaking, which represents an ontological desire to know their caste. In such a scenario, it is the lower-caste person who remains at the receiving end, being made to disclose their caste identity and exposed to the humiliation implicit in it. Most of the Dalits I interacted with shared their experiences of caste prejudices in their personal and professional lives while working with high-caste colleagues and friends. Their experiences reveal that caste is a significant marker of identity and it is as relevant among migrants in the UK as it is in India.

In this chapter, I demonstrate how caste prejudices and discrimination operate in the ordinary lives of migrants. I discuss that caste is a system of humiliation and that the everyday "gaze" is an embodied perspective of caste. The broader questions I explore in this chapter are: what the nature of caste-based discrimination in the UK is, and how caste identities and relations thrive in the everyday lives of migrants – and most importantly, how caste identity and prejudices are passed on from one generation to another. I argue that caste identity and relations are significantly transmitted through the generations – so much so, that the endogamous relations are maintained in new generations as an important custom along with the belief in caste superiority. While there are a considerable number of inter-caste (and to some extent inter-racial) marriages, the caste identity and consciousness of being superior on the social scale does not wither away. On the contrary, my ethnographic data shows that such mixed unions, though they help the development of social bonds across caste and religion, are unlikely to overcome the sense of caste superiority and inferiority in migrants. Here I examine how caste relations are maintained while they have at the same time adapted to modern values (adaptations such as inter-caste marriages), and how and in what context these relations translate into caste prejudices and discrimination.

In the past decades, just a few scholars have made an attempt to analyse the institution of caste among overseas Indians. Barton M. Schwartz (1964, 1967) is one of the first post-colonial anthropologists who studied caste, endogamy, and rituals that operate among Trinidadian Indians. Following Schwartz, RK Jain (1993) and others examined certain aspects of caste among overseas Indians. These studies are important to understand how Brahmanical rituals and customs, including endogamy, persist among overseas Indians (Jayawardena 1968, 1971; Hollup 1994). While these studies show caste as an important aspect of social identity, they also argue that caste is not the governing factor of social organisation in the overseas community (Schwartz 1964a, 1967; Jain 1993). This analysis mainly stems from an understanding that caste is a system of hereditary occupation and since the latter has either collapsed or has not space in the migration context, the above studies concluded that "caste is not the primary basis for activities and relationships" and that it "only reflects rather than govern person's social status" (Jain 1993: 17).

Schwartz draws on Gerald Berreman's approach to caste, who considers endogamous practices to be the basic characteristic of caste (Schwartz 1967). Jain, on the other hand, draws his understanding of caste from the scholarship of the Indian sociologists MN Srinivas and Andre

Beteille. Schwartz and Jain point to the subversion of caste among migrants as being a result of the weakening of endogamous practices and hereditary occupations, but they do not explain why caste identities survive among overseas Indians despite of the subversion of endogamous relations. I discuss the subversion of caste relations as an outcome of the host country's social environment. It is not the result of a weakening of belief in caste. In fact, caste remains a basis of social identity even in inter-caste marriages. While caste is re-instituted through religious practices (Chapter 2, 3), it is important to know how it operates as an embodied perspective in the everyday life of migrants. This chapter unravels caste as an everyday "gaze" that represents an embedded perspective that shows that daily interactions at workplaces, schools, colleges, and a host of other public and private spaces are governed by caste identities.

While earlier scholars on overseas migration suggest the decline of caste rules, recent studies on the South Asian diaspora in the UK suggest quite the opposite. Roger Ballard's (1994) work, for instance, shows how caste rules are reinstated through marriages and kinship, which ultimately results in reinforcing caste hierarchy. More recently, Gajendran Ayyathurai (2021) has shown how caste and patriarchal relations are re-embedded through certain social and ritual practices among Indians in the Caribbean. Observing marriage institutions among the diasporic South Asians, Ballard argues that "the rules of endogamy are still just as strictly followed in the diaspora as in the subcontinent" (Ballard 1994: 26). Ballard's study indicates that endogamy is an important characteristic of caste, as pointed out by Ambedkar. While endogamy remains as an important feature of the survival of caste in diaspora, the recent changes in marriages suggest that caste is not merely reproduced through endogamy. It has been sustained despite of mixed marriages, including inter-caste and inter-racial marriages. Ballard's (1994) observation of caste in this context remains limited in that it speaks of the presence of caste through endogamy, but it does not show how caste relations and prejudices survive despite of the mixed marriages. Here I examine inter-caste marriages among migrants and argue that the belief in caste survives despite mixed marriages across caste and religion. I discuss that cross-marriages are the result of the modern and cosmopolitan environment in the host society. They are not an outcome of a change in the ontological drive of caste that reproduces the everyday gaze that represents embedded caste prejudices.

To make sense of caste and the discriminatory practices that stem from the belief in caste superiority, I discuss Thomas Hansen's (2012) conception of "gaze". Drawing on the social life of the post-apartheid Chatsworth, a formerly Indian township in Durban, Hansen describes the

issues of freedom and anxiety coupled with racial segmentation, especially in a context where apartheid as an ideology has been widely rejected. He explains that "gazing" is an individual act in which the sense of social hierarchy and privileges is reproduced through regular acts of "watching and being watched" (ibid.: 7). Further, he points out that though the system of race has been abolished, the element of race survives as socio-cultural and psychological habits. He describes "gaze" as a modern feature that "produces sociality" in which the prejudices operate as a psychological habit (ibid.: 4). The idea of "gaze" supplements Ambedkar's theorisation of caste as a "state of mind"; this assists one's understanding of the embeddedness of caste beyond physical separation and endogamy. The gaze of caste is an outcome of the "ontological drive" (Berg 2020) that forces migrants to identify with caste superiority and practice it. While the idea of gaze in a racial context informs the struggle between racialised and non-racialised bodies, the caste context provides an additional dimension to gaze as an act of reinstating embodied prejudices.

The scholarship of Eleanor Nesbitt and Paul Ghuman makes the idea of the gaze relevant among Indian migrants in the UK. They analyse the issues of caste identity and prejudices among British-born children (Nesbitt 2004, 2005, 2009; Ghuman 2011). Nesbitt shows how religious culture and practices are passing on to younger generations through their families and religious institutions. Ghuman (2011), in his book on *British Untouchables*, explores the dimension of caste prejudices among youngsters. Drawing on Gordon Allport's psychoanalytic framework of prejudice, he analyses how peer interaction is influenced by the sense of being higher and lower in the caste ranking. "Teasing", name calling, and caste slurs are the indicators through which he observes how caste prejudices are passed on from family members and parents to their children and grandchildren. Such caste-based slurs and name calling are often treated as "I was only teasing" in regular conversation. However, they have the potential to portend severe consequences in the minds of children who are at the receiving end of caste prejudices (ibid.). The school environment in Britain provides religious education to children with the aim of exploring diversity of culture (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993). However, the curriculum concerning Indian culture and religion mainly represents popular religions while excluding marginalised religious cults such as Valmiki and Ravidasia. Nesbitt's and Ghuman's studies are important contributions to the understanding of how caste identities are reproduced among children in a school environment. Drawing on the idea of the "gaze" in everyday life, I add to their discussion while also moving beyond them by examining caste identities and humiliations as an outcome of the belief in caste.

This chapter unfolds in three steps. First, I discuss how caste prejudices manifest under the everyday gaze and ontological desire that represent an embodied perspective whereby migrants identify themselves with their caste. Drawing on Dalit narratives, I discuss how the caste gaze results in exclusion and humiliation in public and personal spaces, including temples. Second, I illustrate the phenomenon of caste in marriage and the issues of caste prejudices associated with inter-caste marriages. Here, I draw on the narratives of the families who are subject to caste humiliation and examine how caste sustains itself despite mixed marriages. Lastly, I draw on caste identities and discrimination among new (British-born) generations and the way in which the belief in caste is inculcated in their minds by their families. The question as to how the younger generation is exposed to caste identities and how they carry a sense of caste superiority will be illustrated here.

Caste – an everyday gaze and ontological desire

It was a regular Sunday morning congregation in the Valmiki temple located at Muswell Road in the town of Bedford. From a distance the temple appears to be a Victorian household building since it was constructed in one of those residential houses surrounded by other households on either side of the road. The flagpole (*nishan sahib*) erected in front of the building distinguishes the temple from the rest of the houses; it typically serves as a sign to identify the temple, especially for new visitors. Apparently, most of the Valmiki population of Bedford also resides in the neighbourhood where the temple is located. This ultimately brings the community in closer proximity – physically as well as socially. This Sunday, I had a special reason to visit the temple apart from my regular visits: to meet Ram Dhariwal who suggested I go there and talk to him about his experiences of caste as well as his involvement as an anti-caste activist in the UK.

Ram, in his forties, was born in a Valmiki (ex-untouchable) family, and his parents were one of those early emigrants who arrived in Britain in the early sixties. Like most UK-born children, Ram's worldview has also been significantly shaped amid the social and cultural environment of the community he belongs to as well as the social world outside, while growing up in a British social atmosphere. This scenario often seems to have created a dilemma, if not confusion and complication, in the minds of his generation. What social and cultural values one should subscribe to and whether one should reject customs and traditions which apparently make no appeal to one's conscious, is a question commonly faced with by Ram's generation. Ram's

formal education in a British social environment and his adoption of British (Western) values over the values and traditions that reminds him of his stigmatised caste identity (Valmiki or Churah) often pushed him into a dilemma and confusion. "... You're being discriminated against just because you're born in a lower-caste family", says Ram while recalling the instances of caste prejudice that he encountered at his workplaces. "One of the reasons I kept on shifting from one project to another" he says, "was the caste-attitudes I faced from my own colleagues whom I worked with."

Ram recalls several such experiences of working in the corporate sectors where he came across caste prejudices directly from his own colleagues. He told me that in the beginning everything seemed fine in the companies he worked with, but gradually when his colleagues learnt of his caste background, they began to keep their distance from him. Some of them even told him directly that his (Valmiki) caste and religion meant to others (caste Hindus) that he is an "untouchable".

> There was one young lady (Hindu Punjabi) in the office I worked in, in the last company. It was a Japanese firm. One afternoon we took a break for coffee, we sat down, got to talking about different things. We got to discussing that I have a different face and then she asked me, "What's your faith?". I said, "I am a Valmiki". "Oh, you're untouchable", she said to me straightaway. I said, What do you mean?" Then she kept on saying that he [Valmik] was a thief and this and that … I said, "No no... it was nothing like that," but she said it's because "Our scriptures say so ..." *Bhagvad Gita* and that sort of things! Then I asked her, "Who is your guru?" She said "Ram" and then I asked, "Whose Ram's guru?" Then she started laughing and tried to ignore the question. I told her that 'It was Rishi Valmiki who wrote the scripture (Ramayana) and that Ram emerged from that scripture". But she wouldn't believe this. And then she looked at my tattoo. [It's] a bit personal to me! Then pointing at my arm, she said, "You know, in the old days the untouchables were branded like cattle…" I got so angry, but I couldn't say, nothing! All the *gores* [the British whites] were seated over there so I kept quiet and left. But behind my back, she started telling them that I'm one of the low-caste untouchables, I'm this and that ... It bugged me for two weeks and finally I spoke to my manager. He was shocked to hear this. He said, "Well, but in the company, we can't do, nothing". Then I told him that I can't work in such an environment and eventually moved on to another project.

Ram's dark complexion, he said, has always made some people curious about his social and regional background since he is far from carrying any "Punjabi" features in his external appearance. Dark skin in the people of Punjab or even North India as a whole is quite rare irrespective of caste statuses. Therefore, one's dark or fair complexion does not necessarily disclose one's caste. A lower caste Valmiki could be as fair in his skin colour as a Punjabi Hindu or a Sikh and vice versa. The racial phenomenon on these grounds is slightly different

from caste, in that the former gives a clear indication of a person's social (or racial) belonging based on their skin colour. But in the caste context, skin colour is not the sole criterion to judge someone's caste. This makes the act of gazing even more complex rooted in the vernacular lifestyle. This is not to indicate that each caste has its own social or behavioural traits. But nonetheless, these social and behavioural traits remain significantly inherent in the construction of the "ontological self" as Hansen (2012) points out. Therefore, though judging a person under the caste gaze is complex owing to the similarities in skin complexion, social and behavioural traits remain important indicators of caste identity.

While in case of Hindus, their external appearances broadly resembles each other irrespective of their caste locations, the case of Sikh men is slightly different. Except for a few lower castes (Dalit Sikhs) including *granthis* (preachers), the practice of wearing the turban, maintaining a long beard and other sacred items is rare among Dalit Sikhs unlike the mainstream Sikhs.[42] But still, turbaned lower-caste Sikhs do not escape the caste gazes of upper-caste Sikhs irrespective of the similarities in their external appearances. Therefore, whether the former are with or without the turban, the caste gaze has its own way of categorising person into his caste location. Shukra (a pseudonym),[43] born in a Chamar family, relates an experience he recently had in a Sikh resource centre (in Southall) that he visited to avail of a manual service – to fix an artefact that belonged to his late father. When I receive Shukra, who came from central London to meet me for an interview, he first narrates the incident that had happened just before we met. He says that the service provider in the resource centre was reluctant to offer the service because of Shukra's non-turbaned appearance, which, according to him, made the service man gaze at him "not only as a non-Sikh but also as a lower caste". Pointing at the incident, he further says:

> […] You can visit any place, any shop here, but you'll be reminded that you don't belong there [the upper castes spaces]. You're not directly told that you're Chamar or you're this caste, you're that caste. But they tell you indirectly, they remind you when you don't look like them ... You don't see [caste], but you feel it... caste is not something that you see, caste is experienced. Caste is not something that you do it, caste is something that's done to you! You can't even prove that someone has discriminated against you. You simply can't! Can I go back to the old man [at the resource centre] and say, "Hey! you discriminated against me"? No, I can't. But I can feel it. I can see that he could have helped me if he wanted, but he didn't! I can't complain about that. That's

[42] Wearing the turban and maintaining a beard are part of the five sacred items to be worn by baptised or Khalsa Sikh men. These items are collectively referred to as the "Five Ks", lit. the five sacred items, namely, Kesh (uncut hair), Kara (bracelet), Kanga (comb), Kaccha (cotton underwear) and Kirpan (dagger).

[43] "Shukra" is a pseudonym used by this interlocutor of mine in an article he wrote on caste. I use the same name here with his permission.

> the way things are here... I don't know, if I had a turban on my head, probably he would have helped me!

Shukra has written an article in an edited book on caste. In that article, titled "Caste – a personal perspective", he reflects on his caste identity and the way the latter followed him in Britain when he migrated there at a young age (Shukra 2003). After almost two decades of his personal experiences of caste that he noted in the article, Shukra still finds himself in the same situation where caste prejudices and discrimination are normal in a regular lifestyle. "Cast[e]ism is stronger than it was in the early days of Indian settlement in Britain," writes Shukra (ibid.: 169). The instance he encountered at the resource centre confirms this claim, which he made almost two decades ago. This may also clarify why several people I spoke to often said: "Casteism is even worse here" (*Yaha pe to jyda hain jat-pat*)". The way caste prejudices are faced in everyday life was not imagined by many lower castes when they came to Britain (Chapter 1). But they find themselves in quite a similar position to the one they were once subject to in their native places as far as caste relations are concerned. It is clear that caste is not a part of the UK's body politic, but the way caste operates in Britain at a minute level as experienced by Shukra is common across today's generations. The above claim he made years ago bears out dynamic truth of caste prejudices in the present diasporic context. While the traditional caste-based economic dependence and hereditary occupation have certainly lost their hold over caste practices as described by the scholars who studied caste in overseas societies, the modern diasporic spaces suggest that the belief in caste superiority persists in regular life. The gaze of caste reflects precisely this persistence of caste in everyday life.

As Hansen (2012) explains, racial prejudices are internalised in the acts of gazing and being gazed at. While gazing in the racial context provides a clear indication of a person's racial background, in a caste context, gazing does not always work that way. Lower-caste bodies are not always identified or judged correctly as to their caste location based on external appearance. This is because race (or skin colour) is not the basis of caste as mentioned above. And hence, gazing as an act in a caste situation acquires additional features rooted in what Pandey (2013) calls the "vernacular" or the local prejudices (2013: 1-2). These local and regional traits are common for the people of a particular region or language. And therefore, if the external appearance fails to reveal the caste of a person, the vernacular traits often play a part in disclosing caste identity. The person is asked (by the gazer) vaguely about his/her family background, forefathers' occupation or even the temple affiliation. One of the above grounds tends to reveal the caste identity of the person in question. And in case all these criteria fail to

reveal caste, then the person is asked directly and unashamedly: "Who you are?" or "What temple do you belong to? (*Kedi gurdwara?*)". In this case, it is undoubtedly a lower caste who carries the burden of experiencing the caste humiliation of disclosing their caste.

Mrs Virdee, who was admitted in a hospital, shares her experience of confronting a high-caste woman whose interaction made it clear she intended to find out the former's caste:

> I was in a hospital bed with other people. There was a Punjabi [Hindu] woman beside me who came over and asked my name. I said, "I am Sumitra Virdee". But she did not look satisfied with that and my [sur]name probably left her with some doubts. She asked me further, "*Kedi gurdwara?'* (What temple do you belong to?)". I could see clearly what she meant by that [question] and I said to her, "Why don't you directly ask me my caste?". She felt offended and left.

Inquiring about caste through temple affiliation is a vernacular form peculiar to the Punjabi population in Britain. The belonging to a temple is essentially a caste belonging indicating a person's higher or lower caste ranking.[44] Such questioning aimed at revealing caste – either consciously or sub-consciously – is common in normal interactions in public and personal spaces. Visitors in higher-caste temples are usually of mixed caste and religious background. They participate in annual festivals as well as in daily *langar* services. However, the Ravidasi and Valmiki temples are unlikely to be visited by the high-castes – neither at annual programmes nor for the daily *langar*. In this scenario, the physical world of these communities is confined to their separate spaces marked by the temples, where the presence of the non-caste member is sensed and they are thereby gazed at as an outcaste. How the caste gaze operates on temple premises and how lower castes are confronted with caste prejudices will be explored in the following pages.

Caste and exclusion on temple premises

Lower caste experiences of visiting upper caste temples inform us that physical spaces are confined to one's own caste, even though they are seemingly open to all. Moreover, it is also clear from their narratives how caste gazes operate on temple premises, thereby excluding the lower castes from undertaking sacred tasks such as volunteering in *langar* services (cooking,

[44] One's affiliation to Ravidasi or Valmiki temples indicates one's lower caste. Similarly, the high-caste Sikh temples are identified with the titles "Singh" or "Nanak". For example – the "Gurdwara Shri Guru Singh Sabha" (Southall) or the "Nanaksar Gurdwara" (in Coventry, Wolverhampton and other places). Moreover, the "Ramgarhia gurdwara" or "Ramgarhia Sabha" clearly indicates that the temple belongs to the "Ramgarhia" (carpenter) castes.

cleaning, food distribution, etc.). Parvin, a Ravidasi from Coventry, narrates his experiences of visiting upper caste temples. To the question of how a non-turbaned person like himself is treated in upper-caste Sikh temples, he replies:

> Some people recognise that you're Chamar or you're Jatt when you go there [to Sikh temples]. It is quite easy to know [someone's] caste by looking at a person because we [Punjabis] have got special outfits [the sacred items to be worn]. I don't have a beard, so one can simply think that I'm not a Sikh. But nowadays, even the Sikh boys are shaving their beards and keeping themselves clean-shaven. ... When I go to (caste) Hindu temples, they also know that I'm not a Hindu. Sometimes, I need to visit gurdwaras to meet someone related to my work. When I go to meet people at temples, sometimes I eat *langar* there (communal food), do *mattha-tekna* and come back. The Jatts won't say anything to you personally when they notice [you] that you're Chamar. But they give you a look, as if you've come to the wrong place ... *Jati abhi tak unke dimag main baithi hai* (Caste still dwells in their minds).

Talking about his friendships with his Jatt friends, Parvin continues:

> I've got many Jatt friends. We work together, drink together, but when we meet in [their] gurdwaras they won't be that friendly [as they are in a traditional public space] ... they'll just look at me and node silently. Sometimes, they'll shake my hand and move on ... we are not friends when we are in gurdwaras. That [friendship] is only outside the gurdwaras. I believe that the [Guru] Granth Sahib is for everyone. We [Ravidasis] have our own gurdwaras because of this [caste attitudes of the upper castes]. They show you their caste mentality every time, no matter if you're [their] friend or not.

In a similar situation, an old committee member of the Ravidas temple talks about how Ravidasis in Bedford established their own temple as a result of caste discrimination. He says they would often encounter Jatt Sikhs and says:

> Earlier (in the sixties) we used to have one gurdwaras for all [both higher-caste Sikhs and Ravidasis]. It's not that the [higher-caste] Sikhs wanted to pray together with us, but at that time we needed to cooperate with each other ... I remember how they used to feel when the Chamars would join [them] for worship. There was no authority in the Chamar's hands ... All of the temple management was dominated by Jatt members. But that was the least of our problems. The main issue was their attitudes towards us. We contributed [financially] to building the temple, but soon they began to show their [caste] attitudes and that kept on troubling us. We decided finally to have our own temple. So, we Ravidasis collected money and built our first temple. This building [the temple, where we were talking] was purchased by us afterwards, when we needed more space for our activities. Now, we have no reason to go to their doors [higher-caste temples]. We have everything: our own temples, our own Gianis (priests), and our own programmes going on every day here.

Continuing the discussion from what has been said by the person above, another member of the committee joins in and says:

> Well ... we do sometimes visit Sikh temples, but it's not the same [feeling]. We don't feel like they belong to us. We don't wear turbans and we don't maintain beards, so in their eyes we aren't Sikhs. … It all shows when we sit with them in the *langar* hall or in the prayer room and the way they look at us and behave. It's not like it happens accidentally; they know who you are. Mostly we all know who's who [in terms of caste] and therefore when they look down upon us it's not accidental. But sometimes, we just ignore all this.

Another (British-born) member of the temple committee reflects upon the situation with the following details:

> We have the same Holy Book in each gurdwaras irrespective of our castes, but still we've got problems here in our daily lives. From our point of view, we don't say we are better than them just because we are willing to shake hands with them but it's not the same feeling from their side … See, what happens is, once you've got this stigma [of caste], it's an excuse for the others who could judge you by that stigma. In what way do they [high-castes] think they are better than us? Money, houses, food, drink...? What way? We earn as much as they do, sometimes even more [than them]. We've got better houses than many of them, but still, it is the stigma of caste that they carry in their head! They don't come to our gurdwaras except for a few committee members whenever they have some matters to discuss. But we don't generally get the public here. There's a difference of "feeling". We feel free here [in our own temple]. Whatever we want to do, we do it here; if we go there [to high-caste temples], we won't feel the same. That's the difference.

The above narratives indicate that at some point the lower castes tried to accommodate themselves to mainstream Sikhism at least on religious grounds, since both worship the same scripture. Visiting Sikh temples and participating in annual Sikh festivals is an effort in that direction on the part of the lower castes to set aside social differences and imagine a mutual belonging to Sikhism as one faith. The religious spaces occupied by mainstream Sikhs attract general visitors across caste and religion, especially during annual celebrations and the daily food services offered in the temples. However, such interaction, either in food service participation or at annual events, hardly provides any material basis to develop, what Ambedkar calls a "fellow-feeling" which is required for the organised living (2014: 55). Arguably, the religious doctrine of Sikhism has the potential to unite people across caste and creed, especially through communal eating and so on. But practically, the institution of *langar* is confined merely to the daily ritual of food serving rather than including the creation of fellow-feeling beyond caste and creed as it was ideally intended to do. This indicates why the lower castes within the Sikh fold continue to be discriminated against based on caste.

Caste, endogamy, and inter-caste marriages

Among other features of the re-embedding of the social, endogamy is one of the common practices that has been prevalent within the diasporic community since the beginning. While endogamy is practised as an important social custom (Ballard 1994), a considerable amount of exogamy is also prevalent, in which marriages across caste, religion, and to some extent, race occur. Upper-caste narratives on the question of caste and marriage say that the mixed marriages have destroyed caste and that the latter is no longer relevant in the UK. During my interactions with Hindu and Sikh temple authorities and priests, they pointed to the inter-caste marriages as an outcome of the weakening of caste-based relations. However, analysing the inter-caste marriage scenario from the lower-caste perspective, it reveals that caste identity still remains a decisive factor irrespective of mixed marriages. The marriage union between the lower caste and high caste is possible as a sign of the modernity experienced in the Western context. However, it is far from crossing social and cultural boundaries driven by caste hierarchy. Moreover, the pattern of inter-caste marriage suggests that such marriages and love affairs often result in creating social tensions between the families involved. This phenomenon was peculiar among the first migrant generation and their children decades ago, and has also continued in subsequent generations.

Protecting caste values in mixed marriages

In the early nineties, several local and national newspapers in Britain brought to attention the issues of caste among Indian migrants.[45] The news spoke of caste-related tensions in inter-caste marriages, love affairs, and discrimination at workplaces as well as pubs, restaurants, and temples. In some cases, it was mentioned, matters of caste resulted in caste violence and harassment, including physical and mental torture of the victim, especially in the case of inter-caste love affairs.[46] Inter-caste couples were also reported to have faced ostracisation by their own families (upper caste in this case), where the family would throw the couple out of the house and thereby cut off their social connections.

[45] *The Daily Telegraph* (Thursday, October 11, 1990) and *The Guardian* (Saturday-Sunday, May 11-12, 1991) reported several stories of caste discrimination in Britain. The newspapers highlighted several issues of caste discrimination ranging from the opposition to inter-caste marriages by the parents of couple to caste conflict and assault at work and in public spaces.

[46] The story of caste harassment followed by an inter-caste marriage was covered under the title "Caste Out" in the weekend *Guardian* (Saturday-Sunday, May 11-12, 1991).

The economic sphere, too, does not seem to be an exceptional to the functioning of caste prejudices. Lower-caste entrepreneurs are often reported to have disguised their caste identity in the fear that their businesses would suffer if their real caste was revealed in a situation where the clientele and business partners happened to be largely upper caste. In towns like Bedford, the caste conflict between the high-castes and the Chamars is seen as one of the striking features of the diasporic environment in the nineties. The instances of upper castes boycotting restaurants and pubs visited by lower castes are typical examples of such a physical divide of caste.[47]

Mr Bengarh, one of the members of the Ravidas temple in Bedford, tells of his family relations with his son's in-laws, a Brahmin family. He recalls that his daughter in law's family was opposed to the marriage. But the family had no choice but to accept the union due to fear of the law. He says one of the reasons people (upper castes) are giving their consent to inter-caste unions is because they are now aware that there are laws that protect individual choice in marriage. Recalling his son's marriage and his in-laws, Mr Bengarh says:

> Nowadays we are marrying into different castes but still there's a bit of bitterness. … If your son or daughter married an Englishman, you'd get on better with the English than with Indians. My son is married to a Brahmin girl. My daughter-in-law's father is a nice man. And he said to me on the wedding day, "Look … you're nothing to my relatives and they are nothing to you. My relatives might look down upon you, they might not speak to you, they might not like this marriage ... some of them are not happy about the marriage." He said, "You speak to them and they'll speak to you … don't expect that they will care for you! You know, it will take time for things to get better. It's my daughter marrying your son". This reminds you that you're still an outcaste within your own family.

Reflecting upon the post-wedding life of the couple and his Brahmin relatives, he continues:

> ...Nothing much changed. Our entry into each other's doors is just limited. For my daughter-in-law's family, she's their daughter but my son is not their son. He's still Chamar for them. We meet occasionally but it's just a formal meeting for a short time. That's all. Now my son and his wife live in their own house, they are both working, well settled ... they've got kids, so I think they're busy in their own lives ... that's good!

Having experienced such complex inter-caste family relations, some lower castes are now of the opinion that it is better to marry off their children within their own caste in order to avoid

[47] My interaction with Arun Kumar, Dhanpatt Rattu, and other Dalits who were active in countering the caste discrimination they came across in the town of Bedford. Arun Kumar went on to write several articles in the local newspaper. He was also interviewed by the news reporters from *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian* on the caste question in Britain in the early nineties.

humiliating family relations which tend to result from inter-caste marriages. Harish, the president of the Maharshi Valmiki Foundation, Bedford, says:

> Valmiki men who are well educated and settled marry upper-caste women, but men from upper castes are reluctant to marry Valmiki women even if they fall in love with each other. By marrying within our own caste, and moreover, marrying into an economically struggling family, we are raising the status of another family. Why should our resources go outside of our community when you can make one family better off by marrying your son or daughter into a poor family?

In this scenario, it is considered that marriage within one's own caste would help improve the family status of a girl or boy who is economically poor. This is also considered to be a community responsibility, to marry into an economically struggling family so that the family status of the latter is improved.

Continuing the narrative from Harish's point, Raj Kumar, another member of the Valmiki Foundation, says:

> There wouldn't be a problem to marry our girls into upper caste families. But we are afraid that if we marry our daughters to upper castes, they [the upper castes] wouldn't treat them respectfully. They always look down upon our girls ... it's not the same thing as a Brahmin girl marrying into a Dalit's family. We respect them [the upper caste girls] like our own daughters in our families.

It is however important to note here that the above approach to marriage discussed by the Valmikis is fundamentally different from the idea of "endogamy" that reflects the purity of caste. The former invokes social concerns for cooperation and collective growth, whereas the latter is inherently rooted in the belief in caste hierarchy. The marriage phenomenon in such a scenario remains a repository both for modern and traditional values. On the one hand, inter-caste marriages are expected to overcome traditional caste hierarchies by building community relations across castes and religions. But on the other hand, the inter-caste union, though cherished as a modern social feature, is significantly driven by caste values. It crosses the barriers of caste only as far as marriage as an act is concerned, but the family relations and social life that follow operate fundamentally within the boundaries of caste. Whether it is in the case of Mr Bengarh who shares inter-caste family relations with his Brahmin relatives or in the case of Harish and Raj Kumar who conceive of intra-marriage as a potential way to improve family conditions within their community, thereby avoiding caste humiliations that tend to result from inter-caste marriages – in either case, the onus of caste falls on the lower castes.

Caste thus survives the attempts to destroy it in the diaspora, too, despite mixed marriages across caste.

Marriage continues to manifest as a sacred institution in the diaspora despite certain changes in endogamous relations. Mixed marriages, though practised occasionally, are not well received by the family members of high castes, to whom the "perfect match" can be sought only within their own caste. Looking for the "perfect match" therefore remains a matter of family pride. This has been prevalent through matrimonial classifieds in Indian newspaper for decades and continues to this day. Along with economic status, education, physical appearance (fairness, height, etc.),[48] caste is one of the important criteria. Indeed, it is *the* decisive factor for a potential marriage union, as much in India as among migrants. In short, the un-matching of caste has always remained a great hurdle even among couples who seemed to have crossed their caste boundaries. Interestingly, at present, the world of matrimonial has expanded broadly through digital technology (matrimonial websites, etc.),[7] and even though in certain cases the caste criterion is not explicitly mentioned or it is said to not be an obstacle ("caste no bar"), the other required criteria on the profiles hint at expectations of caste belonging.

Hukum Chand is one of the first-generation Dalit migrants who came to Britain along with his parents in the late fifties. He tells the story of his late son Evean's love affair with a caste Hindu woman. The love affair continued as long as the parents of Evean's fiancée were unaware of his lower-caste identity. The day they found out his caste, they forced their daughter to reject Evean and the potential marriage deal which the couple had been planning. While showing me photographs of Evean that he had recently organised on the wall-frames, Hukum Chand tells me proudly how he had raised his son with good care and in comfort. He said he had provided him with the best schooling in Bedford Modern School and later in London University, where his son studied medicine and dentistry. Recalling his late son's love-relationship, he says:

> My eldest son had a relationship with an upper-caste (Hindu) girl. He invited her for dinner one day and they both looked happy. My son had already told her that he's from the Chamar caste and that he would like to marry her. The girl, too, was serious about their relationship as she did not care about caste barriers. But when her parents learnt that their girl had fallen for a Chamar man, they brainwashed her and forced her to change her mind about the marriage. Then she came to my son one day and told him

[48] For example – these are some of the matrimonial sites that explicitly indicate '"caste" criterion in their profile pages: https://www.matrimony.com; https://www.shaadi.com; https://www.bharatmatrimony.com/register/registerform.php etc., to mention a few (Accessed on 9 June 2021).

> that the marriage between them wouldn't work because her parents wouldn't accept him ... so it ended!

Remembering his son, Hukum Chand says further:

> People haven't yet come out of their [caste] thinking. They don't care how educated you are, what you do ... they first want to know about your caste. My son studied in the best school; he went to London University, he earned the best degrees. He was a well-settled boy and yet he couldn't marry the woman he loved just because of his caste!

Meanwhile, Hukum Chand mentioned to me that his son's story was reported in a newspaper,[49] which I found sometime later in the newspaper archives preserved by an Ambedkarite activist in Bedford. The story appeared with several other similar instances of caste problems among British Indians. When Evean and his fiancée were approached back then by a news reporter concerning the above-mentioned caste instance, Evean was quoted as saying:

> "I never really knew about the caste system until I was about 16 and my dad told me we were untouchables. I was really upset and felt very aggressive about it – there I was suddenly, at the bottom of the heap. […] when you're at university you start a relationship with people and caste doesn't come into it, or race for that matter. Indian girls go out with white boys and white girls go out with Indian boys – it just depends who you meet and get on with. But when it comes to marriage, it changes. A friend of mine is going to marry a Spanish girl and, another who is a Sikh is marrying a Muslim, and there are lot of difficulties there." (The Guardian, May 11-12, 1991)

And when his fiancée finally made up her mind not to marry Evean, she too told the news reporter:

> "In the end either it was my fiancé or my family. ... In the end we broke up as I didn't want to split-up from my family. I'm now going to marry someone from my own caste, but I hope the time my own children grow up things will be different. I don't want them to go through what I did." (ibid)

The instances of caste discrimination faced by Hukum Chand's generation are explicit and decisive in many ways. There was no question of inter-caste marriage in his generation, since the married men were reunited with their wives and children by bringing them from India to Britain, and the marriageable men imported their potential brides from within their own caste from their native places. But the subsequent generations of their children and grandchildren who were born and raised in the UK naturally adapted to the modern, cosmopolitan values of

[49] This instance is reported along with other issues of caste in *The Guardian*, May 11-12, 1991. In the report, Evean, Hukum Chand's late son, is seen in the picture with a caption bellow which reads, "PAINFUL TRUTH: Dentist Evean Chand lost his girlfriend to the caste system".

the Western culture. However, the strong hold of the family social environment kept on dictating not only the socio-cultural lifestyle of the new generation, but also their individual choices in marriages. Therefore, today, though marriages appear to be an individual choice, the new generation's social life is embedded in the belief in caste values.

Caste humiliation in the modern lifestyle: friendship, love, and caste identity

Migration is a feature of modernity. It has made it possible to transcend social relations across territories through the process of dis-embedding and re-embedding (Chapter 1). While migration helped Dalits break traditional caste relations and dependence on high-castes, caste identities and relations are reproduced in diaspora in various manners. Work sites, including the corporate sector that indicates progressive features, are not free of caste bias. In fact, caste prejudices operate in these spaces explicitly, either through non-cooperation with persons from a lower-caste background or through ignoring them upon discovering their caste identity. This scenario of caste bias is peculiar among Indian migrants, from the early years of their migration when they worked in factories, and continues in their present-day workplaces.

Harbans Lal Virdee is among those Dalits who came to the UK in the early seventies and worked in factories for several years until he established his own business in West London (Southall). Since he was an educated and hard-working young man in his twenties, the factory manager at Cardboard Box in West London offered him a supervisory position. But his co-workers who happened to be high-caste Jatts could not bear his promotion for no other reason than his lower-caste status. Harbans Lal tells me:

> When my name was displayed on the board indicating that I would be taking charge as the new supervisor in the company, the Jatts gathered and went to the manager and complained that they wouldn't work under my supervision. They told the manager that I'm lower than them and they're superior to me ... they told him that my forefathers and my (Chamar) caste's people worked under them (as landless labourers) on their farms back in India. So, I couldn't be their supervisor! The next day, the manager called me and told me about the incident, saying that some workers have a problem with my being their supervisor. He asked me whether I am still prepared to take charge of the new position. I said, 'yes', I want to be a supervisor. I took up the job. However, it turned out to be rather so difficult to work in an environment where I was continuously looked down upon by higher-caste workers. They never listened to me whenever I assigned them any task. They would pass comments on my caste and make fun of my supervisory position. Whenever I instructed them to do something at work, they either ignored my

> instructions or did just the opposite. After a while, I felt tired of working in such an atmosphere and finally left the factory.

Even though caste-based occupation in the diasporic land is out of the question, the belief in occupational hierarchy has been inherent in the consciousness of high-castes. It has been significantly well maintained ever since they landed in Britain and also passed on to the next generation. Therefore, whether it is in the case of Harbans Lal, a first-generation migrant, or British-born Dalits like Ram – in either case, caste has been an ontological drive that produces an everyday gaze that results in caste humiliation and exclusion. For migrants, even after working in a modern atmosphere and being exposed to the new social and economic world in the UK for decades, caste continues to govern their social lifestyle.

Manoj, a Dalit professional, came to the UK over a decade ago to work in the field of medicine. Being born and raised in cosmopolitan Bombay and earning a medical degree there, he worked there for several years until he moved to Britain. When I met him in 2016 during my first field visit, he gave me the impression that he had never faced caste prejudice at work, neither in Bombay or in Britain. In one of our first conversations, he even told me very firmly that:

> … Every Dalit doesn't necessarily face [caste] discrimination ... I am from Bombay, I'm in the medical profession. Most of my friends are Brahmins and I never had any [caste-related] problem with them.

Basically, he was trying to say that if a Dalit is educated and economically affluent, upper castes may well get along with him. In his case, the professional environment he worked in in Bombay was largely dominated by his upper caste co-workers, and his location as one of the professionals seemed compatible with that space. In Britain, too, he said that he started getting along with his caste Hindu colleagues without encountering any caste bias. However, when time went by and we kept on meeting frequently at his home where he would cook and invite me for dinner, several things emerged over the course of our conversation – quite different from what he had told me in the beginning about his friendship and caste experiences with his Brahmin friends. He began to recall certain instances of caste prejudice that he had once ignored but that remained in his subconscious mind. Among the instances he narrated, one was related to his caste Hindu friend. Manoj said that he shared almost two years of "good friendship" with his Brahmin friend until the latter came to know about his caste. Like several other Marathi names, Manoj's surname does not disclose his caste since it could be found among both higher and lower castes of Maharashtra. And for a non-Marathi person, almost every Marathi surname

sounds the same without giving any clue as to caste. Probably for this reason, Manoj says, his friend must have mistaken (mis-gazed) his caste:

> I never tried to disguise my caste identity from my friends and colleagues at work. I always have my [lower-caste] friends coming over and he [his Brahmin friend] didn't have any problem with that. But when he realised that I'm also one of my lower-caste friends, he suddenly changed his attitude towards me. We used to cook, eat, and drink together but when he got to know that I'm Dalit, he stopped coming over for food/drinks. One day, I met him outside in a street. I asked him, "Let's go and have some sweets in the corner shop". He looked at the shop and said, "*Kya hum Chamar ki dukan main khanyenge?* (Is it that bad that, I'll have to go and eat at a Chamar's shop?)." I felt so uneasy and awkward at that moment, but I didn't understand for a moment why he said that. I thought maybe he was joking, but later I realised he wasn't. He knew the confectionery was run by a Chamar and we usually got sweets from that shop. He never had a problem with [the shop] until he came to know about *my* caste. … That day when he acted that way, I didn't know what to say. I tried to forget it, but one thing I knew, that I felt very bad about it.

In another instance, Shail, a Valmiki woman in her thirties working in a corporate office told me how she came across caste prejudice from her own friend who was under the impression that Shail also belonged to an upper-caste (Hindu) family. While referring to a number of instances of caste discrimination among her friends and relatives, Shail narrated the incident she unexpectedly encountered with her own friend:

> As long as my colleague who was my friend [a caste Hindu woman] did not know about my caste, she was fine with me. It's been almost two years, we have been working together in the same office. One day she got to know that I'm not who she thought I was. She asked me indirectly, "Who are you...?" She was obviously hinting at my caste. When I told her that my parents are Valmiki, she suddenly changed her behaviour. From that day onwards she changed her attitude completely and began to behave as if we were never friends. We still work in same office but she's not the same. She doesn't even bother to say "Hi" ... I felt so embarrassed by her attitude that it affected my work so much. It always pops in my head that I'm lower caste and I'm not important to others.

Friendship across castes in this scenario is based on the gaze of the upper caste, who dictates that the person he/she has befriended with must be of the same caste. Such gazes are based on a premise that the given working space is exclusively dominated by their own elite castes. The presence of Dalits like Manoj or Shail is unlikely in the upper caste imagination and hence they are mis-gazed as one of the elites of a similar (caste) ranking. Manoj's Brahmin friend had no problem eating sweets from a shop owned by a Chamar or even partying with Manoj's Dalit friends, until he realised that Manoj himself is also a Dalit. Similarly, the doubt that made Shail's friend ask her directly about her caste ("Who are you?") indicates how the belief in caste governs professional relations and friendship in modern spaces. As is clear in the above

narratives, the upper caste took offence when they realised the true (caste) identity of their friends. Such offence on the part of the upper castes is not necessarily because they were given a false impression of caste identity by their (lower-caste) friends, as it was not the case in the above instances; but because their own caste gazes happened to deceive them. Assuming Manoj was one of his caste fellows, his Brahmin friend even enjoyed the company of Manoj's lower-caste friends while cherishing cosmopolitan values of progressiveness (or castelessness). Eating and drinking with lower castes is one such sign of being progressive that is cherished by urban caste elites. But when their caste-gaze fails to recognize their friend in the framework of caste, as happened in the case of Manoj's friend, their caste hatred is suddenly retrieved as a force of contempt; it is taken as an offence.

The caste prejudices and discrimination faced in urban, cosmopolitan spaces are largely not spoken of due to the fear that the victims may end up in losing their jobs. Moreover, talking about caste experiences is often uneasy because it revives the feeling of humiliation. The way Manoj felt, talking about his caste experiences in our first encounters, was also felt by many of my respondents who had been in a similar situation. It was only when the nature of my research inquiry was clear to them that they began to be friendly, considered me to be one of them, and started sharing the caste experiences they came across personally or with their friends and family members.

Caste – a cultural passing

Several scholars who studied overseas migration presumed that caste identity would fade away in the upcoming generations as a result of changes in caste (e.g. Schwartz 1967; Jain 1993). This presumption was drawn from the ongoing spread of modernity and its impact on the social and cultural lives of migrants. Moreover, the absence of caste as an occupational system in the migratory society makes one think of the potential insignificance of caste at least in the forthcoming generations. However, caste has not faded away among new generations. It has been passed on to them by their family members as well as the social context they grew up in (Nesbitt 1997; Takhar 2011; Jaspal and Takhar 2016). The question I explore here is, how does caste appear in the younger generation and how do they react to the instances of caste prejudice that they experience with their peers and college friends? Despite being born and brought up in a caste-free environment and not having directly seen the working of the caste system in the UK, the younger generations are significantly exposed to caste hierarchy, of which they are made conscious by their families (Dhanda 2009, 2013). The influence of domestic life and

religious activities has a significant bearing on the growth of youngsters (Nesbitt 2004, 2009). In the family environment, children are groomed with religious culture, exposed to popular stories being narrated to them in families.[50] Moreover, the popular "bhangra" music and the Punjabi rap songs are widely reproduced within the Punjabi culture in the UK. This musical genre is known for recreating vernacular caste slurs and lyrics that explicitly portrays "Jatt masculinity and caste dominance" (Judge 2002, 2003; Ram 2016).[51] In short, the socialisation of children is significantly driven by a religious ethos and mannerisms that inculcate caste values in them. The immediate effect of their identification with caste is name calling and caste bullying by peers in the school atmosphere.

The narratives of the younger generations and their parents suggest that most upper-caste children get their consciousness of their caste superiority from their families – whereas in case of lower caste children, the subject of caste is often avoided by their parents. The reason is that most Dalit parents think that if they keep their children away from talking about caste, they might be able to raise them in a caste-free environment. But the outcome these families face is quite the opposite: neither can they keep their children away from knowing about their caste identity, nor can they protect them from encountering caste prejudices against them. My interactions with Dalit parents reveal that their children seem to have encountered the word "caste" first in the school environment, even though the parents avoided speaking of caste in their children's presence in the family. When exposed to caste as the "lower" and the "inferior", lower-caste children are often on the receiving end of such expressions as humiliating gestures. In case of upper-caste children, they seem to have learnt of their high-caste status in their own family environment.

Monica, a high-school girl from a Brahmin family, tells me how she first came to know about caste and what she thinks of it in terms of one's superior and inferior status:

> I'm from a Brahmin family and I first heard the word "caste" in my family itself. My grandparents are so religious. My grandma wakes up and does the *puja* (prayer) every morning. Sometimes she also makes me sit with her and recite prayers. … My parents are religious, too, but I am not because I don't find [Hindu] religion attractive … it is

[50] The "Sikh Channel" broadcasts stories associated with Nanak's life. The stories are specifically made for children, to make them aware of the Sikh religion. Likewise, the stories of the Hindu epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* stories are shown through vernacular Hindu TV channels.
[51] For a reference, see this link about to "bhangra" music and caste slurs:
https://www.vice.com/en/article/ae84ma/british-bhangra-caste-feature (Accessed on 14 September 2021).

> so traditional. It's outdated. I have Sikh and Muslim friends, but we never speak about religion. In school, we've got to learn about religion and caste but not so much.

When I ask her about inter-caste love and marriage, and how she would react in a situation if she happened to meet a lower caste, she gives the following reply:

> Well! I might fall in love with a lower-caste boy, and I wouldn't mind marrying him, but my parents and grandparents wouldn't be happy with it. My brother had a Sikh girlfriend. He hid it from everyone in the family, but when my dad got to know about it, he never met that girl again ... it [the love-relation] didn't go well with my brother and he finally married another [Brahmin] woman.

In schools, pupils are often confronted with questions about their faith, language, and culture in order for schools to give them religious education and make them aware of other religions and cultures (Nesbitt 2005, 2009). While Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim identities are quite well-known in schools, Ravidasi and Valmiki identities are barely known even to the teachers. This scenario often leads the Ravidasi and Valmiki children's lower-caste status being exposed by their upper-caste peers since the latter in this case are made aware of their high-caste status in relation to lower-caste identities.[52] Such a situation, according to the parents of lower-caste children, often results in their children confronting caste-based slurs and taunts in schools.

Nowadays, Dalit parents try to educate their children on caste issues. Ram says that his daughter does not believe in the Valmiki religious ways since she does not find them appealing. However, her encounters with her schoolmates often result in the awkwardness of facing caste humiliation. Ram narrates an incident that happened when his daughter visited the family of her school friend:

> My daughter went to visit her schoolmate in a Hindu family. A lady in the family asked her what her religion was. My daughter told her that she's not religious but she's from a Valmiki family. Then the lady asked what Valmiki was and then my daughter explained about it. Then the gentleman in that family asked her what her caste was. My daughter said, "Why do you want to know my caste? 'I'm from a Valmiki family and I don't believe in caste..." And based on that people categorize you here. They look at you as Indian and categorize: are you Hindu? No! Are you Sikh? No! Then they wonder what Valmiki is about … but when they get to know about the history [of the Valmiki caste], they start keeping their distance.

These issues however are not confined to school environments and peer groups. College students and graduates from lower castes also encounter caste abuses from their Hindu and Sikh

[52] My conversation with Ram Dhariwal (November 2018).

classmates. Shubham, a medical student in Birmingham, narrates an instance of caste abuse that he came across at the beginning of his studies. Shubham, like several other young Dalits, does not identify as Valmiki. His view on his identity is that he recognises himself as coming from a Valmiki family background but does not believe in "Valmiki" as his religious identity, though culturally speaking, he participates in community celebrations of religious festivals. He narrates an incident he experienced with his upper-caste flatmate on the first day college.

> I was sharing a flat with a turbaned guy [Jatt Sikh]. When my sister and I were unpacking my stuff, my flatmate's father looked at us and said to him, "*Ye toh Churhe lag rahain hain!* (Seems like they're Churahs)". We pretended that we didn't hear him and didn't' respond to it. I felt so bad about it, but my sister and I decided not to mention this incident to my father.

Shubham says that his college friends of Indian origin are mostly caste Hindus and Sikhs, which is probably because the representation of Valmikis in higher education is low compared to any other castes, including Ravidasis (Chamars). Shubham says he is well connected with his upper-caste friends since they occasionally gather for food and drinks at his home in Bedford. However, he is also aware that whenever a topic related to caste/religion seeps into their discussion, his friends do not express their dislike for his caste or religion directly, but they subconsciously remain aware of their higher-caste status. Talking about his relationship with a caste Hindu girl, he recalls how the caste element became an obstruction between them:

> I met a Brahmin girl at my University last year. We started liking each other eventually. Meanwhile, whenever we met, we discussed our families, about our visiting plans for visiting India, etc. She asked about my mum and dad. I told her that my dad works as a postman (in the Royal Mail postal service) and my late mum was a nurse in the NHS (National Health Service). One day she messaged me on WhatsApp and asked, "I don't believe in caste but I'm just curious what caste you belong to". I was so surprised, I didn't know what to say ... I didn't say anything for a few days and then I realised that things between us wouldn't work. I messaged her back: "If you don't believe in it [caste] why ask?" We stopped seeing each other thereafter.

Unlike the older generations, the younger British-born generations distinguish their "cultural" lifestyle from their "religious" one. College and university students treat religion as a personal matter even though there is a great deal of family influence, especially when it comes to marriages and other socio-cultural practices. Culturally, they acknowledge and celebrate the diversity that British society in general offers. However, ultimately their socialisation dominates their personal choices concerning marriage, friendship, and love relationships especially in the case of high-caste adults. While the friendship, love, and marriages across castes are seen occasionally, these relations are unlikely to overcome the belief in caste

superiority. Therefore, in the case of marriage, even though exogamy is practiced to some extent, it is primarily an outcome of the modern and cosmopolitan influence of the host society; it does not overcome the ontological drive of caste inherent in regular life.

Conclusion

Caste is a basis of social and cultural identity among Indian migrants in the UK. The process of reconstruction of the social in migrant society reflects the dynamic growth of culture and religion that reinforces social identity and relationships in a hierarchical manner. The caste distinction that operated in religious spheres has now become persistent in the regular lives of migrants. Daily interactions in the public and private sphere invoke caste identity, thereby giving rise to caste prejudices and discrimination. It is the belief in caste that has become an ontological drive to practise caste and exclusion. It is an everyday "gaze" that represents an embodied perspective where social and cultural relations operate within the confines of caste. While the modern features of Western society provides space to accommodate with certain changes in the institution of marriage, these changes are far from transcending the belief in caste. Inter-caste marriage in diaspora is an outcome of modernity, but that does not reflect a change in caste attitudes. Caste has accommodated modernity. Therefore, the inter-caste marriage may cross the caste boundary, but it is unlikely to overcome the "belief" in caste that represents hierarchy and exclusion. Though the objective features of caste like traditional occupation and physical separation have no space in the diaspora, caste continues to be reproduced through scriptural beliefs that justify caste hierarchy.

Similarly, in religious domains, including the public and private spaces, where social exclusion persists through the everyday gaze that represents an embedded perspective. Ordinary interactions among migrants reveal that there is an urge to know someone's caste. As demonstrated in this chapter, it is prevalent at the workplace, including the corporate sector, where caste identities are disclosed through the act of gazing. It is the caste gaze that maintains and justifies caste distinctions in regular lifestyle. This chapter also pointed out that caste relations are also systematically transmitted to new generations. While an effort is made by Dalit parents to keep caste as a humiliating gesture from the sight of their children, it crosses their paths sooner or later in the school and college environments. The caste superiority of which high-caste children are made conscious in their own families eventually results in caste

bullying of lower-caste children. This is to say that caste is reproduced in everyday life as an organising principle and caste prejudices and discrimination are the outcome of it.

As it will be shown in the next chapter, matters of caste have led to a public debate in the UK. The issues of caste prejudices and discrimination have now been brought into a legal framework by the articulation of caste as a discriminatory ground in parliamentary debates. So far, I have shown that caste has operated as a "social logic" that represents the formation and reconstruction of caste identities and relations among migrants. I have also demonstrated the persistence of caste prejudices and discrimination in everyday life. In the next chapter I will show that caste has now become visible as a "political logic" due to the confrontation of caste in legal and human rights domains. To discuss how caste debates have appeared in the public domain as a legal and human rights concern, and what the outcomes of these legal and political interventions are, let us turn to the next chapter.

Chapter 5

The Politics of Anti-caste legislation in the UK: Caste, Politics, and Hegemony

On 22 July 2018, the British government announced that it "won't recognise caste as an aspect of race in anti-discrimination legislation".[53] The grounds upon which this decision was made relied on two specific reasons. First, that there was no adequate proof of caste discrimination in Britain ("extremely low number of cases"), and second, that there was "no agreeable definition of caste" to recognise caste as a discriminatory entity in Britain's domestic law.[54] Contrary to this decision, the studies on caste commissioned by the government itself demonstrated the growing intensity of caste prejudices and discrimination, thereby suggesting a possibility for a caste-specific law in the UK.[55] The findings of these studies were also supplemented by independent research conducted by local Dalit organisations (DSN 2006, 2011; ACDA 2009, 2016). By undermining the findings of these studies, the government not only contradicted its own actions by overlooking the findings of the report it commissioned, but also denied its binding duty to include caste "as an aspect of race" as directed in the Equality Act 2010.

The decision to withdraw anti-caste legislation was made based on a "Public Consultation" to decide whether anti-caste legislation was needed or not. However, the flaws pointed out in the formation and implication of the Consultation by academics and the legal experts ultimately

[53] The news concerning the government decision on anti-caste legislation in national and international newspapers. Some of these articles are available on: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/world/britain-backs-off-caste-discrimination-legislation/article24497401.ece;
https://thewire.in/caste/caving-to-pressure-from-hindu-groups-uk-backs-down-on-law-against-caste-discrimination. (Accessed on 3 June 2021).

[54] See the Public Consultation report (p.14) available on the government webpage: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/727790/Caste_in_Great_Britain_and_equality_law-consultation_response.pdf (Accessed on 3 June 2021).

[55] These reports are published by research institutes such as, the National Institute for Economic and Social Research (NIESR 2010) and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). Available on the following links: NIESR report: https://www.niesr.ac.uk/sites/default/files/publications/caste-discrimination.pdf.
EHRC (led by Dhanda et al. 2014, 2014a): https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/research-report-91-caste-in-britain-socio-legal-review.pdf;
https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/21278/1/92.%20Caste%20experts%20and%20stakeholder%20events.pdf (accessed on 3 June 2021).

favoured the anti-legislation discourse on caste (Waughray 2014; Waughray and Dhanda 2016; Waughray 2018). A strategic politics of denial of caste was created on the one hand by the government's unwillingness to include caste in the Equality Act 2010, and on the other hand by the anti-legislation lobbies that emerged within political and religious domains. The denial of caste is fundamentally rooted in the hegemonic articulation of caste which projects caste as a "dharmic" (religious) entity that should be kept outside the purview of legal and political intervention. The denial springs both from the political and religious spheres. On the political level, it comprises the members of the parliament of Indian origin who lobbied within their respective parties against caste-specific legislation. The denial also appeared within academic spaces, driven by a few scholars who are connected with Hindu organisations. By reproducing a debate that portrays caste as a colonial outcome that was forced on Indian communities, these few academics affiliated with Hindu organisations sided with the anti-legislation lobby while denying the presence of caste in the UK.

The denial in religious spheres emerged from the *sanatani* (orthodox) Hindu groups. In their anti-legislation campaign, they categorically denied that caste is a problem within the Indian community in the UK. Creating a propaganda stating that caste and dharma (Hinduism) are two distinct categories and that the making of anti-caste legislation would impose caste on "dharmic" community, the orthodox Hindus tried to project the Hindu community as a harmonious unit without internal differences. This rhetoric of portraying the Hindu community as homogeneous category on the one hand, and separation of Hinduism from caste on the other, helped the Hindu lobby dominate the caste discourse as they opposed any efforts to create anti-caste legislation. The Hindu lobby comprised religious fronts, a few individual academics, and parliamentarians of Indian origin supported by local British MPs and spokespersons in the House of Commons. The anti-legislation lobby was also supported by some Sikh organisations and religious fronts who opposed caste legislation. The hegemonic articulation of caste that has been dominating caste discourse in mainstream academia in India contributed to the denial of caste. Diaspora Hindus subscribed to this dominant discourse. The caste debates in the UK clearly indicates how the hegemonic discourse on caste was reproduced and how caste legislation was opposed. The British government's decision to reject anti-caste legislation largely echoed this hegemonic articulation while undermining other views of caste.

In this chapter, I examine why there has not been anti-caste legislation in Britain's domestic law and why caste has not been considered as a potential ground for protection against

discrimination. How and when did the caste issue begin to attract political attention and how did British politics respond to it? How was the caste debate dominated by the hegemonic articulation of caste in public and how was it responded to by the Dalit articulation of caste? These questions broadly cover the emergence of the caste issue in the political sphere and its contestation between two groups: one who demanded anti-caste legislation and the other who opposed it. I discuss these questions by highlighting the caste struggles led by Dalit activists and civil rights groups who have been responding to the caste question ever since the issues of caste discrimination came to public attention in the last two decades. Furthermore, I examine how these struggles proliferated when anti-caste groups and activists began to raise the caste issue in the political domain thereby demanding caste legislation. This demand was raised against the backdrop of a time when the issues of caste discrimination began to be recorded and the existing domestic laws seemed limited in capturing caste-based discrimination. This scenario ultimately heightened the caste issue in Britain's legal and political domain, resulting in a broader debate on whether anti-caste legislation is needed or not. While these debates are now settled since the government has announced that there will not be caste-specific legislation, the issue of caste as such was not settled thereby. Caste continued to be a contentious matter in politics as well as in regular life.

In recent years, caste has reached another level, attracting wider public attention in the UK. This scenario represents the "political logic" of caste. While the "social logic" shows the formation and growth of caste relations and hierarchy, the political logic indicates how caste hierarchies are confronted and questioned. On the one hand, it is the denial of caste and opposition to anti-caste legislation, and on the other hand, the confrontation of this denial that informs the political dimension of caste. The politicisation of caste has made the counterhegemonic struggles against caste explicit (Kothari 1970; Gorringe 2017). This also indicates that the "belief" in caste also continues through "political logic", where caste is denied under the hegemonic articulation of caste.

Ernesto Laclau (2005), an Argentinian political theorist, has distinguished between the concepts of social logic and political logic in his book *On Populist Reason*. He explains "social logic" as a formation of and continuity in social relations that indicates hegemonic antagonism between two classes – whereas, "political logic" tends to demonstrate how hegemonic relations are questioned and challenged (Laclau 2005: 146, 187). The political and legal debates on caste, and the anti-caste struggles led by Dalit activists, reflect on caste as a political logic. While

focusing on the political dimension of caste, my aim is to explore anti-caste struggles and analyse how the caste debate is dominated by the hegemonic articulation of caste on the one hand, and how the latter is confronted by the Dalit discourse on caste on the other. I argue that the rejection of anti-caste legislation by the British government is the manifestation of the hegemonic discourse that dominated caste debates in Westminster. In order not to upset the Hindu lobby which has a strong hold on business, politics, and economic activities, the government yielded to its articulation of caste as a private domain not to be interfered with by the government. Disguising caste as a "dharmic" identity, the Hindu lobby created an illusion of homogeneity (absence of caste), saying that the enactment of a caste-specific law would mean a deliberate imposition of caste on the Hindu community. The possibility of creating a caste-specific law was therefore projected as an offence that would hurt the religious sentiments of the Hindu community.

The disguising of caste using the pretext of religious sentiments has been a central feature of the hegemonic articulation of caste (Mosse 2020). It was prevalent during the colonial times, when caste was portrayed as a "religious" issue and that it should be kept outside of state and political intervention (Washbrook 1981; Viswanath 2010). The colonial policy of "religious neutrality" indicates how certain caste practices and beliefs remained intact even under colonial domination (Viswanath 2010: 124-125). Such non-intervention in religious matters led to the maintenance and reproduction of Brahmanical dominance within the colonial framework. Not only did social and religious practices driven by caste continue as a result of religious neutrality, but also matters of courts and the law were also determined under the scriptural rules (Washbrook 1981: 653). The colonial context suggests that caste relations operated under the policy of religious neutrality and non-intervention in domestic matters. The caste issue in the UK clearly indicates this dimension where caste is disguised as a dharmic identity, thereby denying that caste has anything to do with the Hindu dharma. This ultimately suggests non-intervention in the religious domain.

Before the dominant articulation of caste became visible in the UK, it first appeared in a UN conference on racism in Durban in 2001. There, too, a caste-specific law was opposed by the argument that the matter of caste must be dealt with internally (in India) without outside intervention. The Durban Conference remained an important event for the analysis of the dominant discourse on caste and also for its confrontation by alternative views of caste represented by Dalit activists. By juxtaposing these two contexts – Durban and the UK – I

examine how the hegemonic articulation on caste is reproduced whenever issues of caste acquire public attention nationally or internationally. I use Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) framework of "hegemony", which they explain as a "field dominated by articulated practices" (ibid.: 134). In the caste situation, these "articulated practices" are rooted in the religious aspect of caste.

In the following, I first outline caste debates in the Durban context and demonstrate how the hegemonic discourse on caste dominates international spaces and how it is reproduced in the UK. I discuss how the Durban event remained important for the Dalit struggle against caste in international spheres. Secondly, I explain how the caste issue emerged as a "political logic" in the UK's public space. I illustrate here how the demand for anti-caste legislation emerged as an outcome of caste discrimination in Britain and how it was opposed by the caste Hindu lobby which defended caste as a religious (dharmic) and cultural matter beyond state intervention. Finally, I examine caste debates concerning the UK Equality Act 2010. Here, I focus on the recently held "Public Consultation" based on which the British government rejected anti-caste legislation. I will also examine how the "political logic" of caste operated in legal and political spheres during the Public Consultation. Drawing on my participatory observation among pro- and anti-legislation campaigners, I examine how the rhetoric of "dharma" morality was used as a strategic politics for the denial of caste.

Durban – an event for the Dalit struggle against caste

It was the first time in India's post-Independence history that the caste issue was confronted outside the country on an international platform at the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR), held in the historic city of Durban, South Africa in 2001 (hence, commonly known as "Durban Conference"). This confrontation remained important for Dalits for various reasons, despite its outcome that did not favour the demands raised by Dalit activists. It provided an historic opportunity for Dalit activists to represent caste issues and forge solidarity with other oppressed communities worldwide (Thorat & Umakant 2004). Mainstream sociologists in India rejected the conceptual framework of caste and race as related systems of oppression and also opposed any efforts to compare caste with race in international spheres (e.g. Beteille 2001; Gupta 2001). The Dalit discourse, on the other hand, challenged this conventional views that treated the caste problem in isolation from other systems of oppression. Analysing caste in the context of racism, the

Dalit representatives adopted a new conceptual tool by comparing casteism and racism as related systems of oppression (Natrajan and Greenough 2009). This articulation helped the Dalit activists connect with other oppressed communities across Europe, Africa, and Asia.

The main agenda in representing caste at Durban was to bring the caste problem to the UN's attention. The hope was that the Durban Conference would be a potential ground to argue for making caste discrimination illegal in the UN charter, by articulating caste as a racial form of discrimination (Viswanathan 2001, 2001a). While the problem of caste received considerable attention in the Conference, the final outcome was that the Conference did not support the demand raised by the Dalit activists. They did not succeed in securing a reference to "caste" in any of the UN documents (Louis 2001). What remained important from Dalits' standpoint, however, was not so much the outcome of the Durban Conference but the confrontation of caste itself by exposing the nature of caste in everyday life. It helped them expose the callousness of the Indian government towards caste issues. Most importantly, the arguments put forth by Dalit activists at the Durban event provided a new analytical perspective to conceptualise the problem of caste in relation to racism, by challenging the hegemonic discourse on caste that compartmentalised caste as a geographically and analytically fixed entity (Berreman 2009). The Dalit discourse at Durban challenged the conventional approaches to caste, thereby creating an alternative space to conceptualise caste in relation to other oppressive systems, such as racism. The Durban context offered that space to exercise the alternative conceptualisation of caste.

A question emerges as to why Dalit activists sought an international platform (UN) to address caste issues despite India's caste-specific laws (the "Prevention of Atrocities Act 1989") and several other constitutional provisions ("Article 17" of the Indian Constitution) that make caste practices illegal. The Dalit representatives at Durban reflected on this question by pointing at the failure of the state machinery and judiciary and their caste bias towards victims of caste atrocities. The question of "accountability" is one of the central agendas of Dalit organisations as far as the Indian state and caste violence and atrocities against Dalits are concerned (Berg 2007). It is the "implementation" of certain laws and constitutional provisions that is not in place; not that there are no safeguarding mechanisms or caste laws to protect vulnerable sections from caste dominance. The state apparatus is not only indifferent to the Dalit situation but also party to crimes against Dalits – this is the situation that, according to Dalit activists, demanded "accountability" and "law and order" in place (ibid.). The reports and findings

presented by Dalit organisations on caste atrocities in India provided a detailed picture as to why caste issue deserve international (UN) attention. It is a well-established fact that caste is different from race, ethnicity, and other similar grounds for discrimination. And since there is no direct mention of caste as a discriminatory ground (as is the case of "race", "ethnicity", and "descent") in the international laws, it makes the problem of caste more complex when it comes to helping institutions understand it in an international domain. In this scenario, it is important to understand how the concept of caste was received at the WCAR and how it was formulated under the category of existing discriminatory grounds while it was conceptualised within the UN's anti-discrimination framework.

Making sense of caste in an international human rights context

The UN has been committed to promoting human rights for all ever since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948.[56] The UN's sub-commission, the Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), formed in 1965, has been instrumental in outlawing discrimination based on race, ethnicity, and other similar grounds. India has been one of the oldest signatories to both of these UN bodies. India signed the UDHR document in 1949 and the CERD in 1969 and became one of the early advocates of universal human rights, thereby condemning "racism" and "apartheid", at least officially (Thorat and Umakant 2004; Visvanathan 2001). Caste has received no direct mention in any of the UN documents; that makes caste a "non-race" entity. This brings caste discrimination outside the purview of "racial" discrimination as per the UN definition of "race" (Thorat and Umakant 2004: xvi).

However, the matter does not end there. The "racial discrimination" defined by the International Convention on Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) is based on grounds such as "race", "colour", "descent", and "national" or "ethnic" origin, which leaves enough scope to interpret caste as a form of "racial discrimination" based on one of these grounds, namely "descent" (ibid.). The absence of a caste-specific reference in the ICERD however was pointed out by Dalit activists before the Durban Conference. The absence of a caste-specific reference in the UN charter on the one hand, and the increasing caste atrocities and violence against Dalits as well as negligence of caste issues by the Indian state on the other, forced the Dalit activists to present their grievances using an alternative terminology which was available

[56] The webpage of the UDHR: https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights (Accessed on 20 May 2021).

within the existing provisions against "racial discrimination" (ibid: xvii). As a result, since 1996, the CERD began to recognise caste discrimination under the rubric of "descent" in Article 1 of the CERD. Referring to the caste discrimination, the CERD clarifies that:

> "The Committee states that the term 'descent' mentioned in Article 1 of the Convention does not solely refer to race. The Committee affirms that the situation of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes falls within the scope of the Convention." (Thorat and Umakant 2004: xvii)[57]

By affirming the condition of the Dalits (Scheduled Castes) under the "Convention" (ICERD), the Committee invited attention to the ongoing situation of caste atrocities and untouchability that the Dalits have been subject to. Along with the reports submitted by Dalit organisations and Human Rights Watch (HRW)[58] concerning caste violence against Dalits, the Committee's own studies on caste atrocities supported the findings of Dalit activists and organisations (Divakar 2004). This was made clear by the Committee by its further stating how caste is practised in India, for example through caste violence, atrocities including untouchability (separation in schools; prevention from using public wells, restaurants, etc.), which are still prevalent despite special anti-discrimination provisions ("Prevention of Atrocities Act 1989") and educational policies (reservations or affirmative action). In short, the Committee acknowledged that the situation of the Dalits in India fundamentally violates Article 5(f) of the Convention (Thorat and Umakant 2004: xvii-xxii).[59] This is to say that the UN's discrimination discourse was acquainted with caste as a system of discrimination prior to Durban. However, when the concern against caste discrimination was raised at the UN, it was opposed both by the Indian state and mainstream academics who argued that caste is an "internal matter" and that it should be dealt with internally without outsiders' (UN) intervention (Viswanathan 2001).

[57] The official document on the ICERD is available on the United Nation's Human Rights webpage, available here: https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cerd.aspx (Accessed on 19 May 2021). The terms- "Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes" (SCs and STs) are Indian constitutional categories. Broadly, SCs are referred to as Dalits even though not all Dalits come under the constitutional terminology that uses "SC".

[58] Human Rights Watch conducted a study on caste atrocities in India and published the results in 2001, titled: "Caste Discrimination: A Global Concern" (August 2001). This report emphasised that "caste discrimination" falls within the scope of "racial discrimination" under the category of "work and descent" stated in Article 1 of the ICERD. The report is available on this webpage: https://www.hrw.org/report/2001/08/29/caste-discrimination/global-concern (Accessed on 20 May 2021).

[59] The ICERD document can be accessed here to understand the reference to Article 5(f) of the Convention: https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cerd.aspx (Accessed on 20 May 2021).

What is the nature of the above opposition and why are efforts to make any international provisions rejected and caste considered to solely be an Indian ("internal") problem? The opinions on caste at Durban were divided into two camps: the one which argued for the inclusion of caste in the UN charter as a "racial" form of discrimination, and the other which opposed this inclusion. This opposition came from none other than leading Indian sociologists, Andre Beteille (2001, 2001a) and Dipankar Gupta (2001), and their supporters within and outside of academia. The position taken by these sociologists not only opposed the inclusion of caste in the UN document but also condemned the UN's move to considering caste as a subject of discussion on par with racism (Louis 2001; Berreman 2009). Beteille in particular rejected the conception of caste as a racial matter and also questioned Dalit activism's decision to take the caste issue outside of India. The dissatisfaction shown by Beteille (2001a) over the self-representation of the Dalits is implicit in his views on caste that he expressed in leading English newspapers against the backdrop of the Durban Conference.[60]

By claiming that caste is not a racial form of discrimination, Beteille rejected the comparison of caste and race (2001, 2001a). He took a paternalistic attitude by suggesting to the Dalits that they should pursue their own government for solutions to the problem of caste instead of seeking outside intervention. He showed his discontent with the UN's efforts to bring caste discrimination under the "race discrimination" category. What is even more surprising is that he suspected that the representation of caste at Durban was not in "good faith" because it was, according to him, driven by false motives. "There is no harm," he said, "discussing, whether inside or outside India, the discriminatory practices of caste, including untouchability ... But the discussion should be in good faith and not under false pretences" (Beteille 2001a). The language of "false pretences" or "misuse" is often used against the safeguarding mechanisms for Dalits in the legal and political context (either in the context of the "Prevention of Atrocities Act 1989" or the reservation policy). Such vocabulary also appeared during the parliamentary debates about anti-caste legislation in the UK. Such language rather has a strong hold on academic and political spheres, which reflects the hegemonic articulation of caste. Analysing

[60] The articles written in the newspapers are available here: *The Hindu* (in March 2001): https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-miscellaneous/tp-others/race-and-caste/article27921114.ece (Accessed on: 9 September, 2019).
The Times of India (in August 2001): https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/edit-page/caste-consciousness-brinitiate-an-open-discussion-in-durban/articleshow/605241584.cms (Accessed on 21 May 2021).

Beteille's take on caste during the Durban Conference with regard to his overall engagement with the caste problem, some scholars pointed at his "un-empathetic" attitude towards those oppressed by the caste system. Visvanathan (2001) pointed out the lack of empathy and compassion towards the Dalits movement and the victims of caste in Beteille's sociological theory by asking why there is not a single statement by Beteille and other sociologists of his rank, in the past or present, condemning caste atrocities and violence against Dalits (Visvanathan 2001: 3125). The position taken by Beteille was thus not only confined to Durban, but it also reflects his perception of this vital social problem in India. The anti-reservation (anti-affirmative action) stand taken by Beteille, holding on to the legacy of his predecessors and the founding figures of Indian sociology, MN Srinivas and GS Ghurye, is one important matter that indicates how the problem of caste has been dealt with by mainstream sociologists.

Making space for caste in the UN Conference

How, then, did Dalit and human rights activists go on building a case for the UN Conference at Durban despite the palpable opposition and the denial of caste and the race comparison by the Indian state and academia? What plans and strategies did the Dalit activists adopt to represent caste at the UN by confronting this opposition? There are two broad conceptualisations through which Dalit activism made its case for the Durban Conference. First, it drew on the existing UN Convention (ICERD), especially Article 1 that defines "racial discrimination" based on race, colour, ethnic and national origin, and descent.[61] It is "descent", that is the ground upon which caste as a form of racial discrimination is interpreted theoretically and conceptually (Thorat and Umakant 2004; Reddy 2005). This interpretation of caste as a racial form of discrimination has also brought out issues of (descent-based) discrimination faced by other minority communities in Africa, Asia, and Europe. For instance, the Barakumin of Japan, Osu of Nigeria, Gypsies (or Romani people) in Eastern Europe, and several other groups in South Asia who have been discriminated against based on their social origin, also represented their voices at Durban along with the Dalits (Thorat and Umakant 2004: xvi). In fact, the Dalit discourse on caste at the UN Conference provided space for the voices of the above-mentioned minorities who also unified their struggle with the Dalits to fight against oppression (Visvanathan 2001; Thorat 2009).

[61] Reference for Article 1 of the ICERD: https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cerd.aspx (Accessed on 23 May 2021).

Secondly, drawing on the historical and political debates on caste and race and juxtaposing the oppression of Dalits and the African Americans, Dalit activists adopted a comparative discourse of caste and race (Natrajan and Greenough 2009). They based their comparative approach on the Black and the Dalit movements in the USA and India respectively by invoking the historical debates and dialogues between African American leaders like W.E.B Du Bois and Dalit leaders like Dr BR Ambedkar (Omvedt 2009: 375-384). The exchange of ideas on caste and race as similar systems of oppression and how one can join and solidify the struggle of the other through the unification of the struggle against discrimination is a tactic that emanates from these historical struggles of the Blacks and the Dalits. The comparison of caste and race as systems of oppression has been an important feature of historical struggles against oppression (Omvedt 2009: 375). The Dalit representatives at Durban aimed at delineating these historical struggles so as to broaden the discrimination discourse and bring caste-like systems of oppression within the purview of the ICERD. One of the apparent consequences of this is that the post-Durban discourse on caste and race invited academic attention, in that a new pattern of comparative sociology and history emerged that began to challenge the conventional views that compartmentalised caste and race as incomparable categories (Omvedt 2009; Pandey 2013; Zene 2013). The Durban Conference was therefore not only confined to the inclusion-non-inclusion binary of caste on the UN agenda, nor did it merely invoke a question on whether caste and race could be compared or not; but it also brought the historical struggles concerning caste and racial discrimination into international attention, thereby challenging the hegemonic discourse on caste.

The context in which the Dalits prepared for the Durban event is documented by various scholars (Louis 2001; Viswanath 2001; Reddy 2005; Berg 2007, 2018a; Natrajan and Greenough 2009; Thorat and Umakant 2004). It reflects several stages, starting from building consensus among Dalit activists, intellectuals, and the public on the matter of taking caste to an international audience. Prior to Durban, there were two preparatory meetings held in Tehran and New Delhi to set the stage for the Durban Conference. These meetings were important for Dalit representatives to map out their plans for Durban (Reddy 2005). Here, they focused particularly on the question of how caste falls under the category of racial discrimination and what evidence or arguments they could produce in order to substantiate their claim of considering caste to be a racial form of discrimination. The Delhi preparatory meeting, particularly, remained crucial to bringing up the issue of caste atrocities by comparing them with racial discrimination and "apartheid". It was in the Delhi meeting that the Dalit

representatives argued that caste is also a "form of apartheid" by relating it to the plight of South Africans under the apartheid regime (ibid.: 567). Describing the condition of the ex-untouchables (Dalits) in India, where segregation and exclusion is still an everyday reality, the Dalit activists conceived of caste and untouchability as a "crime against humanity", referring to the UN's description that defines "apartheid" as a "crime against humanity" (ibid.). Despite the opposition from the Indian government, the Dalit activists built their case by broadly conceptualising caste as a racial form of discrimination and by describing the nature and magnitude of caste atrocities and violence against Dalits. The reports published by the Human Rights Watch (HRW) in 1999 and 2001 clearly stated the condition of the victims of caste and the need for "global concern" towards the issues of caste.[62]

The adoption of the universal language of human rights and justice for victims of discrimination has been explicit in the articulation of Dalit rights (Reddy 2005; Berg 2007). This is articulated by borrowing from the language of international struggles, such as the feminist discourse that affirmed "women's rights as human rights" (Reddy 2005: 560), as well as the Black movement in the USA that claimed "civil rights are human rights".[63] In a similar fashion, Dalit activists asserted that "Dalit rights are human rights", which served as the "lingua franca of the Dalit discourse" (Reddy 2005: 560). Building on the language of global human rights and universalising caste, however, is not merely confined to the Durban Conference as a political act on the part of the Dalit activists, neither is it mere a "discursive affinity of caste and race" as Deepa Reddy (ibid.: 565) suggests. The inspiration drawn from the global feminist movement or the Black movement has materialised in the form of the Dalits forming similar anti-discrimination movements. The formation of the Dalit Panther movement in the early seventies in India was inspired by the Black Panther movement, and the struggle of the African American is an example of how the language of universal rights is borrowed and materialised in the Dalit articulation of human rights in order to universalise the struggle against oppression.

It is in this context that the comparison of caste and race is articulated in the Dalit discourse on caste. It is not aimed at considering caste and race as being literally similar systems, but rather at conceptualising the two oppressions with common terminology so as to broaden the struggle

[62] The report published in 2001 by Human Rights Watch gives a brief idea about how caste discrimination persists in India and why it is necessary that the global community should pay attention at it. Available here: https://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/globalcaste/caste0801.pdf (Accessed on 23 May 2021).

[63] One of the examples of Dalit activism drawing its inspiration from the "civil rights movements" is here: https://www.facinghistory.org/universal-declaration-human-rights/civil-rights-human-rights (Accessed on 2 June 2021).

against oppression. The scholarship on caste reflects a comparison on conceptual grounds that indicates how caste needs to be understood in relation to race and also beyond India. Scholars such as Prakash Louis (2001), Shiv Viswanathan (2001, 2001a), Kancha Ilaiah (2001), Dag-Erik Berg (2007), Balmurli Natrajan and Paul Greenough (2009), Gail Omvedt (2009), Gopal Guru (2009), Vivek Kumar (2004, 2009) and recently, Gyanendra Pandey (2013) and Cosimo Zene (2013), have stressed the comparative aspect of caste and race by juxtaposing these terms in order to understand the caste question in a broader context. Some exceptions to this juxtaposition are Louis Dumont (1980), who confines caste to Indian territory, and Andre Beteille (2001), who rejects the analysis that caste is a matter of race. The Indian government subscribes to the latter's view while also claiming that caste as is an "internal" issue. Despite this opposition and limited approaches to caste, the Durban event paved the way for an understanding of caste from alternative perspectives. The juxtaposition of caste and race broadened the conceptual understanding of caste, thereby confronting the conventional and hegemonic articulation of caste.

Anti-caste legislation: history, debates, and outcomes

The issues of caste existed among migrants since they arrived in the UK, but caste became a political matter only during the last two decades. Caste operated as a "social logic" through the formation and reproduction of social practices and became visible as a "political logic" when it began to question in the public domain. In this section, I return to the central question of this chapter: why there is no anti-caste legislation in the UK. Over the last two decades, Dalit organisations in Britain have been campaigning against caste discrimination by stressing the importance of legal measures to tackle caste discrimination in the UK. Ever since the enactment of the Equality Act 2010, the caste issue has gained momentum because the Act provided certain grounds for bringing caste into the anti-discrimination framework. Particularly, the section 9(5)(a), an enabling provision in the Equality Act 2010, provided grounds to recognise caste discrimination by making caste as "an aspect of race" (Waughray and Dhanda 2016: 178). The enactment of the Equality Act 2010 therefore remained a crucial ground for anti-caste activists to raise their demand for anti-caste legislation.

This scenario sparked a public debate that continued over several years, right from the enactment of the Equality Act 2010 to the recent exploration of anti-caste legislation through a Public Consultation in 2018. Ever since the demand for anti-caste legislation was made by Dalit

activists and civil rights groups, it faced stringent opposition by the Hindu lobby. Prakash Shah, a legal academic and co-director of Dharmic Ideas Policy Foundation, is one of a few academics affiliated with Hindu organisations in Britain; he brought back an old debate by arguing that caste is a "colonial" outcome (Shah 2015). He criticised anti-caste legislation as a conspiracy by Christian missionaries to convert the lower castes and bring them into their fold. Similarly, other academic opponents like Bhikhu Parekh questioned the intention of the legislation, thinking that it might be "misused" because there would be "frivolous complains" of caste discrimination (Dhanda 2015: 41). These anti-legislation rhetoric was eventually transmitted to the general public, who were persuaded to form an anti-legislation opinion.

Politicisation of caste by Dalit activists – a historical glance

The presence of Dalit activism in Britain goes back to Dalit migrants' arrival in the fifties and sixties (Chapter 1 and 6). During the early years of their arrival their activism was mostly confined to religious organisations and temples. In fact, the temple as a spatial entity played a vital role in social as well as political activism for the diasporic community (Chapter 3). However, over the last two decades, the growth of Dalit organisations has taken activism to a different level, in that the issues of caste have become central to addressing caste prejudices and discrimination in public spaces. Caste as a "social logic" that was visible through the production and reproduction of the social; it now began to appear as a "political logic" which confronted caste legally and politically. The politicisation of caste also operated through anti-caste protests and demonstrations held in London. This helped the Dalits influence public opinion in their favour and also obtain support from the liberal politicians and civil rights groups. Politicians like Jeremy Corbyn, the leader of the Labour Party, supported the anti-caste activities while participating in public rallies and discussions organised by Dalits in 2015. His involvement in the caste issue led to him serving a Dalit organisation (DSN) in the capacity of a trustee.[64] Lord Harries, a crossbencher MP and a former bishop of Oxford, was one of the supporters who represented Dalits' demand for anti-caste legislation in the parliament. This scenario indicates the issue of caste drew political attention from British politicians who articulated the need for an anti-caste legislation.

[64] Some of the leading newspapers in India made coverage for Corbyn's involvement in caste and his association with the Dalit fronts like DSN-UK. See details: https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/jeremy-corbyn-a-sympathiser-of-dalits-and-critic-of-communalism/article7646087.ece; https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/national/jeremy-corbyn-win-may-push-uk-caste-bias-law/article7587341.ece (Accessed on 2 June 2021).

Central to the political agenda of British Dalit activism are "Dalit rights" (Waughray and Thiara 2013: 120). The emergence of Dalit organisations such as the International Dalit Solidarity Network UK (IDSN-UK) in 1998, Voice of Dalit International (VODI) in 1999, CasteWatch UK in 2004, and the Anti Caste Discrimination Alliance (ACDA) in 2008 centred around articulating the idea of "Dalit rights" in the context of the broader human rights framework (ibid.). Along with participating in caste discourse in public and intellectual spaces (universities), some of these organisations are also "committed to the developmental activities towards the poor and marginalised sections in India", says Eugene Culas, the Director of VODI.[65] Some of the platforms through which caste was brought to the public attention were mass meetings, conferences, and the publication of the reports written by Dalit organisations. These studies demonstrate the persistence of caste in South Asia in general and Britain in particular. VODI, for instance, organised an international conference on "Dalit human rights" in London and published a report (VODI 2000)[66]. Moreover, DSN conducted a survey on caste discrimination and published its report, which remained a basis for arguments for the need for an anti-caste legislation as a response to the persistence of caste discrimination in public domains, such as workplaces, religious spaces, the public health system, education, and so on (DSN 2006: 10-16).[67] The DSN report from 2006, titled "No Escape: Caste Discrimination in the UK", was the first study of its kind that recorded matters of caste discrimination in public and private life. Satpal Muman, the co-founder and chairman of CasteWatch UK, tells me that "we have adopted every possible means to make this [caste campaign] visible so that we can tell the government why anti-caste legislation is needed in this country".[68] Following reports published by ACDA (2009) and the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR 2010), matters of caste discrimination were further stressed in public and private spaces. Dalit activists articulated their concerns for anti-caste legislation by politicising of caste through mass campaigning and also by subsequently creating awareness on caste through independent studies and seminars.

[65] My interview with Eugene Culas (June 2016).
[66] The news concerning the report is available here: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1191/0969733002ne502xx (Accessed on 2 June 2021).
[67] The report is available on: http://www.dalits.nl/pdf/noescape.pdf (Accessed on 25 May 2021).
[68] My interaction with Satpal Muman (April 2016). Recently he was invited to a webinar on "fighting caste discrimination in the UK" by the London School of Economics (LSE collectives). Link available on: https://decolonisinglse.wordpress.com/2020/10/07/fighting-caste-discrimination-in-the-uk-a-conversation-with-satpal-muman/ (Accessed on 25 May 2021).

Disavowal and disproval – caste and UK politics

An important question here is: what makes the demand for anti-caste legislation in British law possible? The Equality Act defines discrimination based on nine protected categories, which include, "race", age, sex, religion, etc.[69] The category of "race" is further defined broadly as consisting of colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origin, and hence it provides scope to consider caste broadly as "an aspect of race".[70] Caste is not explicitly mentioned as one of the protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010. However, the Act gives the government the power to amend the definition of "race" in section 9 of the Act to make caste "an aspect of race" (Waughray and Thiara 2013: 120). It is this particular potential to bring caste discrimination under the umbrella of racial discrimination in the Equality Act that was contested throughout public debates on the issue. As a consequence, public opinion was divided about the consideration of caste as "an aspect of race". This scenario reflects the caste debates at Durban in 2001, where the comparison of caste and race met with strenuous opposition by the Indian state and mainstream academics. What is important to underline is that the hegemonic discourse on caste that dominated at Durban was also reproduced in the UK.

The scholarship that emerged during the caste debates in British politics show the callousness of the incumbent government which did not act upon the matter (Dhanda 2015; Waughray and Dhanda 2016; Waughray 2018). While the Equality Act obliged the government to include caste as "an aspect of race", it did not act upon this immediately and kept delaying the matter by stating that there is no clear evidence of caste discrimination in the UK. The coalition government (then led by the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats) seemed reluctant from the beginning, claiming that there was no "strong evidence" to support the explicit mention of caste in the Equality Act (Waughray 2009; ibid.). This also meant that the government did not take into account the studies published by Dalit organisations and other research institutions that pointed to caste discrimination in the UK. What was even more surprising was that it did not consider its own reports which were aimed at discovering the nature of caste discrimination. In September 2013, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) launched an independent research project led by an academic team. The main objective of the research was

[69] See Part 2, Chapter 1 of the Equality Act 2010 which defines "protected characteristics" such as age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The detailed Equality Act 2010: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents (Accessed on 25 May 2021).
[70] For further reference to "race" in the Equality Act 2010: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/9 (Accessed on 25 May 2021).

to establish "baseline data" to determine the extent of caste discrimination in the UK (Waughray and Dhanda 2016: 178). The research team published two reports by Dhanda et al. (2014 and 2014a) that analysed the existing legal framework of British law as well international law vis-à-vis caste discrimination. These studies suggested that the proper way to tackle caste discrimination in a judicious manner was to "name caste as a fifth subset of race" (Dhanda et al. 2014: 36), alongside the existing four subsets, namely, colour, nationality, and ethnic and national origins. Despite the studies suggesting a pathway for how to proceed with legislation to include caste as a protected category in the Equality Act, the government did not consider the findings and suggestions of these reports. On the contrary, it undermined the studies by stating that such research could be "intrusive and damaging to community relations" (Waughray and Dhanda 2016: 178). Basically, the language the government used to deny anti-caste legislation echoed the language of the Hindu lobby which had become a dominant voice in the British parliament at the time. In the coalition government (2010-2015), therefore, no substantive step was taken towards introducing anti-caste legislation as directed in the Equality Act. Instead, the government yielded to the hegemonic articulations of caste that denied caste discrimination while opposing anti-caste legislation.

Meanwhile in April 2013 there was another important development concerning caste in the UK. The British parliament passed a bill which ordered the government to "provide for caste to be an aspect of race" in the equality Act of 2010.[71] The resolution was moved by Lord Harries, the crossbencher and former bishop of Oxford, and received 225 votes against 153 in the House of Commons.[72] Despite significant opposition from within the coalition government, the bill was supported by a few Liberal Democrats like Lord Avebury and former Tory ministers like John Gummer. Due to passing of this bill, the "power" given to the government to include caste as an aspect of race in the Equality Act 9(5)(a) was converted into a "duty" as per section 97 of the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013 (ERRA). This made it obligatory for the government to introduce secondary legislation to include caste as "an aspect of race" (Waughray and Dhanda 2016). This guideline of the ERRA however did not clarify how the government was to proceed in order to execute the intended legislative duty (Waughray 2014). The coalition government established a timeline for the introduction of the secondary

[71] The news concerning the British Parliament's decision on outlawing caste discrimination was published in certain leading newspapers such as *The Guardian*: https://www.theguardian.com/law/2013/mar/05/caste-discrimination-outlawed-lords (Accessed on 25 May 2021).
[72] For details see the news: https://www.theguardian.com/law/2013/mar/05/caste-discrimination-outlawed-lords (Accessed on 26 May 2021).

legislation which was to add caste to the aspect of race listed in the Equality Act.[73] However, the timeline overlapped with the upcoming general elections in May 2015. This also meant that no conclusive step could be taken until the election was over and the new government was set in office. The procedure directed by the ERRA to add caste to the Equality Act kept on being delayed for two years after the formation of the new government in 2015. It was only in March 2017 that the new government launched a "Public Consultation" to make a final decision on anti-caste legislation.

The "Public Consultation" and its aftermath

From the enactment of the Equality Act 2010 to the launching of the Public Consultation in March 2017, there was no substantive step taken to make caste discrimination illegal in British law. The Consultation was followed by the withdrawal of the proposed anti-caste legislation in a dramatic manner due to its controversial nature and the way the public responded. The very reason for which section 9(5)(a) had been added to the Equality Act 2010 was diverted by the government's unwillingness to make the statutory provision for caste discrimination in the Equality Act on the other hand, and by the opposition to it spearheaded by the Hindu lobby on the other. The government was supposed to make caste "an aspect of race" as a protective measure against caste discrimination in the Equality Act (Waughray 2014). However, the opposition levelled against the legislation subverted the basis of the above section by asking "whether caste is required to be an aspect of race in the Equality Act"[74] instead of making explicit "how to introduce anti-caste legislation in the Equality Act" (Waughray 2018: 23).

The Consultation mainly stressed two options for its respondents from the public. It asked respondents whether they would prefer to include caste in the category of "ethnic origins" by "relying on emerging case law" or whether they would like caste to be mentioned explicitly "as an aspect of race" in the Equality Act (Waughray 2018: 22).[75] The "case law" option was emphasised by the government, which insisted on its position that caste discrimination could be dealt with within the existing legal framework, that is, within the category of "ethnic origins"

[73] The legislation timeline detail is available here on the UK government website: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/caste-discrimination-legislation-timetable (Accessed on 26 May 2021).

[74] See page 3 of the Consultation guidelines. The document is available on the UK government webpage: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/609641/170419_-_Caste_condoc_-_Final.pdf (Accessed on 26 May 2021).

[75] Also see the details of the Public Consultation documents, especially the "consultation response" report July 2018: 8-11). Available on: https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/caste-in-great-britain-and-equality-law-a-public-consulation (Accessed on 26 May 2021).

which was an aspect of race defined in the Equality Act. This claim was further stressed using a decisive judgement in a court case which appeared before the Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT) in 2014 (*Tirkey vs Chandok*). In the *Tirkey* case, the court came to an agreement that the existing laws were adequate to tackle caste-based discrimination using the criterion of "ethnic origins", since the above case, which concerned caste discrimination, succeeded in claiming caste discrimination under the existing provisions for race in the Equality Act. While section 97 of the ERRA, amended in 2013, stated that it was the government's "duty" to add caste to the aspect of race listed in section 9(5)(a) of the Equality Act, the government ignored this duty by claiming, in the light of the *Tirkey* case, that:

> "... the subsequent judgment of an Employment Appeal Tribunal [EAT] in the Tirkey v Chandhok case in 2014 established that many of the facts relevant in considering caste in many of its forms might be equally capable of being considered *as part of a person's ethnic origins, which is already part of the existing race provisions within the Act*." (emphasis added)[76]

Therefore, while launching the Public Consultation, the government sought "case-law" as a potential remedy to deal with caste discrimination without any reference being made to caste in the Equality Act. That meant that the government need not act to make anti-caste legislation as directed in section 9(5) of the Equality Act if the "case-law" option was chosen by the majority in the Consultation. Not only did the government ignore the "duty" enacted in the 2013 amendment to section 9(5)(a) of the Equality Act, but it also undermined the efforts to deal with the caste problem in the UK. The Dalit activists and experts who supported anti-caste legislation showed their dissatisfaction with the Consultation for the reason mentioned above. During the Public Consultation, Dalit activists often expressed their concerns that the Consultation was not necessarily about introducing anti-caste legislation and that "case law" is not a convenient way to approach courts, especially from the victim's point of view.

The questions dealing with the "case law" option in the Consultation document asked respondents whether the "protection against discrimination on grounds of ethnic origin provides an appropriate level of protection against caste discrimination", and what could be the advantages and disadvantages of case law (questions 1 to 5). I attended public meetings

[76] The Consultation report (Introduction, p.3). Available on: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/727790/Caste_in_Great_Britain_and_equality_law-consultation_response.pdf (Accessed on 26 May 2021).

concerning the legislation with a Dalit activist, Arun Kumar. He replied to the above question by citing the document[77] which he prepared as a "guidance note":

> "There is no guarantee that case law will develop in the desired direction, or at all, to fully protect individuals who are affected by caste discrimination. I believe that caste-based discrimination should be explicitly added to the Equality Act, as this is much more effective at guarding against caste-based discrimination, instead of leaving protection to an uncertain future through any development of case law. Caste must be clearly added to the legislation to ensure everyone is aware that caste-based discrimination is wrong."

To the question on the advantages and disadvantages of "case law", he reflected while hinting at its disadvantages:

> "There is no guarantee that case law will develop to recognise that caste is covered by existing law and that discrimination on the grounds of caste is unlawful. This uncertainty makes bringing a claim expensive, stressful and uncertain. These burdens are likely to be reduced if caste is simply inserted into the Equality Act 2010."

While the major opposition to "anti-caste legislation" preferred "case law" option as suggested by the outcome of the Consultation, orthodox Hindus rejected both the options by denying caste in Britain. According to them, to choose the "case law" option is to consider that there is caste discrimination, and since they denied the existence of caste, they rejected any legal protection against caste discrimination. This also suggests that the Hindu groups were also discontented with the issues of the Public Consultation as it was based on the premise of the existence of caste, which they denied categorically. However, the reasons behind their discontent were fundamentally different from those of the Dalits. The Dalits expected to have special legal provisions to respond to caste discrimination, whereas their Hindu counterparts opposed any such legal provision by denying the presence of caste in the UK.

The *Tirkey* case has indicated that despite the absence of caste-specific legislation, caste discrimination could be brought under existing law, albeit in rare cases. It was arguably the first successful case to prove caste discrimination as per the "ethnic origin" category within the existing law. The *Tirkey* case was exceptional due to the victim's social background and the nature of (caste) discrimination itself. The victim hailed from a tribal community and served as

[77] The "guidance note" prepared by Arun Kumar was designed to help the public to complete the Consultation questionnaire and was circulated via emails, mostly among Dalit students, activists, and scholars.

a domestic worker in an upper-caste family. The discrimination and harassment that this person faced captured the violation of labour laws and her tribal (ethnic) background made the reason for the discrimination visible. However, this case "does not resolve the question of whether, in principle, caste falls within the scope of race in the EA [Equality Act 2010] as currently worded" (Waughray and Dhanda 2016: 179). The precedent set by the Tirkey case for considering caste as an aspect of race in the Equality Act under the "ethnic origins" category is significant, but "not decisive and … it remains incumbent on government to extend the Equality Act to cover caste" (ibid.: 177). Overall, "case law" remains a limited approach to recognising caste discrimination and hence is inefficient in tackling caste discrimination for that very reason.

The politics of denial

The Public Consultation launched by the UK government and its outcome were decisive in repealing the provision against caste discrimination in the Equality Act. While the Consultation was the turning point in the rejection of anti-caste legislation, it is important to understand the way in which the Consultation operated. One question that comes up is how the public responded to the Consultation and what was happening on the ground when it reached to the people. In fact, one wonders how it reached the public given its inconvenient wording and technical language, and also its incomprehensibility to the first-generation migrants who happened to be illiterate for the English language. Since it was launched online, its access was limited mostly to an educated few. In this context, the question arises as to how activists and volunteers from different organisations on either side – those who supported and opposed the legislation – reached out to the public and how they influenced public opinion in their favour by informing, (mis)informing, and manipulating the facts concerning caste. In this section, I illustrate how the anti-legislation lobby created propaganda and fabricated the facts concerning caste. On the one hand, the opposition lobby targeted religious communities (temples) and delivered their rhetoric about Hindu dharma and caste by projecting anti-caste legislation as a threat to the "dharmic" community. Creating the illusion that the dharma is "all-inclusive" (homogeneous) and that caste was forced upon the dharmic community by way of public debate (the Public Consultation), the opposition lobby succeeded in persuading the public that their propaganda was the truth.

During the Public Consultation period (28 March – 18 September 2017), I travelled back and forth between the towns of Bedford, Coventry, Southall, and Wolverhampton and participated in the meetings and talks organised in temples by the anti- and the pro-caste legislation campaigners. Hindu organisations and Dalit activists mobilised their own communities while also targeting the general public to influence opinions in their favour. The main locations where they targeted the public were temples and religious centres, especially during weekend gatherings. Meanwhile, the daily filling of the Consultation form continued in public spaces, on streets, in markets, and at cultural and political programmes including the celebration of Independence Day. The Consultation was launched online on a government webpage,[78] and hence the method of responding to it varied due to technical as well as practical issues. It disregarded the majority of South Asian migrants (first-generation migrants), who are barely acquainted with the English language, let alone the technical and legal knowledge that the Consultation document required. Due to this obvious reason, it needed experts and activists who could decipher the meaning and purpose of the Consultation. It was in this context that Consultation campaigners from various religious organisations and social and political fronts approached the public, either in favour of the legislation or in opposition to it, depending on their respective stands.

Hindu and Sikh opposition to anti-caste legislation

The major opposition to the legislation was spearheaded by Hindu groups and organisations along with a significant number from the Jain and Sikh community (Waughray 2018). The opposition was divided into two factions: one who opposed anti-caste legislation in favour of the "case law" option, and the other who rejected both the legislative as well as the "case law" routes, the latter consisting especially of Hindu groups. Their reason for the rejection of both routes was clear throughout their campaign during the Consultation.[79] "There is no evidence of

[78] During the consultation period, the online link was sent to people through text messages, on social media as well as through emails. I received the following link from a Dalit activist on 27 July 2017 along with several other members in an email list who were mostly Dalit scholars (MA, PhD students) as well as local Dalit organisation members:
https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/caste-in-great-britain-and-equality-law-a-public-consulation (Accessed on 25 May 2021).

[79] The Public Consultation document was divided into two sets of questions. The first set of questions comprised of five questions concerning "prohibiting caste discrimination through developing case law", and "prohibition of caste discrimination by specifying caste in the Equality Act". The second set comprises of four of questions. The question number 10 asks "Which is your preferred option to tackle caste discrimination?" to which the Hindus preferred the "other" option, rejecting both the case law and the anti-caste legislation option. For details, see the Consultation document here:

the existence of this thing called Caste nor of discrimination based on caste in Britain," claimed the volunteers of the Hindu Forum UK, in its Consultation copy being circulating for signatures in a public gathering in Southall (West London).

The opposition that sprang from the Sikhs and other minority populations like Jains broadly subscribed to the views of caste held by the Hindus, that there is no caste in Britain. A significant number of Sikhs, who recognised the caste problem in the UK but did not see the necessity of anti-caste legislation, opted for the "case law" option (Waughray 2018). This meant that they were broadly in agreement with the government's opinion that caste discrimination could be tackled by the existing laws. Since there is no religion-wise data available in the final response of the Consultation report, it is difficult to say exactly how many Sikhs opposed and how many favoured anti-caste legislation. But nonetheless, during the Consultation campaign, the responses I received from Sikh organisations and religious fronts in Southall, Bedford, and Coventry reveal that a significant number of Sikhs supported the Dalit campaign to include caste in the Equality Act. There is a political dimension as to why the Sikhs supported anti-caste legislation. As observed by Waughray, the Sikhs suspected a "Hindutva agenda" behind the opposition to anti-caste legislation and therefore they favoured the Dalits rather than the *sanatani* Hindus in the matter of anti-caste legislation (Waughray 2018: 23).[80] This indicates that even though caste discrimination was recognised by Sikhs, they opposed it only politically by supporting the legislation, because for them the "Hindutva agenda" was detrimental to their own socio-cultural and religious interests. In short, the Sikhs in general recognised caste under the law, but they were unwilling to have it tackled in everyday life.

Based on the Public Consultation survey, which was launched online between 28 March and 18 September 2017, the government decided not to make anti-caste legislation. This decision was made based on the majority of responses that preferred the "case law" option to "anti-caste legislation". Since the outcome was relied on the numerical strength of the responses, it is worth understanding the nature of all the responses and their size and ratio in relation to the total (British South Asian) population from which these responses were gathered. The total responses the Consultation received numbered 16,138, of which over half preferred the "case

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/609641/170419_-_Caste_condoc_-_Final.pdf (Accessed on 30 May 2021).

[80] See Waughray (2018: 23), footnote 6 in which she explains based on her personal conversation with a scholar how certain Sikh groups suspected a Hindutva agenda behind the opposition of anti-caste legislation by the Hindu groups.

law" route and around one-fourth of them rejected both the routes, while the one-fifth chosen the anti-caste legislation option.[81] According to the 2001 census, British South Asians numbered over 2.3 million, of which over 1 million were of Indian origin.[82] That means the total responses (16,138) received for the Consultation were less than 1 percent (0.7 percent) of the total South Asian population and less than 2 percent (1.6 percent) of the total population of British Indians. This suggests that the (numerical) basis upon which the government made its final decision on the legislation was methodologically flawed as it was based on a tiny proportion of the population while it disregarded a vast number who was barely aware of the Consultation and its intended aim. However, these technical and methodological limitations of the Consultation apart, what made it a dramatic episode was the way in which the opposition lobby manipulated facts about caste and the Consultation.

Propaganda, rhetoric, and misinformation

During my field work in Coventry (in June 2017), I met volunteers from the "Hindu Forum Britain"[83] at the "Hindu Mandir (temple)" located at Stoney Stanton Road. The town of Coventry represents several Hindu associations from the *sanatani* to the progressive fronts, as claimed by their respective temple authorities. During my visit to the temple, I was already informed about the volunteers' visit by Ram Prashar, one of the founding members of the Hindu Mandir, whom I had interviewed in the previous year during my first visit to the town. The volunteers of the Hindu Forum carried with them a bundle of printed copies of the Consultation document. One of them addressed the congregation, stating the purpose behind filling the Consultation forms, why it was needed, and so on. The volunteer also mentioned that so far, his team has received a "good response" from other places (Hindu temples). Further, he went on to talk about caste, saying that that "there is no caste in Britain" and that "the anti-caste legislation should be opposed because it is against the dharmic community". Posing a question (in Hindi, since he was Gujarati and the congregants were all Punjabi speakers) to the congregants, he continued, "Do you think there's a caste problem here?" Everyone stayed

[81] See the Consultation response document (page 6) available on: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/727790/Caste_in_Great_Britain_and_equality_law-consultation_response.pdf (Accessed on 29 May 2021).

[82] "Britain's South Asian population numbers over 2.3 million including almost one million Muslims of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin and over one million people of Indian origin, of whom 467,000 are Hindu and 301,000 are Sikh" (Waughray 2009: 185). See also footnote 25 in the same quote.

[83] The Hindu Forum Britain claims to have over 300 organisations and associates of Hindu organisations in Britain. For details see the webpage: http://www.hfb.org.uk (Accessed on 2 June 2021).

silent, and expecting the prompt replies to his question from the congregants, supposedly in the negative, he went on to say that:

> We don't believe in caste ... there's no caste in our [Hindu] dharma. It is a conspiracy of the Dalit and Christian organisations who are trying to destroy our dharma. They're spreading false views of our religion ... they're trying to take over our temples by spreading rumours about caste [discrimination]. If we don't oppose this, our dharma will be in trouble!

When the congregation dispersed for the communal meal (*prasad*), the volunteers placed some chairs at the entrance of the temple where they started filling out the printed forms of the Consultation that they carried with them. One of them handed me dozens of copies and instructed me on how to fill them. Basically, he told me what to fill in for each question myself while only collecting the personal details of the respondents. During the whole process of filling those documents, only personal details (name, address, email, telephone) were collected and the rest of the questionnaire was filled in by the volunteers themselves, including myself as I was instructed. In every copy we were filling in, "Strongly Disagree" was already ticked in answer to the main two objective-type questions, which asked whether one was in favour of or against protection from caste discrimination, either through "case law" or "anti-caste legislation". The final part of the questionnaire asked what option the respondent thought was convenient in tackling caste discrimination: "case law" or the inclusion of caste "as an aspect of race" in the Equality Act. The volunteers had already marked that option, too, by indicating the "Other" option – meaning the respondent wished to reject both of the above routes. This is to say that the main part of the Consultation copies was already filled out decisively (as the answers which were ticked indicated the rejection of any provision against caste discrimination).

When I asked the volunteer who addressed the congregation, why they opposed both the "case law" and "anti-caste legislation" routes, his reply echoed the rhetoric concerning caste which has already been spelled out by the opponents of anti-caste legislation, including a few academics and ministers in the parliament.

> Caste is a foreign word. It doesn't exist in our religion. Making a caste law is baseless ... we don't have any evidence of caste discrimination. Through this [Consultation] the government is trying to impose caste on us and divide the Indian community.

While addressing the congregation, he had also made remarks concerning caste as a "colonial imposition", saying that the word "caste" is foreign to the Hindu religion and making a caste-related law would lead to division among Hindus. During the parliamentary debates on this issue, such arguments were put forth by opponents of the anti-caste legislation. Lord Bhikhu Parekh, for instance, opposed anti-caste legislation by saying that "there will be frivolous complaints based on caste" if anti-caste legislation was made (Dhanda 2015: 40-41). The academic Prakash Shah (2015) wrote a hundred-page book repeating the rhetoric about caste being an "orientalist" creation. He criticised the Christian organisations for their support for anti-caste legislation, saying it was a conspiracy to convert Dalits into their fold (Shah 2015: 14-43). Reviewers of his book found his criticism and opinions baseless and biased in favour of the opposition lobby. [84]

While the volunteers from Hindu organisations managed to collect responses from the people, the latter did not necessarily support the views of caste expressed by the former. Some people in the temple even seemed surprised by the remark made by the volunteer when he addressed the gathering" "... they're trying to take over our temples by spreading rumours about caste." This was beyond comprehension for many who did not much bother to engage much in conversation with the volunteer, besides providing their personal details for the Consultation document. While eating the communal meal at the temple, I asked a woman if she had ever come across caste and whether it was wrong to have a law against caste discrimination. She replied that "*Jat-pat to yaha pe bhi kam nahi hain* (There's no less casteism here either) … What's wrong if any law (*kanoon*) is made against it?" The opposition lobby certainly succeeded in collecting the responses in their favour to reject any caste-related law in Britain; however, the public view significantly contradicted their (official) responses which were collected through manipulation of the facts about caste.

Throughout this anti-legislation campaign by Hindu organisations, they adopted the old rhetoric to project caste as a "colonial imposition". Words like "dharma", for instance, were stressed against the word "caste" by creating an illusion that the latter was a "foreign" element to Hinduism. The opponents in the parliament (both of Indian origin and local British) also followed this line of argument by claiming inadequacy in the definition of "caste". "How do we define caste?" was a question repeatedly put forth by the opponents like Lord Parekh in the

[84] Book review by Annapurna Waughray: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0262728016663793 and by David Keane: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1358229115625267 (Accessed on 3 June 2021).

parliament, indicating that there is no specific definition for caste and that it would be unreasonable to consider anti-caste legislation in British law (Dhanda 2015: 41). During the Consultation, Hindu organisations and volunteers played on this terminology to create confusion and misunderstanding within the parliament houses among the public. Throughout their anti-legislation rhetoric, they influenced mass opinions with the propaganda that caste is "colonial imposition" and that making a caste law is an "attack" on the dharmic community.

Anti-legislation rhetoric and the denial of caste

Closer to Westminster, the opposition lobby turned aggressive and became more vocal in their anti-legislation rhetoric. London being the centre of the right-wing Hindu lobby and being close to power (the parliamentary houses), the Hindu lobby appeared confident in its manipulation and anti-legislation rhetoric. In Southall (West London), anti-legislation lobby went a step ahead of its counterparts whom I came across in Coventry and Bedford. They not only had with them printed copies of the Consultation with the required sections already "ticked", but they also had the entire questionnaire already filled and printed in hard copies. What they were doing was only filling in personal details on top of the document, telling people verbally that anti-caste legislation should be opposed. To the last question in the Consultation that asked if the government could do anything else (apart from the case law and anti-caste legislation options) to prevent caste discrimination, the already-filled-in Consultation copy which I received in a public gathering in Southall (in September 2017) stated:

> "Eradicate the word caste in the UK legislation. The proposal of case law to solve any issue is illegal and discriminatory. Please REPEAL the caste amendment which has resulted in additional stress to dharmic communities and British government being named as violator of human rights as all this consultation and amendment is done WITHOUT ANY VALID EVIDENCE."

And it continues in the following line in capital letters:

> "I THINK CASTE IS COLONIAL IMPOSED, AND PART OF THE DIVIDE AND RULE STRATEGY. PLEAE STOP THIS ATROCITY."

I met this group of *sanatani* Hindus at a park in Southall where Indians were gathered to celebrate certain events concerning Indian Independence Day. It was a mixed gathering that represented various religious and regional affiliations through their organisations and socio-cultural associations. Stalls were placed, indicating religious and socio-cultural and regional affiliations, to attract the respective members of these groups, either for organisational

membership or some upcoming religious and cultural programmes. The Hindu groups with their stalls were engaged in filling Consultation forms. A lady volunteer who handed me a printed copy with filled-in answers asked me, like everyone else around, to write my personal details on top of the copy. My impression from talking to her and other volunteers was that they seemed categorical in denying caste. They also denied the studies on caste in the UK (such as DSN 2006; NIESR 2010; DSN 2011) as "fraudulent". "The NIESR report on which the whole thing is based is a fraudulent report. There is no valid evidence or proof", claimed the volunteers, citing a reply from the printed copy in answer to my question when I asked their opinion about the studies which already show caste is a problem in the UK.[85]

The anti-legislation propaganda emphasised that there is "no valid evidence" of caste and that the latter is alien to the Hindu dharma ("colonial imposition"). By projecting this, they disguised caste under the dharma category and deemed the efforts towards caste-specific legislation anti-dharmic or even anti-Hindu. The British government certainly escaped these "anti" accusations by siding with the Hindu lobby. It stated in the final Consultation report that the anti-caste legislation would not be made because there was no adequate evidence of caste in the UK ("extremely low number of cases"). This decision indicates that the government echoed precisely the language of the anti-legislation propaganda. The Consultation episode therefore reveals the anti-legislation rhetoric that adopted the politics of "denial" of caste. This also shows as why the matter of anti-caste legislation faced delays and deferrals ever since the caste issue sparked public debate. On the one hand, the government yielded to the anti-legislation lobby by subscribing to the hegemonic view of caste, and on the other hand, the politics of denial, "deception, deliberate falsehood and outright lie", to put it in Hannah Arendt's (1972: 4) word, dominated public debate on caste in the UK.

Conclusion

The rejection of anti-caste legislation was therefore the manifestation of the hegemonic articulation of caste. As demonstrated in this chapter, the Hindu lobby succeeded in its propaganda by denying caste as far as the legislation was concerned. It adopted the politics of "denial" by disguising caste as a part of the dharmic identity. By projecting the Hindu dharma as a caste-free and homogeneous category, the Hindus succeeded in persuading the government

[85] The abbreviation "NIESR" was misspelled as "NEISER" (National Institute of Economic and Social Research), but in conversation it was clear that the volunteers were referring to the NIESR (2010) report prepared by Hilary Metcalf and Heather Rolfe.

not to interfere in a religious matter. The rejection of the anti-caste legislation and the grounds upon which it was rejected speak of precisely this non-interference in religion. The opponents of the legislation dominated (and diverted) the public debate by pointing to the inadequacy of the definition of caste and its meaning. The parliamentary debate largely revolved around the complexities and meanings of caste in a "literal" sense by undermining the embeddedness of caste in practical life. And this appeared to be the propagandists' political strategy – to divert attention from the ground reality of caste and to deny caste by projecting the Hindu dharma as a harmonious community without internal differences. I have shown that the rhetoric of "dharma" morality was used as a tool to persuade the public to form their opinions against the proposed anti-caste legislation.

The parliamentary debates on caste also indicated how caste was politicised both by the opponents of anti-caste legislation and its supporters. As discussed in this chapter, the political dimension of caste represents the hegemonic and counterhegemonic aspects of caste. The hegemonic articulation of caste that appeared at the Durban Conference was reproduced in the parliamentary debates in the UK. There, too, the opponents of the legislation dominated the caste debate by denying caste in the UK. However, the politics of denial is a clear contradiction of the history of temple formation in the UK. It is the strategic denial of the caste "gaze", which is an embedded perspective of grading and exclusion. As shown in the previous chapters, the growth and formation of temples was a clear manifestation of the caste-based identities and internal differences. They demonstrate the "social logic" of caste, in which caste is produced and reproduced through caste identities and religious practices in accordance with scriptural beliefs. Caste is confronted by the creation of alternative social and religious practices by lower-caste religious communities. This confrontation indicates the "political logic" of caste as discussed in this chapter. The politicisation of caste through the United Nations conference and the discussion of caste from a human rights perspective led to the internationalisation of caste. The parliamentary debates on caste in the UK have further made the political logic of caste even more relevant. Even though the parliamentary outcomes did not result in the making of anti-caste legislation, the matter of caste did not end with the parliamentary decision. As will be discussed in the following chapter, the struggle against caste continues through the mobilisation of Dalits seeking a caste-free identity. How a caste-free identity is constructed and how it serves as a basis for freedom from caste domination will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

The Making of an Ambedkarite Movement in Britain: Freedom, Identity, and Buddhism

The roots of the Ambedkarite movement in the UK can be traced to the arrival of Dalits migrants in the fifties and sixties. Along with the rest of the migrants who maintained their social and religious identities, the Dalits also mobilised around their religious identities and established their own temples and religious centres. While the majority of the Dalits organised under the Ravidasia religion, a significant proportion of them moved away from this traditional cult and adopted Buddhism as a new religious identity. The adoption of Buddhism demonstrates how the Dalits organised under Ambedkarite ideology and how they followed in Ambedkar's footsteps by converting into Buddhism. The Dalits in the Ravidasia and Valmiki religions established themselves with the tradition of building temples and getting involved in regular rituals and customary practices. However, the growth of Ambedkarite institutions marks a withdrawal from traditional rituals and customs. It was an outcome of a continuous process of cognisance and awareness of the historical struggle against caste oppression. The Ambedkarites made themselves aware of their historical struggles by reading and understanding Ambedkar, thereby organising against and countering caste oppression. It is this process of cognisance and mobilisation that led to the foundation of the Ambedkar movement.

There are, as Vivek Kumar (Kumar 2004, 2009) has rightly argued, very few studies that have focused on the Dalit dimension of migration.[86] So far, the two studies by Mark Juergensmeyer and Eva-Maria Hardtmann are the basic sources on the presence of Ambedkarites in Britain. In the early eighties, Juergensmeyer (1982) studied the "Ad Dharm" (Ravidasi) movement that emerged in the early twentieth century in Punjab. Tracing the roots of the movement, Juergensmeyer followed the Ravidasis who migrated to Britain. While describing the rootedness of the Ad Dharm in the UK, he points to the presence of Ambedkarites and their

[86] Similarly, the literary depiction of overseas Indians revolves around mainstream cultural and religious narratives. For instance, VS Naipaul, Vikram Seth, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Kiran Desai's novels.

separation from the traditional Ravidasis (ibid.: 245-257). Later on, in her book on *The Dalit Movement in India*, Hardtmann (2009) also reached to the Dalits who migrated to Britain. In a chapter on "Ambedkarites in Britain", she explains that the Dalits maintained their Ambedkarite ideology by celebrating Ambedkar and Buddha, like the Dalits in India. She argues that the Ambedkarites in Britain have produced the same "anti-Hinduism/Gandhi/Congress discourse" by following the same "anti-caste tradition as the Dalit activists in India" (ibid.: 160).

It is important to know why the Dalits in the UK are engaged in the "anti-caste tradition" and why they mobilise under Ambedkarite ideology. As seen in previous chapters, caste is a system of humiliation and its embodied perspective (the gaze) in everyday life is a reason for the oppressed to struggle for freedom from caste-based domination. The Ambedkarite ideology provides an imperative for Dalits to fight against caste-based humiliation. The mobilisation of the Dalits in the UK contributes to their struggle for freedom from caste, and the Ambedkar movement as an alternative helps them achieve that freedom. In this chapter, I examine how the Dalits in the UK mobilise under Ambedkarite ideology and what the Ambedkar movement and struggle for freedom mean in the diaspora. Based on my participatory observation in Ambedkarite activities and my interactions with Dalit organisations and activists, I discuss how the Ambedkar movement was built in the UK and how it is connected to the Dalit movement in India while also demonstrating how it differs from the latter on certain grounds. The presence of Ambedkarites in the UK is not confined to celebrations of Ambedkar and Buddha and the former's opposition to nationalist ideology as argued by Hardtmann (2009). Ambedkarites have moved away from traditional celebrations and brought Ambedkar to the public discourse in educational institutions and government houses, thereby breaking the higher-caste dominance in public spaces. By exploring the Ambedkarite movement in the UK, this chapter makes an ethnographic contribution while also adding a new perspective to the scholarship on the Dalit movement.

This chapter brings the struggles of the Ambedkarite movement into focus by tracing the roots of activities initiated by the Dalits since the early decades of their arrival in the UK. The question as to how the Dalits constructed their Ambedkarite identity and how they perpetuated their struggles against caste oppression through their mobilisation will be explored. The young Dalits in their twenties and thirties at the time of their migration were barely aware of the Ambedkarite struggles which were prevalent in different parts of India. In fact, most of them had only heard of Ambedkar and his struggle against caste and untouchability. In this context,

it is important to know how the Dalit migrants inclined towards Ambedkarite ideology, especially when they came from a traditional Ravidasia background. What was the inspiration for them to leave the traditional cult and adopt Buddhism, and why did they follow in Ambedkar's footsteps by converting to Buddhism? The ways in which the Dalits constructed their Ambedkarite-Buddhist identity reflect the formation of the Ambedkar movement and its continuity over time. I argue that the formation of the Ambedkarite movement lies in understanding Ambedkar practically, through reading and discussing his ideas. It is a movement for freedom from caste domination. The way the migrant Dalits collected literature on Ambedkar, and the way in which they themselves read and understood it, was the basis of the mobilisation of Dalits under the Ambedkarite ideology.

The Buddhist alternative provides the Dalits with an imperative to construct their caste-free identity. This differs from the Dalits who come from the traditional Ravidasi and Valmiki religions, whose identity and religious practices continue to revolve around caste identity. I examine how the Ambedkar alternative provides a radical means to counter social and religious inequality while offering Buddhism as a caste-free religious choice for the Dalits. The question concerning the Ravidasia religion and its contestation of the Brahmanical religion has been discussed before (in Chapter 3). There, I argued that the Ravidasia struggle against caste oppression is incomplete because it is affirmed theologically and yet reproduced in practice. In this chapter, I discuss the Buddhist alternative provided by Ambedkar as a practical as well as theological challenge to the Brahmanical caste system. The question as to why Ambedkar matters so much to the Dalits and how his Buddhist alternative paved the way for the diasporic Dalits is relevant here. I argue that the adoption of Buddhism is a step away from caste in that it provides a radical alternative to help its followers "give up" caste-based traditions and social practices and accommodate a new lifestyle that provides a sense of freedom from caste. Taking inspiration from Ambedkar's notion of "freedom" (from caste), his followers are not only committed to fighting caste injustices, but also to building their own individual personalities and confidence. The Buddhist path adopted by the Ambedkarites provides this sense of "freedom" from caste and reflects the universal language of freedom from oppression.

My aim is to understand and explore the Ambedkarite struggles and their pursuit of a Buddhist identity. I draw on the connections to anti-caste struggles discussed in previous chapters. Caste as a "social logic" is confronted in the religious domain by Ravidasis. The confrontation of caste by Ambedkarites informs the "political logic" of caste. The anti-caste legislation

phenomenon discussed in the previous chapter is largely an outcome of the efforts of Ambedkarite Dalits. By initiating caste debates among the public, thereby advocating an anti-caste legislation, the Ambedkarites remained at the forefront of confronting caste at the political level. Moreover, recently, the Ambedkarites have begun to set foot on intellectual platforms, where they organise seminars, workshops, and exhibitions on Ambedkar's life and work. This recent activity has its roots in the initial anti-caste struggles, when Ambedkarites used to collect literature and distribute it to the local public libraries. I demonstrate why Ambedkar is important among the Dalits in the UK and why he remains a symbol for the anti-caste struggle and social change in the diaspora.

In what follows, I first elaborate on the initial activities and struggles that led to the foundation of the Ambedkarite movement in the UK. I discuss how Dalits mobilised themselves at the time when they were newly arrived in the UK and were working in industrial towns in England. Secondly, I discuss how Ambedkar was brought to mainstream spaces while dominant discourses on Indian history and culture were challenged. Lastly, I discuss how the Dalits adopted Buddhism by organising a historic conversion event in the UK. The question of what it means to be a Buddhist and how that matters in the Dalit struggle against caste oppression is discussed here.

Laying the foundation for an Ambedkar movement in the UK

The roots of the Ambedkar movement lie in the consciousness of being an Ambedkarite. It reflects one's inclination towards Ambedkar's social and political vision. The process through which Dalits acquired awareness of Ambedkar demonstrates how they gave up their traditional caste and religious identities by obtaining a new caste-free identity. During my interactions with Ambedkarite Dalits, one thing that they categorically stated was that "In order to come out of caste, one needs to give up caste-based identities". How did they actually materialise this "giving up" of the caste-based identities and obtain a caste-free identity? The answer to this question lies in understanding their consciousness of Ambedkar. In order to understand Ambedkar, they followed his message practically by educating themselves about their historical struggle and oppression. Ambedkar's writing remained at the core of their education and awareness. It is this process of education and awareness that led to the mobilisation and formation of Ambedkar organisations and Buddhist temples, where ultimately Buddhism was

adopted and caste-based identities were "given up". Before going further, it is worth introducing Ambedkar here and his connection with the Punjabi Dalits.

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956) was born as a Mahar, one of the untouchable castes in the state of Maharashtra. After he had completed his studies at the Elphinstone College in Bombay, his success as the first untouchable to complete a college degree brought him to the notice of the Maharaja of Baroda. The Maharaja was interested in supporting young students like Ambedkar in their studies. With his support, Ambedkar managed to go to America, where he obtained his PhD at Columbia University, New York. He then moved to Britain, where he received another doctorate at the London School of Economics and was called to the Bar by the Gray's Inn. Ambedkar was the only untouchable in his time who acquired a depth of knowledge in multiple subjects including history, economics, politics, and law, trained in the Western educational system. His political career began as soon as he returned to India in the early-twenties and started practising law while simultaneously engaging in political activities (Keer 1990 [1954]; Jaffrelot 2005). In the mid-twenties, he organised several protests and rallies against caste and untouchability and advocated equal rights for Dalits ("depressed classes"). Because of his engagement in anti-caste activities, he was soon acclaimed as a nation-wide leader of the untouchables.

Subsequently, he was selected as the representative of the untouchables at the Round Table Conferences held in London in the early thirties. In 1927, two historic events took place under his leadership. The Mahad *satyagraha*[87], a campaign for right to equal access to drinking water from public tanks. Drawing water from public tanks was prohibited for the untouchables (Omvedt 1973, 1993). The second event was the burning of the *Manusmriti*, the sacred text that justifies caste and untouchability. Ambedkar's writings and speeches are meticulous works of research that draws on a critical understanding of Indian history, religion, and politics. His paper on *Caste in India* (1916) and the text *Annihilation of caste* (1936, originally written as a speech) serve as a manifestos for the Dalit struggle. His expertise in the field of law (as a barrister) resulted in his being assigned a greatest responsibility: of writing free India's Constitution. Ambedkar rejected Hinduism due to its foundation of caste inequality, and since this foundation is none other than the sacred texts of the Hindu religion, he was convinced that he had to leave the Hindu fold. He announced in a historic gathering in the Yeola Conference (Maharashtra) in

[87] The term *satyagraha* is known as a part of Gandhi's involvement in civil disobedience. However, in the Dalit struggle against caste, *satyagraha* implies a constitutional and democratic means for struggle against caste and social exclusion.

1935 that he would be "discarding" Hinduism.[88] Ambedkar converted to Buddhism on 14 October 1956 in the city of Nagpur (hitherto known as "Dikshabhoomi" or the land of Buddhist conversion), which turned out to be a decisive step towards providing a radical religious alternative for the untouchables, who began to cherish their caste-free identity.

The followers of Ambedkar in the UK mainly represent the Punjab region, from where they migrated. During his lifetime, Ambedkar paid his visits to Punjab that resulted the addition of a significant number of Dalits to his movement. The immediate outcome of his influence on Punjabi Dalits was that they established local wings of Ambedkar's associations, such as the Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF) and later the Republican Party of India (RPI). Interestingly, when Dalits migrated to Britain from this region, the ones who were acquainted with these fronts established their UK branches (SCF-UK, RPI-UK). These fronts remained largely symbolic. But nonetheless, they provided a platform for Dalits to identify with Ambedkarite ideology. From the sixties onwards, Ambedkarite activity began to gain momentum when a large chunk of Dalits migrated. This was also the period when the social and cultural practices of the migrants in general began to be re-embedded in the migratory society, which made each community aware of its caste and religious identities (Chapter 1). The growth of temples and cultural centres clearly indicated caste belonging and caste distinction among the migrants in their social and religious lives (Chapter 2 and 3). In response to these internal social hierarchies and differences, Ambedkarite Dalits began to construct a new identity for themselves while moving away from their Ravidasia tradition. In this section, I discuss how these early Dalit migrants came together and started discussing Ambedkar, and how they gained consciousness of their historical struggle. I explain that it was literature authored by Ambedkar that remained a basis for Ambedkarite struggles.

The early pioneers of the Ambedkar movement

At the time when migration began, the movement led by Ambedkar flourished in Punjab fairly well, though it was limited to the educated Dalits in urban areas. Since most of the migrants came from remote places in Punjab and were mostly illiterate, their association with the Ambedkar movement was very weak. In fact, most of them had only heard of Ambedkar

[88]See a newspaper story concerning Ambedkar's announcement of leaving the Hindu fold here: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/nagpur/by-discarding-hinduism-i-am-reborn-said-br-ambedkar/articleshow/54786309.cms (Accessed on 30 June 2021).

without much of an idea about his life and social vision. But gradually, as my interactions with the Dalit migrants reveal, they came into contact with other Dalits while working in factories, their curiosity about Ambedkar resulted in regular dialogue and discussions. The educated among them became the source of new ideas and new discussion on Ambedkar based on whatever written material they possessed. During this time, there were no books or literature available on Ambedkar in the UK, let alone vernacular writing. This seemed to be a practical difficulty on their way to acquire knowledge of Ambedkar's work.

The Dalit movement in India led by Ambedkar was on the rise in the fifties, and that was also the period when vernacular Dalit literature began to emerge in almost all Indian languages including Punjabi (Zelliot 1992; Omvedt 1993; Jondhale and Beltz 2004). For example, Lahori Ram Balley was one of the early pioneers who played a vital role in contributing to the flourishing of Ambedkarite literature in the vernacular (Hindi and Punjabi). He translated parts of Ambedkar's writings and his biography into vernacular languages, published them by setting up his own publication house, and circulated them across India while also making them available to the Dalits in diaspora. Along with Lahori Ram, a few other names, such as Bhagwan Dass and Nanak Chand Rattu, are fondly remembered today by the first generation of migrant Dalits. These people were closely associated with Ambedkar himself and after his death they remained in touch with the Ambedkarite activities in the UK. They provided their guidance on organisational matters, donated Ambedkar's belongings to establish an Ambedkar Museum in the town of Wolverhampton (Midlands, England), and supplied Ambedkarite literature to the Dalits in the UK.[89]

The libraries in the UK that were established along with Ambedkar Centres and Buddhist viharas (temples) are laden with the literature sent by Lahori Ram. During my interactions with Ambedkarites in Britain, Lahori Ram was referred to as one of the "staunch followers of Ambedkar". They told me that his association with them developed in the sixties through the books and newspapers that he regularly sent them. Of the literature that Lahori continuously sent to the Ambedkarites in the UK, his book titled *Dr Ambedkar ka Jivan aur Karya* (*Dr Ambedkar: Life and Work*) and the newspaper *Bheem Patrika* remained a basis for "knowing" Ambedkar while also keeping readers up to date on socio-political issues back in India. Manohar Birdee, an Ambedkarite, told me that Lahori's book was one of the most acclaimed works among Punjabi Dalits, because it was written in simple language, which attracted people

[89] My interaction with Dalit Ambedkarites – Arun Kumar, Tarsem Kaul, Manohar Birdee, and others.

to Ambedkar. He said that the above-mentioned book and newspaper were the basic source for "knowing and understanding Ambedkar". From the seventies onwards, Lahori also published booklets in English, reproducing Ambedkar's speeches and writings. Today these booklets can be found in libraries established by the Ambedkarites in the UK.[90] The occasional visits paid by Lahori Ram to Britain were encouraging experiences for the Ambedkarite migrants that helped them establish themselves with Ambedkar's vision. Since he had known Ambedkar personally and occasionally worked with him, Lahori Ram continued to be a source of inspiration and struggle for the Ambedkarites in Punjab and the UK. My interlocutors told me that, Lahori was one of the last few survivors of that generation who witnessed Ambedkar's movement at close quarters and dedicated their lives to carrying the legacy of Ambedkar forward by producing knowledge and spreading it among Ambedkarites across the world.

The above-mentioned literature continued to flourish and recently it has begun to be circulated in academic spaces among scholars and intellectuals in universities and other public places across Britain. In places such as the Indian High Commission (India House), the London School of Economics (LSE), and recently Gray's Inn, seminars, lectures, and exhibitions are organised annually on Ambedkar's birth anniversary. During these annual events, volumes of Ambedkar's writing and speeches along with other literature written by Ambedkar and members of the Dalit movement are displayed. When I attended the 125th birth anniversary of Ambedkar at India House and at the LSE in 2016, I accompanied Dalit activists in packing sacks of books from their libraries and bringing them to the above-mentioned places. C Gautam is one of the earlier Dalit activists associated with an Ambedkarite organisation in Southall. During my stay with the organisation, I, along with other friends in the organisation, took these books with Gautam to several places where public events were organised that year and in the following two years across London and the Midlands. When I asked him what those books meant to him and why he takes them to public events, he replied that he started Ambedkar activism with the distribution of books in the initial period of migration when there was not much literature available. He said he had brought most of those books himself from India whenever he visited. The library set up at the Ambedkar Centre at Southall is filled with the books collected by Gautam over the last four decades, including volumes of Ambedkar's

[90] One of the booklets I came across titled "Federation versus Freedom" was a speech delivered by Dr Ambedkar in Pune at the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics as part of a series of "Lale Memorial Lectures" in the year of 1939 (described in the "Publisher's Note" on the front page). It was published first in 1977 and then in 1995 as a second edition by LR Balley (copyright and editor), Bheem Patrika Publications, ES393A Street No. 6., Abadpura, Dr Ambedkar Road, Jalandhar 144003 (Punjab)".

writing in Hindi and English. Many of these books were presented to Gautam by the authors themselves, who gave them to him as a token of appreciation of his activism.[91]

The activity of gaining knowledge through Ambedkar literature began decades ago and continues even more vibrantly today. The Dalits who started reading and understanding Ambedkar eventually started writing down their own ideas. I met several Dalit writers from the first generation of migrants who have been engaged in writing in vernacular languages. Their writing reflects social, political, and religious issues that are published in booklets; autobiographies; and books in Punjabi and Hindi, while a few of them are also published in English.[92] Copies of Ambedkar's writing and speeches can now be found in Ambedkar organisations and Buddhist temples in Southall, Birmingham, Wolverhampton, and other places. When one enters an Ambedkarite household, it is hard to miss these volumes placed on tables and bookshelves along with Ambedkar's and the Buddha's portraits. These books have become the dearest possession of the Ambedkarites, even for the ones who may not be able to read or write. They remain a symbol of knowledge and a source of cognisance for the building of an Ambedkarite movement.

Cognisance and mobilisation through Ambedkar

While it is clear that Ambedkarite literature found its way to the UK through the efforts made by some of the Dalit writers in Punjab, it is important to know how it was received by the Dalits who happened to be illiterate. How did they grasp this material and how did it turned out to be a decisive step for them to move towards Ambedkar. I argue that the literature developed a culture of reading, writing, and discussion that remained a basis of cognisance for Dalits with regard to their history and culture. It helped them "know" and "understand" why they have been oppressed under the caste system for ages and why they should step away from the oppressive

[91] Among several other scholars' books, Sukhdev Thorat's "Ambedkar's Role in Economic Planning, Water and Power Policy" (1998), for instance, is one of those books presented to C Gautam by the author.

[92] Harbans Lal Virdee, a Dalit activist in Southall, has been writing on Buddhism, mainly translating and interpreting the certain Buddhist texts (Pali Canon) in Punjabi in order to bring Buddhism to the Dalits in simple language. He told me that the first booklet he published (in 2001) was a translation of the *Dhammapada* (a Buddhist scripture). At present, he is writing the life story of Visakha, one of the first Buddhist nuns and a disciple of the Buddha. Likewise, BR Sampla has written several of books in Hindi which are now lying in Ambedkar libraries in Southall and Wolverhampton. The latest book of his that I came across in these libraries is *Dr Ambedkar aur Punjab* (Dr Ambedkar and Punjab)" published by Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi. Bishan Dass, a former mayor of the city of Wolverhampton, published his autobiography with the title *Pride Vs Prejudice* in 2015. The book is a collection of numerous photographs that describe Mr Dass' life and struggle after he migrated to the UK. It tells the "story of my lifelong struggle against inequality, discrimination and prejudice", which he encountered in India in his youth and then after coming to the UK, where he faced both caste and racial "prejudices".

religion and culture. Their pursuit of knowledge convinced them that the Ambedkar alternative provides an answer to all these questions while also providing a religious alternative to "step away" from caste. They followed Ambedkar's message practically through a process of acquiring knowledge and educating themselves about the historical oppression forced upon them through the caste system. Whenever issues of caste came into my discussions with Ambedkarites, they made their understanding of caste explicitly clear. I found that the common point in all their discussions was their reference to Ambedkar's essays on caste. When I met these Ambedkarites for my interviews and discussions, I would usually see them with a copy of Ambedkar's writing (Hindi or Punjabi) and as the discussion proceeded, they would read some paragraphs or quotes from the book in order to make sense of their views. The act of reading and discussion has a specific connotation here. It is not merely about convincing others of their stance on a particular issue, but also exercises their inclination towards a culture of reading and discussion as a basis of their cognisance. This scenario also clarifies how the Ambedkarite movement differs from traditional religious cults like the Ravidasia and Valmikis. Ambedkarites engage in the pursuit of knowledge and awareness of their history, while the latter produce their traditional practices through temple rituals and religious celebrations.

The first-generation Dalits I interviewed proudly spoke of their journey towards Ambedkar. While working in factories and foundries, they crossed each other's paths and eventually became a group of like-minded people. The social atmosphere at the time also provided grounds for the migrants to organise within their own caste and community circles. While the upper castes began to create their own social and religious associations like the Singh Sabhas and Hindu associations, the Dalits also moved in that direction by establishing Ravidasi and Valmiki Sabhas. In fact, the latter is an outcome of the social exclusion and caste hierarchy that the Dalits began to face in religious spaces dominated by the higher castes (Chapter 1 and 2). For the Dalits, it became clear that they were looked down upon by the upper castes and that they needed to carry on their struggle against caste even after coming to the UK (Chapter 4). The Dalits who had heard of Ambedkar and his Buddhist path prior to their arrival remained conscious of this alternative. The working environment in factories further enhanced their thinking and consciousness when they met other Dalits who happened to know a little more about Ambedkar. This way, their interest in Ambedkar began to grow. Whenever time allowed, they gathered in pubs and restaurants and discussed Ambedkar. In the meantime, when they began to receive books and newspapers from Punjab, their discussions led to organised efforts to systematically explore their history and culture through Ambedkar.

Tarsem Kaul is one of those early Dalit migrants who came to the UK in the sixties and became one of the founding members of an Ambedkarite organisation. He narrates his experience of working in a foundry in Wolverhampton and how he met other Dalits there and they eventually became an Ambedkarite group. This group eventually grew into an Ambedkar organisation that became one of the major Dalit organisations in the UK. He tells me that when they met, they barely knew anything about Ambedkar. But when they began to receive books and when some of them would read and discuss these books, their interest in Ambedkar grew to the extent that they mobilised across Britain. Their organised efforts eventually undertook the very crucial task of spreading Ambedkarite literature around local libraries and organising anti-caste demonstrations in London. He narrates:

> Many of us met each other while working in foundries and that's when we started learning of Ambedkar. One or two persons knew a little bit about Ambedkar and they would tell us about his life struggle. It was very inspiring to hear that someone from our community was so well educated and that he was fighting for our people … When we heard this, we too got the confidence to do something for our people. We were not very educated, but we decided to read and learn about Ambedkar. So, we started collecting books and reading them. At that time, hardly anybody possessed any book about Ambedkar. Whenever somebody managed to get any book, we would ask him to bring it to our group and we would discuss it. When we started reading and talking about Ambedkar, more people joined. Then we decided we needed more books so that we could distribute them among ourselves and learn more about our history, our past … We started collecting money every month to buy more books, and whenever we came to know that somebody was coming from India, we sent them money and asked them to bring books. In two-three years, we collected plenty of books. Later when, Lahori Ram Balley started publishing books, that became a great help to us. We received books in Hindi and Punjabi and everybody purchased it.

When literature was received in abundance, it also began to be distributed to public libraries across the Midlands in England. Recalling instances of visiting libraries, Tarsem continues:

> First we donated several books to the local library [in Wolverhampton] and then visited Birmingham, Coventry, and other towns. That way, we met other Dalits from our community, who also joined us. When the Maharashtra government started publishing Ambedkar's writing, we ordered all the volumes and started distributing them to universities and professors.

The process of book distribution and acquiring knowledge was driven by a firm belief that "understanding Ambedkar" (*Ambedkar ko samajhna*) was crucial to gaining knowledge and becoming conscious of the oppressive caste system. Referring to Ambedkar's writing, Tarsem says that:

> Knowing Ambedkar is knowing our true history and culture. Without reading Ambedkar, there's no way to know why the caste system is bad for us and why we have been oppressed for thousands of years. There was no one before Ambedkar who could tell us about our true history. You can see that those who have followed Ambedkar have changed their lifestyle … We are no more Hindus or Sikhs or Ravidasis. For us Ambedkar is our great asset. He showed us the path.

The Ambedkar organisation founded by Tarsem and his Ambedkarite group was one of the first Dalit organisations founded in the UK. It was an outcome of these Ambedkarites who educated themselves, spread the knowledge of Ambedkar, and started mobilising Dalits across the UK. During this time, other Ambedkarite fronts were established in the towns of Bedford, London, and Birmingham, and they were basically the outcome of the struggles of Tarsem's generation, who reached out to the Dalits in these towns. The way these organisations formed show a similar process of knowing and understanding Ambedkar and then mobilising through organisational activities. Recalling how the Ambedkar organisation was established in Wolverhampton by a group of Dalits, Tarsem tells:

> There was a popular pub in the town. We used to go there regularly when we were working in the foundries. That was also the place for us to spend our free time and discuss about Ambedkar. When we had already started a little bit of social activity, we thought we should have some common platform like that and formalise our activities. So, we thought of forming an Ambedkar association. One day, when gathered in the pub, some of us came up with a name for the association: "Dr Ambedkar Memorial Committee of Great Britain". Everyone liked the name and that's how we created our own organisation under this name. That day was 19 July 1969, when we formed our organisation. We randomly chose the president, vice-president, etc., and from the next day we started our activities.

Gifting me a copy of a souvenir book, Tarsem shows me a picture of that pub in it, where he and his friends used to gather decades ago and where they formed their organisation.[93] The caption under the picture reads: "This is the Yew Tree Pub where this organisation was founded." It also includes the names of the nine founding members including Tarsem's. The organisation further expanded when it built a Buddhist vihara (temple) in 1991 and an Ambedkar Community Centre in 2000 in the city of Wolverhampton. Constructed in a Japanese pagoda-style of architecture, the vihara is believed to be the biggest Buddhist temple outside of India owned by the Ambedkarite Dalits. Since its formation, the organisation began to play a

[93] The souvenir book was published in 2006 by the Dr Ambedkar Memorial Committee of Great Britain. It reflects on the activities and achievements of the Committee since its formation in 1969. This 150-page-long souvenir was brought out to mark the golden jubilee of Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism on 14 October 1956. It gives an overview of the activities of the Committee including the protests, seminars, and other events connected to Ambedkar's birth anniversary celebration, on which day they gifted Ambedkar portraits and bronze busts to educational institutions in the UK.

leading role in mobilising Dalits on social and political matters. It organised protests against caste atrocities perpetrated against Dalits in India as well as demonstrations around issues related to reservations and education. The growing Ambedkarite activism gradually resulted in bringing Ambedkar to the public.

Ambedkar and contestation of public space

As discussed in the previous chapter, the issues of caste are now confronted in politics as a result of Ambedkarites' intervention in caste as a public matter. While the Ravidasis confined their struggle against caste to religious practices, the Ambedkarites took their struggle to the public domain. Making Ambedkar's arguments visible, they bargained for the legal safeguards against caste discrimination. The public debate on caste also aroused academic interest in Ambedkar in the UK. The annual celebration of Ambedkar through seminars and public talks in academic spaces made Ambedkar's presence in academia explicit. This development is important from Ambedkarites' perspective since it is an important dimension of their struggle. It shows how public and academic spaces dominated by the mainstream Indian ideology and culture are challenged by the intervention of Ambedkar's ideas. In this section, I discuss how Ambedkar is brought to the public space thereby challenging the dominant discourse on Indian society and politics. I draw on activities like anti-caste protests and the celebration of Ambedkar's birth anniversary and other events connected to his life that have helped Ambedkar's ideas flourish in the mainstream.

London – a symbol for the Dalit struggle against caste

Ever since migrant Dalits became involved in anti-caste struggles, the city of London has been a centre for their activities and mobilisation. There are two basic reasons why London remains a symbol for the Dalit struggle against caste. One is historical and another political. Historically, the place is associated with Ambedkar's name both as a student and as the leader of the untouchables. After completing his doctorate at Columbia University in New York, Ambedkar came to London to pursue further studies at the LSE and the Gray's Inn in the early twenties. A decade later, his association with London became widely known for the historic Round Table Conference in which he presented the issues of caste as a representative of the untouchables. The Conference is known for Ambedkar's success in convincing the British authorities of India to grant what is commonly known as the "Communal Award", which promised a separate electorate for the depressed classes (Jaffrelot 2005). Despite vehement opposition by the

nationalist MK Gandhi and others, Ambedkar's articulation of the caste question was considered to be the way forward to resolve the "communal" matters that India was grappling with in the face of its independence (Zelliot 2004, 2013). The Communal Award granted by the British did not become a reality because Gandhi continued his opposition to it and went on a fast unto death to demand its withdrawal. As a consequence, Ambedkar had to withdraw his plans to implement the Communal Award. What remains important from Dalits' perspective, however, is not so much the outcome of the Communal Award, but Ambedkar's efforts to represent the concerns of the untouchables, thereby convincing the British of his convictions about the caste issue. Today, Dalits take great pride in this historical moment. Such historic events are part of the everyday vocabulary among Dalits since they are discussed in temple gatherings and also brought into informal conversations.

Politically, London remains a centre for the Dalit struggle ever since Dalits began their anti-caste activities in the sixties. Along with protesting the caste atrocities against Dalits and organising demonstrations on matters such as education and reservations, the Ambedkarites made sure their voices reached the Indian government via the Indian High Commission in London. The recent matter of anti-caste legislation and the public debate in the British parliament further enhanced the political importance of the capital for the Dalit struggle. The entire legislation phenomenon, from Dalits' point of view, remained a matter of the anti-caste struggle that challenged the hegemonic articulation of caste (Chapter 5). Moreover, the presence of popular Hindu culture and religion in public spaces (celebration of Hindu festivals, etc.) as well as their representation in academia are another aspect of dominance that is challenged by the Dalits by bringing Ambedkar discourse to these spaces. The celebration of Gandhi and Hindu festivals in places like the India House in London has been a dominant trend until recently. However, the Dalits broke this convention and bargained for the representation of Ambedkar by celebrating Ambedkar's birth anniversary there annually. Likewise, the academic spaces like the LSE have been increasingly involved in bringing in Ambedkar discourse as a new social and political perspective on Indian history, which was so far dominated by nationalist thinking. The celebration of Ambedkar's birth anniversary at the LSE has become an annual event for the past few years. In 2016, I attended the 125th birth anniversary of Ambedkar at LSE, participating in seminars, attending guest lectures, and visiting an exhibition of Ambedkar's photography reflecting his major struggles against the

anti-caste movement.[94] On the same occasion, Dalit activists from India also addressed their public gathering at LSE on broader issues of caste and Indian politics.[95] Along with attending Ambedkar's birth anniversary celebrations, the Dalits from India have also begun to visit other places in London connected to Ambedkar's life. Along with the LSE, these places include the British Library, Gray's Inn, the parliament and also the place where Ambedkar lived during his student days in London. This suggests that the capital remains a symbol for the Dalit struggle in the diaspora. It also shows that while Raviasis confined their struggle against caste to religious spaces in the towns like Bedford, Coventry, and other places in the Midlands, the Ambedkarites moved on to confronting caste in mainstream public spaces in London.

The anti-caste protests organised by the Ambedkarites are one of the major activities through which caste is confronted in public. I discuss here that protests and demonstrations are one of the basic means Dalits have adopted since the beginning of their Ambedkarite activities. Their understanding of protest lies in Ambedkar's own ideas on the protests he conducted during his lifetime through constitutional means. They differ fundamentally from Gandhi's *satyagraha* based on the ideas of "non-cooperation", which reflects an un-democratic feature of his form of protest. Being explicit on this difference, the Dalits began to confront the caste question ever since they started their activities of gathering Ambedkarite literature and reading it while also establishing their social and religious fronts. These activities ultimately helped them engage with the larger public in political and academic domains. The celebration of Ambedkar's birth anniversary in these domains is an important phenomenon that shows how public spaces dominated by mainstream Indian culture and history are confronted by Ambedkar's ideas. Before moving on to the details of this confrontation and how Ambedkar was brought to the mainstream, let us understand how this confrontation began through an anti-caste protest that the Dalits organised in the late sixties.

[94] In June 2016, the LSE staged another important event while celebrating the 125th birth anniversary of Ambedkar. Dr Amartya Sen was invited to deliver a talk on Ambedkar. He spoke of caste as "anti-national", reflecting on one of Ambedkar's remarks made during the Constitutional Assembly debates in the late forties. The details of the talk appeared in several newspapers nationally and internationally. The lecture also marked the centenary of Ambedkar's first visit to the LSE in 1916. News on Sen's talk is available on: https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/caste-is-anti-national-as-it-divides-india-says-amartya-sen/story-Hbk4RPLejo0XEgpMbEO4rN.html (Accessed on 17 June 2021).

[95] For instance, the BAMCEF (The All India Backward And Minority Communities Employees Federation), organised its public meeting at the LSE on the occasion of the 125th Ambedkar anniversary, presided over by its leader Vaman Meshram. Over a hundred Dalit activists associated with the BAMCEF across India came to this event in London.

The year of 1969 turned out be a historic moment when the Ambedkarites in the UK organised their first protest concerning the caste atrocities against Dalits in India. The first-generation Dalits who organised this protest recall how they prepared for it and travelled to London from various towns in the Midlands. The Dalits from Wolverhampton took the initiative as they were an active group and arranged several vehicles from their town to London. Tarsem Kaul, who was one of the organisers, tells me that the main aim of the protests was to "condemn caste atrocities and also the statement of the then Shankaracharya of Puri, who publicly justified caste division as a sacred and divine social order". While showing me the photographs of the protests, which were printed in the above-mentioned souvenir book, Tarsem recalls that preparations was made for the event by organising group meetings in different towns and spreading awareness of caste and religion. The justification of caste by the Shankaracharya caused discontent among the Dalits in India and in the UK. As shown in the pictures, the pamphlets and placards were prepared and distributed among the protesters while speeches were made against caste and Brahminism. The three black-and-white photographs of the protest printed in the souvenir book provide a glimpse of the time and context within which the Dalits organised this protest and marched on to India House. Tarsem also mentions that a petition was submitted to India House asking the then Prime Minister of India to take action against the perpetrators of caste atrocities.[96] In one of the pictures, the Dalits dressed in their fine suits holding banners and placards are marching towards India House through Hyde Park. One of the placards carried by a demonstrator in another picture reads: "Untouchability! Shame! Shame!" In the last picture, the group of demonstrators are burning a copy of the *Manusmriti*, the sacred text that justifies caste.[97] The 1969 protest is remembered today as a historical step towards fighting caste injustice. It continued to mobilise Dalits over social and political matters like caste, education, and atrocities, even though they had chosen different religious paths.[98]

[96] There is a series of letters written by the Ambedkarite activists addressing the Prime Ministers of India (Indira Gandhi at the time) concerning caste and atrocity issues. Some of the letters also included invitations to Mrs Gandhi to attain Ambedkar celebration in Britain (These letters are printed in a book written by Ambedkar's associate, Nanak Chand Rattu, titled *Pioneers of Ambedkar Buddhist Movement in United Kingdom* published in 1999 by Amrit publishing House, New Delhi. The book is basically about the life of KC Leal, who was a friend of the author and an Ambedkarite-Buddhist who came to the UK in the fifties. Most of the book is about the correspondence between the author and KC Leal.)

[97] Recently, the Ambedkarites have begun to gather in the town of Southall on 25th December for a symbolic burning of the *Manusmriti*. The videos and pictures of the burning of the text are circulated on Facebook and other social media sites by these activists. Most of their friendship circles or followers on Facebook are based in India and organising such an event is important to show solidarity with the people in India, says Ranjit who was one of the organisers of the *Manusmriti*-burning events in Southall in 2016 (My interaction with Ranjit, December 2018).

[98] Arun Kumar, a Dalit activist, provided further details on the anti-caste protests organised by the Dalits in London. He recalls a protest organised on 17 August 1997 condemning the killings of several Dalits in an infamous caste atrocity in Bombay. He also mentioned the most recent protest, against an institutional caste atrocity

Ambedkar in the mainstream through public debate

Recognising Ambedkar's contribution to Indian society and politics, and particularly his efforts to emancipate Dalits from age-old caste oppression, places like the LSE and Gray's Inn have begun to cherish Ambedkar as one of their finest alumni. Along with celebrating Ambedkar and bringing Ambedkar's ideas to the public, the Ambedkarites have been presenting Ambedkar portraits and busts to the educational institutions connected to Ambedkar's life. The booklets, souvenirs, and pamphlets I received from Dalit organisations and activists revealed that this presenting of portraits and busts has been going on since the seventies. What is interesting is that this activity is not the conventional act of presenting gifts; it is rooted in dialogues and discussions that analyse Ambedkar's ideas in the light of other renowned modern thinkers and philosophers. Arun Kumar, who has kept a written record of these activities, tells me that a first portrait of Ambedkar was first gifted to Gray's Inn in the early seventies. When the centenary of Ambedkar's birth anniversary was celebrated in 1991, another colourful portrait was presented to Gray's Inn. At this centenary event at Grays Inn, one of the dignitaries (Lord Goff of Chivalry) referred to Ambedkar as "the Moses of India" in his speech while unveiling his portrait on 21 February 1991. Sir Anthony Scrivener QC, Chairman of the Bar of England and Wales, was another dignitary at the event and, speaking of Ambedkar's contribution, remarked that:

> "To honour Dr Ambedkar is to honour the largest democracy on earth because it was through his genius that the Constitution of India was born and also to honour Dr Ambedkar is to honour the importance and dignity of each human life, for it was he who fought for equality for the underprivileged, for the poor and for the forgotten."[99]

More recently (in June 2021), Gray's Inn recognised its alumnus, Ambedkar's contribution as a "crusade for social justice" by opening a meeting hall dedicated to Ambedkar.[100] The Ambedkarites in Wolverhampton, Bedford, and Southall who attended the events at Gray's Inn in the past including the recent one, say proudly that the portrait of Ambedkar that they had

perpetrated against a Dalit scholar, Rohith Vemula, in Hyderabad Central University. A candle march was organised in 2016 to protest the incident.

[99] The speeches made by the dignitaries at the event have been published briefly in the souvenirs book published by the Federation of Ambedkarite and Buddhist Organisations (FABO) in Southall. There are four volumes of these souvenirs. The above-mentioned references are from the third volume, "Dr Ambedkar Birth Centenary Souvenir" (1991, p. 11).

[100] The news concerning it is Available on: https://www.graysinn.org.uk/news/ambedkar-room-and-portrait (Accessed on 11 October 2021).

presented hangs along with twelve other prominent alumni of Gray's Inn.[101] An Ambedkarite who attended the recent hall opening event writes on his Facebook wall:

> "… In the board room of Gray's Inn, there is another portrait of Dr Ambedkar (attached below). This is the room where all the top brass of Gray's Inn meet for their board meetings. Dr. Ambedkar was the only Desi whose portrait graced that room. It was a touching moment for me. My grandmother was from Ambavde, the native village of Dr. Ambedkar. My father spent his childhood there. I too have spent some vacations there. I have always been proud of him and my remote relation to him. Yesterday when I saw that portrait, I felt more proud than I ever have".[102]

Ever since the presentation of the Ambedkar portrait to Gray's Inn in the seventies, events of this kind have proliferated. In the centenary year, a bronze bust of Ambedkar was installed in India House. From that year onwards, Ambedkar's birth anniversary has been celebrated annually like other national and cultural programmes celebrated there by Indians. Throughout this process the Ambedkarites had to overcome the upper caste dominance in India House. A few years later, the LSE authorities acknowledged Ambedkar's contribution by unveiling a bust in 1994, and began to observe 14 April annually with seminars and exhibitions on Ambedkar. In the following year, in October 1995, several Ambedkarites from Britain travelled to New York and presented a bust of Ambedkar to the University of Columbia, the place where Ambedkar obtained his first doctorate degree.[103] Moreover, the place where Ambedkar lived during his LSE days – at 10 King Henry's Road – has now acquired heritage status. In 2015, the Ambedkarites succeeded in pursuing the Maharashtra government to purchase the house, which is now recognised as an Ambedkar Museum. The blue plaque engraved on the front side of the house indicates the heritage status of the building. The plaque reads: "Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956) Indian Crusader for Social Justice lived here 1921-1922". Inside the building, a bust of Ambedkar is placed on the ground floor, and the top floor is furnished with Ambedkar's photographs representing some important events in his life, from his student days to his political struggle to his conversion. A wardrobe attached to a wall contains a collection of Ambedkar's writing and speeches. A copy of the Indian Constitution is placed by the bust and upon paying one's respects to Ambedkar's bust, one would curiously flip the pages of that

[101] My telephonic conversation with Arun Kumar who attended this evet at the Grays Inn (Conversation with Kumar, July 2021).

[102] Pratap Tambe was one of the Ambedkarites who visited the function along with others who came from the Midlands and London areas. He wrote this post on his Facebook wall a day after he attended the function. During my field work, I met Mr and Mrs Tambe, a couple who were engaged in organising meetings for career guidance for Dalit students who were studying in Britain.

[103] Arun Kumar mentioned that the event was organised by the FABO who carried a bronze bust of Ambedkar to the University of Columbia in New York where they held meetings with scholars and activists based in the USA and unveiled the bust on 24 October 1995.

rather thick book. Every year, visiting Ambedkar House, LSE, Gray's Inn and the British Library, the places directly associated with Ambedkar's life, remains symbolically important for Dalit inspiration and their struggle against oppression.

Towards Buddhism – a step away from caste

Ever since their arrival in the UK and their involvement in Ambedkarite activities, the social and cultural lives of the Dalits underwent a significant change. This became visible when they began to organise their social and cultural celebrations, like weddings, in a Buddhist manners. Some of the Dalits I interacted with remind me distinctly that in the year of 1963, the first Buddhist wedding took place in the town of Birmingham when an Ambedkarite arranged his own daughter's wedding according to the Buddhist marriage ceremony.[104] This marriage scenario indicated a major break from the traditional customs and practices in the lives of the Ambedkarites. This was a clear sign that Ambedkarites were moving away from the tradition and culture embedded in caste-based identities and practices. In this session, I return to the question raised at the beginning of this chapter: why Ambedkar matters so much for the Dalits. I discuss that the religious alternative Ambedkar provided remains a radical means for the emancipation of Dalits. It helped them "give up" their former caste-based identities and acquire a sense of freedom from caste stigma and hierarchy.

On 14 October 1956, Ambedkar converted to Buddhism along with over half a million untouchables (Omvedt 1973; Zelliot 1992). The conversion of the untouchables into Buddhism, led by Ambedkar, is one of the most remarkable events in India's modern history (Aloysius 1998). It provided the untouchables (today's Buddhists), with a radical alternative to emancipate themselves from the age-old caste oppression and untouchability they had suffered within the fold of Hinduism. Most importantly, it gave them a new universal identity free from the influence of caste and sectarianism. The past few centuries have witnessed the conversion of untouchables to Christianity, Islam, and Sikhism. However, they continued to be recognised by their lower-caste identities. The caste stigma therefore remained with their converted identities. The Chamars who adopted Sikhism, for instance, were treated as outcastes by the

[104] Arun Kumar tells me that the *Birmingham Post* brought this news of a Buddhist wedding to public attention as it was first wedding in Birmingham of its kind. Some Buddhist organisations formed in the fifties and sixties were concerned about Buddhist social practices and they started conducting wedding ceremonies and other cultural activities in a Buddhist manner. The Bhartiya Buddhist Cultural Association, which was later renamed as the Indian Buddhist Society, was one of these organisations active in the Birmingham-Wolverhampton area (My conversation with Arun Kumar, December 2018).

mainstream Sikhs, with no social and cultural exchange between the two (Ram 2017). Likewise, the Valmikis who followed Sikhism continued to be stigmatised as lower-caste Sikhs (Mazhabi), having no social intercourse with the mainstream Sikhs (Nesbitt 1994; Leslie 2003). Though Christianity helped expose Dalits to a new social and material life through education and employment, caste remained a basis of their social identity (Mosse 2012). Similarly, Islam recognised the principle of "fraternity" in the religious domain, but the practical life continued to be driven by caste and hierarchy within it (Guha 2014). Ravidasia as an alternative religious model countered the Brahmanical religion to some extent, but remained largely sectarian based on the saint tradition of the Bhakti movement (Juergensmeyer 1982; Zelliot 1992; Omvedt 2008). This awareness of caste practices and the stigmatised identity in the above-mentioned religions spread among Dalits through the process of reading and understanding Ambedkar. The Buddhist alternative in this regard convinced them to give up the traditional practices, rituals, and worshipping of gods that forced them live under stigmatised identities and caste hierarchy.

"What God couldn't do, Babasahab did for us"

The community of Buddhists is now spread across the Midlands and London, and Ambedkar organisations and Buddhist temples have been established. Recently, an Ambedkar museum has also been opened at the Buddhist temple in Wolverhampton, where Ambedkar's personal belongings are preserved for public display.[105] During my stay in the temple, I came across some first-generation migrants who had initiated Ambedkarite activities and mobilised Dalits across Britain. Every Sunday, they gather in the temple over religious activities and individual talks on Ambedkar and the Buddha are given. A monk presides over the programme, reciting the Buddha's message, and then gives his own talk. His talk is followed by the speeches of the men and women volunteers, which basically reflect on certain concepts and ideas either about Ambedkar or the Buddha's teaching. What is interesting about their gatherings is that they bring their hand-written speeches with them and deliver them while explaining their meaning. Dev Suman, for instance, is one of the regular speakers who talks about the Buddha's ideas while interpreting the Pali Canon, which has been collected in the temple library over years. He brings along a Pali text, reads through it, and deciphers the meaning of it. When I first came to know

[105] These belongings of Ambedkar were handed over to the organisation by Ambedkar's personal secretary, Nanak Chand Rattu. They contain Ambedkar's suit, pen and ink bottle, notebooks, lantern, and various other objects.

about how Ambedkarites mobilised through a culture of reading and debating, these Sunday gatherings reminded me of their old times when they used to read and discuss Ambedkar.

During these days, I came across several of these Ambedkarites who undertook pioneering initiatives to educate themselves and carry forward the legacy of Ambedkar. Shadi Salan, for instance, is one of those who came to Britain in his twenties. He was born and raised in a Ravidasi family. He tells me that for the first few years after arriving in Britain, he worked in a foundry. He then joined the public transport service as a bus driver in the town of Wolverhampton and retired after serving there for nearly forty years. Shadi was one of the Ravidasis who knew very little about Ambedkar when he came to England. But when he met a group of Ambedkarites at the factory he was working in, he became one of the active Ambedkarites, taking part in book distribution and discussions. I met Shadi on the day when he gave a talk at a regular weekend gathering. He was reading through a book he was carrying and simultaneously interpreting the meaning of the sentences he was reading. When the meeting was over, I interacted with Shadi and asked about the book he was holding in his armpit. The book appeared brownish-yellowish with its pages ripped. It was a copy of the Punjabi translation of the Hindi book titled *Dr Ambedkar Ka Jivan aur Karya* (*Dr Ambedkar: Life and Work*), written and translated by Lahori Ram Balley, who supplied Ambedkarite literature to the Dalits in Britain. Shadi still possesses the copy of that book he received decades ago. Flipping the pages of the book and talking about Ambedkar, Shadi turned a bit sentimental while reflecting on his own past. He said:

> Without these books we wouldn't have known Ambedkar and without knowing him we wouldn't have been what we are today.[106] … We followed many saints, we worshipped many Gods in many religions and sects, but the real change came to our lives only when we started following Ambedkar.

When Ambedkarites relate to their past, or for that matter to other Dalits (Ravidasis and Valmikis), they clearly see the place of Ambedkar in their lives. Not only did they succeeded in acquiring a caste-free identity by following Buddhism, but they also gained confidence in their struggle against oppression. Turning to the Punjabi book he was holding and skimming through the underlined passages in it, Shadi started reading them aloud and translating and interpreting for me in Hindi. Almost every page of the book he was reading had some passages

[106] The Ambedkarites proudly put their profile pictures on WhatsApp and Facebook with the caption: "We are because he was," along with Ambedkar's picture. During Ambedkar's birth anniversary, posters and banners are made with this caption and carried in a public rally.

underlined. Placing it on a table, he read them out, slowly moving his finger from sentence to sentence. He read them out, translated, and read some more, while explaining them at length. For hours during our discussion, he talked of Ambedkar a lot based on what he read in the book: Ambedkar's schooling and experience of untouchability; his studies in the USA and Britain; his London visits for the Round Table Conference, and so on. Reflecting on the life of Ambedkar and his struggle to emancipate Dalits from age-old caste oppression, and seeing himself as a beneficiary of that emancipatory process, Shadi turns emotional and says: *Jo Rab na kar saka woh Babasahab ne kar dikhaya* ("What God couldn't do, Babasahab did for us").[107]

The narratives of former Ravidasis (now Buddhists) reveal why they moved towards Buddhism and left their traditional caste identity behind. One of the remarkable changes they witnessed in their own lives on becoming Ambedkarites was their understanding and realisation as to why they are oppressed by the caste system and why it is difficult to come out of it while being Ravidasi or Valmiki. Dharam Chand, one of the Buddhist converts tells me:

> It's not easy for everyone to leave one *dharam* [religion] and choose another. The people are an uneducated lot, and they believe that whatever they have or don't have is due to God's will. They don't think their suffering has anything to do with the world they live in. They think it is karma from their bad deeds in a previous life. Everything they encounter in life – they believe it has been given by Rab [God], and Ravidasis believe in that Rab, who gave them everything: pain, suffering, good things, bad things. All this, they think, is God's creation. Therefore, when you talk to them of Ambedkar they might listen you, but the moment you utter a word about Buddhism, they'll immediately leave you.

Dharam Chand became a Buddhist in a conversion event that took place in the early seventies in Birmingham. Being proud of his Buddhist identity, he says:

> Buddhist identity is a matter of self-respect for me. When I say "I'm Buddhist" there's no caste identity [attached to it]. You ask a Sardar [a Sikh] who he is, and he'll tell you that he's Jatt or Ramgariah and so on. You ask a Hindu about his identity, and he'll also say the same: Brahmin, Kshatriya ... And when the followers of Ravidas say that they are 'Ravidasis', everyone sees them as "Chamars" as a degraded people. But when one becomes a Buddhist, nobody says that one is Chamar or from this or that caste. There's no separate Buddhist cult for the converted one. Everyone is equal. There's no caste stigma after becoming a Buddhist.

One of my interlocutors, Harish Thapar, once asked me: "Why do we Valmikis still feel degraded in our identity even though we are as well off as the Hindus and the Sikhs?" I felt like

[107] Babasahab (or in Marathi, Babasaheb) is an epithet given by the followers of Ambedkar to him as a sign of a great respect.

I was trapped in a moral and ethical dilemma in replying to this question. There are a handful of Valmikis in Bedford, like several other towns, who follow their Valmiki tradition (a mix of Sikhism and Hinduism). In their social life, they follow Hindu customs and rituals and consider the *Ramayana*, a Hindu epic, sacred; and culturally they also celebrate Sikh festivals. Harish, who is one of the Valmikis, is well established in his profession, with a taxi service in Bedford. He is not personally attached to religious rituals or temple activities as he barely visits the temple. Along with his friends in the community he has established a Valmiki Foundation with an aim to help Valmiki boys and girls in India with their education and support them financially. Despite all these engagements, he still feels some vacuum in his life concerning his religious identity. He told me his experiences of caste prejudices and stereotypes that he encounters when he is with his upper-caste friends who are connected to his professional life. Though he says these issues of stereotypes often come across as jokes from his friends, he is helpless to respond to them on these matters.

The ambiguity and dilemma of identity that arises in certain situations reflects the contradictions associated with caste and religious identity. The Valmiki identity is stigmatised as inferior and lowly in the caste system. Therefore, however affluent a Valmiki person is in their economic and personal life, they are bound to be associated with the caste stigma attached to the Valmiki identity (Chapter 4). Similarly, the Ravidasi identity is associated with the word, "Chamar", the name of one of the ex-untouchable castes, which is bound to reduce the Ravidasis to their caste identity as it has been the case since the saint Ravidas' lifetime. The Ambedkarite Buddhists may also be reduced to their past identity, but the difference is that their rejection of Brahmanical customs and religion is supported by their Ambedkarite-Buddhist alternative – whereas, in the case of the Valmikis and Ravidasis whose religious and cultural practices are mired in Hindu practices and rituals, it is difficult to reject the Brahmanical religion and customs, practically speaking. Therefore, their identities and regular social practices remain a hindrance on their way to a caste-free life. The Ambedkarite and Buddhist identities provide support for the convert to step away from caste.

Diksha ceremony – the Birmingham event

On 3 June 1973, hundreds of Dalits gathered for a conversion event held at the Town Hall in West Bromwich, a few miles' distance from Birmingham and Wolverhampton. They travelled across Britain for the event, including some from Scotland and Wales where they had moved after they initially migrated to towns in the Midlands. The event was believed to be the first and

the biggest mass conversion of Dalits to Buddhism outside of India. The conversion ceremony was formally led by a Sri Lankan monk, Ven. Saddhatissa, who is said to have met Ambedkar in India.[108]

Such a conversion event is popularly known as a "diksha ceremony". The word, "diksha" ('to consecrate') has its origin in the Sanskrit language and when Ambedkar adopted Buddhism in 1956 in the town of Nagpur in the state of Maharashtra, the place was thereafter recognised as the Dikshabhoomi (lit. the place where conversion took place). In popularising the event as "diksha ceremony", the Dalits wanted to send the message that this was not an ordinary proselytisation ceremony influenced by a missionary, nor was it conducted for mere material gain. Instead, it was an outcome of their consciousness of Ambedkar's ideas and their struggle to establish a new caste-free identity.

The booklets and souvenirs published in the following years following the 1973 West Bromwich diksha ceremony contained photographs of the event. In a souvenir book published in 2006 to mark the golden jubilee celebration of Ambedkar's conversion had two interesting pictures of the event. The pictures show men and women being gathered in the Town Hall at West Bromwich, attending the ceremony and standing in front of the stage upon which the portraits of Ambedkar and Buddha were placed. One of the pictures shows a bronze statue of the Buddha that was placed next to the portraits facing the converts. Another picture shows hundreds of men and women, finely dressed in their winter jackets and suits, following the ceremony initiated by the monk.[109] Starting from the morning, the event continued throughout the day until the evening as followers kept on dropping in and joining the event.

The Dalits who attended the conversion ceremony tell me how they managed to organise and participate in the event. Since the venue of the event was a few miles away from Birmingham and Wolverhampton, most of the Dalits who had settled in the Midlands travelled there in coaches that they booked, private vehicles as well as public transport. The coaches were decorated with banners and posters with Ambedkar's and the Buddha's pictures on them with the caption "Diksha Ceremony". For the publicity and management of the event, a special

[108] Ven. Saddhatissa has served many years at a Buddhist temple established by the London Buddhist community (local British), and was invited on many occasions by the Ambedkarites to their functions. He was invited to the LSE event when Dalits activists presented Ambedkar's portrait to the LSE as shown in a photograph in a souvenir book.

[109] The caption bellow the pictures reads: "Diksha Ceremony taking place in West Bromwich, Town Hall Birmingham in 1973. Many supporters embraced Buddhism" (Souvenir 2006, page 10).

committee was established especially for the event, namely the "Dr Ambedkar Buddhist Conversion Committee (UK)".[110] The members of the Committee visited the places in the Midlands and the areas of London (Southall, East London, etc.), where the Dalit population was to be found. They conducted meetings with the local Dalit activists and distributed pamphlets (in Punjabi and English) which contained details of the conversion programme (time, venue). Moreover, news concerning the event was also advertised in the local newspapers and was announced on television on the BBC.[111] The news of the conversion event covered by the local and national newspapers remained a subject of discussion among Indians for days and weeks to come. The total number of the converts from the day is unknown, but according to the Dalits who participated in the event, it could have been around four to five thousand people.

Dharam Chand is one of the Ambedkarites who converted to Buddhism at that event. He says that the event was "one of the proudest moments" for the Ambedkarites. It provided them with "inspiration" and "passion" to progress in their social lives. Reflecting on the social changes that the Dalits began to witness thereafter, he says:

> ... There are no more Hindu rituals, no more Sikh festivals [in the Buddhists' lives]. When Ravidasis became a new religious cult, they started following everything that is in Sikhism. Their scripture is the same as the scripture of the Sikhs. They follow every custom and belief the Sikhs and Hindus follow. Had we achieved anything new after we became Ravidasis? Everything the Sikhs and Hindus did, we also did. But was not the case when we became Buddhists. The first major change came to our life when we started marrying off our sons and daughters in a Buddhist manner. We stopped celebrating Hindu festivals. Whenever there's inter-marriage, we do it in a Buddhist manner. My own son married a Christian girl, and they first had a church wedding. But the next day, we also conducted a Buddhist ceremony for their wedding. When we converted to Buddhism, we promised to follow the 22 pledges and those who follow them in their lives have left behind the Hindu tradition. We don't have any place for Hindu customs and beliefs in Buddhism.

The adoption of Buddhism witnessed a significant change in the lives of the converts. As Dharam Chand tells me, the conversion gradually led to them living their social and cultural lives in accordance with Buddhist practices. The path of the alternative social life, both in

[110] Dharam Chand, who attended the event, says that his brother was one of the several Ambedkaties who were member of the Committee established for the purpose of managing the conversion event. He recalls the following names of members who took initiative in organising the conversion event: Bishan Dass Mahay, Sohan Lal Shastri, Rattan Lal Sampla, Daulta Bali, Fakir Chand Chohan, Darshan Sarhali, and Khushi Ram Jhumat.

[111] At the time, the BBC was running a Hindi shows on its television named *Apna hi Ghar Samjhiye*, as Dharam Chand recalls. The group of Ambedkarite organisers approached the BBC to announce their conversion event on the television. However, the sponsors of the Hindi show, who were mostly upper castes, refused to announce the conversion programme. But later, when the Dalits approached the BBC head office, the network agreed to run an advertisement for the conversion programme.

spiritual and material life, was carefully set down by Ambedkar and leaves no room for what he called, "religious dogma". This was visible through his book *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, which he wrote towards the end of his life and which has been considered as a guide for the Buddhist path. Another remarkable aspect of Ambedkar's conversion and choice of a religious alternative was the preparation of the 22 pledges (or vows), in which he made clear what it means to be a Buddhist while mapping out a social and cultural path. The pledges broadly describe what one "shall do" and "shall not do" in terms of following certain (Hindu) customs and principles.

The pledges, worded in simple and layperson's language, are therefore the essence of the Buddhist path that Ambedkar and his followers adopted. They are indispensable in the lives of Buddhists – so much so, that they guide their everyday lives in socio-cultural and religious spheres. The pledges act not only as a guiding principle and the essence of the "new Buddhism" (*Navayana* Buddhism); they also differentiate Ambedkar's path of Buddhism from conventional Buddhist cults that entertain ideas of rebirth, reincarnation, and ritualism, which Ambedkar's Buddhism rejects categorically. However, this does not mean that there is no spirituality in the religious path Ambedkar has carved. In fact, Ambedkar stressed that his Buddhist alternative meets "material" as well "spiritual" needs.[112] Another interesting aspect of the pledges is that they are not only worded in affirmative sentences. For example, some pledges are worded positively: "I shall believe in the equality of man", or "I shall follow the noble eight-fold path of the Buddha". But there are also pledges using negative sentences, such as "I shall have no faith in Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh nor shall I worship them", or "I do not believe in the incarnation of God". The pledges guide the converts clearly through their individual lives as to what is dogmatic belief and how one must refrain from it while following universal and rational beliefs. Analysing the content of these pledges, especially their "negative" constructions, Eleanor Zelliot (1992) observes that "this negativism, psychologically necessary to the differing social status of those in the converting group and the intellectual group, prevents any close cooperation" (ibid.: 194). These pledges, printed on posters, and pamphlets, hang toady on the walls of Ambedkarite Buddhist temples in the UK.

[112] In his historic speech on "What Path to Salvation?", Ambedkar talks about the material and spiritual aspects of Buddhism. The speech was delivered at the Bombay Presidency Mahar Conference, 31st May 1936, Bombay. Available on:
http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/txt_ambedkar_salvation.html. (Accessed on 20 October 2021).

The regular weekend gatherings in these temples and social functions like weddings among Ambedkarites clearly reflect these pledges.

The Buddhist identity thus provided the Dalits with a new radical alternative in order for them to change their lives while stepping away from caste-based practices. After conversion, the Dalits entered a new life, leaving behind the traditions and customs that oppressed them as inferior beings. Walking in certain streets in the town of Wolverhampton, I noticed house plates attached to the Buddhists' houses, which read: "Buddhist House". Another house of an Ambedkarite in the same street has a house plate that reads: "Jai Bheem" (victory to Ambedkar). The Ambedkarite-Buddhist identity has provided a sense of freedom from caste that the Dalits cherish in their everyday life. The alternative that Ambedkar has given to his people in the form of Buddhism therefore provides a material as well as ideological foundation for them to acquire freedom from caste in their personal and social lives.

Conclusion

The Ambedkarite ideology provides an imperative for Dalits to fight against the embodied perspective of caste in everyday life. The mobilisation of the Dalits in the UK reveals their struggle for freedom from caste, and Ambedkar as an alternative helps them achieve that freedom. Ambedkarites in the UK literally educated themselves through a continuous process of reading and understanding Ambedkar. The literature on Ambedkar supplied by Dalit writers from Punjab played a vital role in helping Ambedkar's ideas flourish among the diasporic Dalits. Over the years, the Ambedkarites collected literature and engaged in reading and discussing Ambedkar practically while simultaneously forming their own organisations and religious institutions. The Buddhist alternative chosen by the Dalits indicated another important aspect of their struggle. It provided Dalits with an imperative to conceive of a caste-free identity and "give up" caste-based traditions and customs. Caste is a system of humiliation and its embodied perspective in everyday life (the gaze) is a reason for them to struggle for freedom from caste-based domination. This is the reason the Ambedkarites are keen to give up the tradition and culture that reflects the embodied perspective of caste. By practicing Buddhist culture in their regular lives, the Ambedkarites not only challenge caste dominance in the mainstream religions, but also move away from the traditional Ravidasia religion into which some of them were born.

The Ambedkar movement is rooted in knowledge and awareness globally. While Ambedkar ideology and the Buddhist path are the founding features of the Dalit movement in general, the diasporic dimension of the Dalit movement in the UK differs from that in India and has shown some unique features. One of these features is the composition of the Dalit migrants itself. The Dalit migrants received little or no formal education, and yet, the foundation of their Ambedkar movement lies in the process of education and awareness while reading and understanding Ambedkar practically. The way that they made an effort to obtain Ambedkarite literature, which was barely available at the time, and the way they grasped its content and eventually spread it to others and to local libraries, is a peculiar process through which they acquired knowledge. They stepped away from the conventional celebrations, brought Ambedkar to public and intellectual spaces, and remained connected with the academic discourse on Ambedkar. All this was possible for them due to their realisation of the Ambedkarite-Buddhist alternative as a path towards freedom and justice. They had never experienced such an alternative in the past that could emancipate them from the age-old caste oppression, which is why Ambedkar matters so much in the Dalit struggle.

Summary and Conclusion

Caste has been an organising principle among Indian migrants in the United Kingdom. It is embedded in the everyday lives of the migrants where exclusion and discrimination play a part. Caste has been implicit and explicit in regular interactions, identities, and religious practices. During the initial period of migration, caste remained implicit among migrants while they were working as labourers in British industries. It became explicit when they established themselves in their social and cultural lives while reuniting with their families. Caste identities and hierarchy began to play a decisive role in the formation of temples, the performance of rituals, and cultural programmes. I have discussed in this dissertation that caste as a belief has been at the centre of social and cultural reproduction. Asking a basic question in this dissertation, that is, whether caste changes with migration, I have explained that the reproduction of caste has occurred with both change and continuity. I have shown how caste differences were seen as irrelevant at one point, and how they became significant and decisive at another point when the migrants established themselves in the social and religious domains. Analysing the growth and development of social institutions such as endogamy and temples, and the subsequent practices of ritual purity and pollution, I have shown that caste has been re-institutionalised in the UK and become more visible at present than ever before.

Applying Louis Dumont's theorisation of caste, I have shown that the notion of "purity and impurity" remains important for the reproduction of caste hierarchy among migrants. The distinction between the pure and impure is visible in temples and ritual activities that show the persistence of the Brahmanical principles of purity. While pointing at the relevance of Dumont concerning the Brahmin principles of purity, I have also discussed the limitations of Dumont's approach to caste as he does not explain change and continuity in the reproduction of caste. For this, I brought Anthony Giddens (1990) and Thomas Eriksen (2007) into the discussion. They explain change in the context of modernity and globalisation. Their explanation of the terms "dis-embedding" and "re-embedding" provides a conceptual framework to explain interconnections and continuity in social relations that are "lifted out" from one context and reconstructed in another (Chapter 1). Drawing on Giddens' conception of "ontological security", I have explained how caste differences were accommodated temporarily by early migrants in order to tackle the hostile (racial) environment in the UK and how caste regained

momentum among migrants when the external hostility was settled. Drawing on everyday life and socio-cultural practices among migrants, I have argued that caste plays a decisive role in ordinary interactions where caste identities and religious belonging remain a governing factor in both personal and social relations. The issues of caste prejudices and discrimination in everyday life are the manifestation of caste-based identities. Therefore, caste is not just "lifted out" from migrants' native places, nor it is confined to religious spheres and social identities. It has become an everyday "gaze" that represents an embodied perspective, where discrimination and exclusion play a part in the regular lives of migrants. To understand this, I moved beyond Dumont, Giddens, and Eriksen and explained that caste has become an organising principle in the daily lives of migrants. Building on the anthropologist, Thomas Blom Hansen's (2012) conception of "gaze", I have illustrated that caste persists in regular life in ordinary conversations and personal relations, including friendship, love, and marriages. Caste governs social life in accordance with scriptural norms and the belief in Brahmanical principles of purity.

In this dissertation I have explained the way in which caste is re-institutionalised through the belief in caste. I followed Ambedkar's explanation of how caste persists as a belief. Ambedkar's observation of caste as belief has thrown light on the issue of caste and migration, though conceptually. His hypothesis in his 1916 essay – that caste could transcend the geographical boundaries with migration and that it could become a "world problem" – deserves attention in migration studies. Not that caste has become a "world problem", but the way in which caste hierarchies are spread and practised among Indian migrants worldwide, particularly in the UK, is a matter of sociological inquiry. The caste issue discussed in the United Nations conferences two decades ago (at WCAR 2001) and the recent debates on caste in the British parliament over "anti-caste legislation" indicate the growing embeddedness of caste in the global context (Chapter 5). Analysing caste debates in local and international contexts, I have described how caste discourse is dominated by mainstream sociology in India and how the hegemonic articulation of caste appears in both local and international debates. While analysing caste debates in the UK's legal and political spheres, I have pointed out that, on the one hand, caste represents hegemonic articulation and dominance, and on the other hand, this dominance is confronted by the alternative Dalit discourse on caste. I have shown that the reproduction of caste also represents an important dimension of the hegemonic and counterhegemonic struggles between the high-castes and the Dalits.

Building further on the central question in this dissertation concerning the change and continuity of caste, I have discussed how caste has flourished within non-Brahmanical religious traditions, especially in Sikhism. The thesis that caste is not only a Hindu religious phenomenon, and that it has spilled over into the rest of the social fabric, has been maintained by theorists of caste from Ambedkar to the contemporary sociologists and anthropologists. I have analysed this thesis in the context of migration by focusing on Sikhism. The question of how the Sikh religion is divided into castes and how its social and religious practices identify with the Brahmanical principle of purity and exclusion has been discussed (Chapter 2 and 3). The Sikh temples in the UK are divided on caste lines in that each temple represents its social belonging, indicating caste hierarchy, either higher or lower on the hierarchical scale. Arguably, the Sikh religion is founded on the principles of equality, but the social and cultural practices clearly indicate how caste hierarchy persists in everyday Sikhism.

I have explained that recent Sikh religious practices in the UK concerning daily rituals (prayers and sermons), annual processions, as well as marriage, birth, and death-related rituals, are driven by the Brahmanical notion of the pure and impure. I have argued that Sikhism identifies itself with the Brahmanical religion as far as everyday social relations and practices are concerned. Here, I have opted for a stricter focus on the Brahmanical notion of "purity and impurity" rather than using broader terms such as "Sanskritisation" that do not explain the religious conception of caste. These terms also remain limited in capturing the lower-caste religious struggles against the Brahmanical religion. The Brahmanical practices in Sikhism are confronted by lower-caste Sikhs (Ravidasis) through the adopting of an alternative religious model in which daily rituals, processions, and other rituals are created based on the Ravidasis' own historical and cultural narratives. I have demonstrated this phenomenon as the confrontation of the Brahmanical religion by the Ravidasia alternative.

Religion has been an important vehicle for social struggles against caste domination in India. The diasporic scenario reflects this dimension in which religious presence has become a basis for community existence. Religious institutions have not only organised and intensified scriptural norms, customs, and ritual practices, but they have also provided an incentive for the formation of an alternative culture in the case of lower-caste religions. On the one hand, the scriptural belief in caste is reproduced by Brahmanical religions through the practising of ritual purity and impurity as sanctioned in the ancient texts of Vedic Hinduism; and on the other hand, this scriptural notion of ritual purity is confronted by the Ravidasia religion. The root of the

Ravidasia religion lies in the revival of the saint Ravidas' movement (known as the "Ad Dharm" movement) in the early twentieth century in Punjab. The post-Independence migration of the followers of the Ad Dharam brought a new dimension to the revival movement. The migrants materialised their Ad Dharm identity while strengthening "Ravidasia" as an alternative religious cult that had initially been carved out in India. The Ravidasia identity at present operates both as an alternative to the Brahmanical religion and also as an assertion of an egalitarian religion (Chapter 3). I have also pointed out that even though the Ravidasia religion serves as an alternative to the Brahmanical religion, it is unlikely to step away from caste-based identities and ritual practices in daily life that reproduce the caste stigma associated with the followers of Ravidas. This is one of the limitations of the Ravidasia religion in its fight against Brahmanical dominance.

Caste is a system of humiliation and its embodied perspective (gaze) in everyday life is a reason for the caste-oppressed to struggle for freedom from caste-based domination. The mobilisation of the Dalits in the UK is rooted in their struggle for freedom from caste, and Ambedkar as an alternative helps them achieve that freedom. While the Ravidasia alternative shows certain limitations in its struggle against caste dominance, the Ambedkarite alternative offers a radical means for the confrontation of Brahmanism. Not only does it help Ambedkarites step away from the Brahmanical religion and culture while adopting an altogether different religious alternative, that is, Buddhism; but it also provides a social and political means for Dalit mobility beyond religion. I have discussed how the Ravidasia cult remained limited in its struggle against caste and how the Ambedkarite-Buddhist alternative succeeded in offering a caste-free identity.

While exploring the emergence of the Ambedkarite movement in the UK, I have examined how the Ambedkarite identity is maintained by Dalits and how they became involved in the struggles against caste oppression. What was crucial in the making of an Ambedkarite movement in the UK was the way in which the Dalits followed Ambedkar's message concerning education and stepped away from caste identities and the oppressive Brahmanical culture. I have pointed out that the Ambedkar movement in the UK differs from the Dalit movement in India and shows some unique features because the former is led by Dalit migrants and labourers. The migrants took inspiration from Ambedkar's instruction to "educate, agitate and organise" by literally educating themselves through the process of reading and discussing Ambedkar, a culture that they adopted decades ago and is still prevalent today. The Dalits literally engaged themselves in reading and acquiring knowledge, they spread Ambedkar's writing throughout public

libraries, conducted meetings for dialogue and discussion, and launched protests against caste injustices (Chapter 6). Eventually, they also converted to Buddhism, following Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism in 1956, by organising a public conversion event in the early seventies in the town of Birmingham. I have discussed this phenomenon as a radical shift in the social and cultural lives of the Ambedkarite Dalits that offers them an ideological imperative to struggle for freedom from caste domination.

Drawing on first-generation narratives, I have demonstrated how caste prejudices and discrimination operated during an earlier time of migration and how they continued among the subsequent generations (Chapter 4). I have described this phenomenon as a "cultural passing-on" of caste from the older generations to the younger (British-born). The belief that one is superior to others in the caste hierarchy is nurtured in upper-caste families and its outcome is seen in caste bullying by peers in educational environments among school and college students. Caste discrimination is an outcome of the "belief" in caste that creates an ontological drive to practise caste. The consciousness of caste and the desire to know and practise caste springs from the ideology of caste rooted in the ancient scriptures.

In recent scholarship, migration is seen as a movement towards better life chances and opportunities. It is also pursued as a movement for individual "freedom" and "well-being". I have made an attempt to explain that for the Dalits, the idea of freedom and well-being is not only an individual phenomenon, but it is fundamentally a collective response against domination and indicates freedom in social as well as in individual spheres (Chapter 1). In the Dalit situation, migration is not only a movement for bettering individual life chances, but also a means for collective struggle against caste oppression. Analysing migration in the light of anti-caste struggles, I have argued that migration is not only a matter of freedom, but it also relates to "freedom from domination". The Dalit narratives presented in this dissertation reveal this dimension – that right from the beginning of their migration they were seeking a caste-free environment. The migration context certainly provided them that space, but caste domination as such did not wither away even after migration. Indeed, it was reinforced in various ways through social and religious institutions reproduced in the diaspora.

The diasporic host environment is alien to the caste system and its practices. But the way in which caste has embedded itself through migration has made caste appear even more complex. At one point, caste relations and practices have changed and been deemed irrelevant, while at another point they are reproduced. In recent time, caste has gained momentum through its

practice in accordance with scriptural beliefs in the notions of purity and impurity. Dalits did not expect the persistence of caste in the UK to this extent, where they could be treated as inferior through the reproduction of scriptural beliefs and practices of caste hierarchy. This scenario made the Dalits realise that even after migration they would have to fight against caste oppression. The social and cultural growth in the diaspora clearly indicates that caste distinction has been prevalent since the beginning, when temples were built and when the Dalits were excluded from the common religious spaces built for all. As a consequence, the creation of alternative temples and religious institutions in themselves amounted to a struggle against caste domination. However, this creation of alternatives did not confine itself to religious spaces and it began to govern the social lifestyle of the migrants in a decisive manner. The reproduction of the social simultaneously indicates an alternative social and cultural formation that is aimed at confronting caste dominance. The question of "freedom" in migration is therefore not confined to life chances and aspirations, for the migrant Dalits have equally progressed and fulfilled their individual aspirations and career pathways as much as the rest of the migrants. But that does mean "freedom" in the social realm, where caste has become an everyday gaze that represents an embodied perspective. Therefore, the Dalit struggle to seek freedom from caste domination continued even after migration.

I have demonstrated the persistence of caste in the everyday lives of the migrants. The establishment of temples was the first step in identifying with the culture and tradition that made caste identities explicit. Religious practices and temple rituals provided space for migrants to identify with the Brahmanical principles of purity. Social practices like endogamy followed thereafter, clearly indicating the belief in caste and the identification with the Brahmanical tradition. Surprisingly, the belief in caste purity continued even after inter-caste marriages as I have illustrated (Chapter 4). The inter-caste marriage in the diaspora is an outcome of modernity, but that does not reflect a change in caste attitudes. Caste has adapted to modernity. Therefore, the inter-caste marriage may cross caste boundaries, but it is unlikely to overcome the belief in caste that represents hierarchy and exclusion. Caste is produced and reproduced as a "social logic" while the culture and tradition that reflects internal differences and hierarchies are maintained. These differences and hierarchies are manifested in social interactions, where caste prejudices and discrimination are explicit in the regular lives of migrants. The international debates on caste in the Durban Conference and in the UK's public domain demonstrate how caste is confronted through a human rights approach. The confrontation of caste in public spaces represents the "political logic" of caste (Chapter 5).

While the social logic points to the formation and growth of caste relations and hierarchy, the political logic indicates how caste hierarchies are confronted and questioned.

Finally, to return to the central question I asked in this dissertation: does caste change with migration? I have answered this question by demonstrating that caste changes at one point owing to practical tasks and challenges in the host environment, and that it continues at another point with hierarchical relations and practices. I have shown that even though certain changes took place in caste practices, they do not necessarily change the fundamental belief in caste. For caste remains an ideology, an organising principle in the social lives of the diasporic Indians. It has become an everyday gaze that represents an embodied perspective due to which discrimination and exclusion play a part in migrants' lives. This scenario explains why caste persists among Indian migrants in the UK. While the data presented in this research concerning the persistence of caste mostly revolves around religious institutions and temples, the issue of caste in the diaspora could be addressed beyond temples and religious domains. Though the ideology of caste springs from religious texts and the beliefs in these texts, caste also has a multidimensional presence beyond the religious domain.

Glossary

Aarti	Daily prayer in Hinduism
Ad Dharm	Lit. original or indigenous religion, used to refer the Ravidasia cult
Akhand path	The continuous and uninterrupted reading of the Sikh scripture
Amritdhari	Baptised Sikh
Anand karaj	Sikh wedding ceremony
Ardas	The Sikh prayer
Bani/Gurbani	Hymns in the Sikh scripture
Brahmachari	A celibate
Chamar	An ex-untouchable caste and the followers of saint Ravidas
Chaur/Chaur sahib	A ceremonial whisk waved over the Sikh scripture as an act of reverence
Dalit	Lit. "crushed", referring generally to those oppressed by the caste system. Often used interchangeably with "Scheduled Caste".
Damri Bheta	A legend of Ravidas in which he is believed to have offered a coin (damri) to the holy mother Ganges
Dana	The act of donation in Buddhism
Darbar sahib	The prayer hall in Sikhism
Dharam	Broadly used to refer to a religion of South Asia
Diksha	Initiation into Buddhism by conversion
Dikshabhoomi	The place where Ambedkar converted to Buddhism with his followers on 14 October 1956
Five Ks	Lit. the five sacred objects that a Khalsa or baptised Sikh wears at all times – namely, Kesh (uncut hair), Kara (bracelet), Kanga (comb), Kaccha (cotton underwear) and Kirpan (dagger)
Goras	Word used by South Asians to refer to white
Granthi/Giani	The reader/preacher of the sacred book in Sikhism. Often used interchangeably with priest
Gurdwara	Sikh temple
Gurmukhi	The script of the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh scripture
Gurpurab	Celebration of the birth anniversary of the Sikh Gurus (e.g. Gurpurab Guru Nanak)
Gurus	Sikh teachers and founders
Guru Granth Sahib	The Sikh scripture
Harr nishan	The sign (nishan) associated with the Ravidasia flag
Hukumnama	An edict received upon the first ritual of the day in Sikhism
Jai Gurdev	Greeting in the Ravidasia cult
Janeu	Sacred thread hanging around a Brahmin man's body
Japji mala	Rosary of prayer beads worn by Ravidas
Jatt	An agricultural caste in Sikhism, whch considers itself high-caste
Jayanti	Birth anniversary celebration, refers either to Ambedkar's or the Buddha's birth anniversary
Jyoti	Flame
Kala pani	Black water/sea deemed inauspicious in Hinduism
Kangan	A bangle
Khalsa	Refers to the community of Sikhs in general and particularly to the initiated (baptised) Sikhs
Kirtan	Devotional singing in Sikhism performed in Gurdwaras

Langar	Communal food served in Sikh temples during congregation
Mahaparinibban	Death anniversary of Ambedkar or the Buddha
Mandir	Hindu temple
Manusmriti	A sacred text in Hinduism
Mattha tekna	The act of paying one's respects to the Sikh scripture by bowing down and touching one's forehead to the ground
Mazhabi	A lower-caste Sikh converted from the Valmiki cult
Mela/Gala function	Celebration associated with the Sikh tradition
Miri-piri	The respective military and spiritual powers associated with Sikh ideology
Murthi	An idol referred to Hindu god/goddess
Naam simran	Lit. chanting the God's name in Sikhism (also referred to as "Naam japna")
Nagar kirtan	Procession in Sikhism on the occasion of Guru Nanak's birth anniversary celebration
Nanak	The founder of Sikhism and the first of the tenth gurus in Sikhism
Navayana Buddhism	Lit. new Buddhism, the term coined by Ambedkar when he converted to Buddhism
Nishan sahib	Sikh flag
Palki	Palanquin used to carry the Sikh scripture during public processions
Pandit	A Hindu priest
Panj piare	Lit. the five beloved and holy men in Sikhism. They form the nucleus of the Khalsa
Panja Sahib	A gurdwara located in Hasan Abdal, Pakistan, where Nanak's handprint (panja) is believed to be imprinted on a stone he
Pathri	A flat stone on which leather is cut. It is associated with the saint Ravidas' life as one of the sacred objects in his legends
Pathri taran	A legend of Ravidas in which he is believed to have made a stone (pathri) float on water
Prakas	Lit. the light that refers to the literal opening of the Sikh scripture during the first ritual of the day, early in the morning
Prasad	Sweet distributed during prayer sessions
Puja	Worship
Rab	Refers to God in the Punjab region
Ramgarhia	An intermediate artisan caste in Sikhism
Ravidasi	A follower of Ravidas, a fifteenth-century saint and poet who was born into an untouchable (Chamar) caste
Sadh sangat	Sikh congregation
Samapti	The termination of the evening prayer in Sikhism
Sanatani	An orthodox Hindu
Sangrand	The harvest festival celebrated in Punjab and other parts of India
Sat Sri Akal	Greeting in Sikhism. It was coined by the tenth guru, Gobind Singh
Sehaj path	An occasional or voluntary reading of the Sikh scripture
Seva/sewa	Religious service in Sikhism
Sevadar	A Sikh volunteer who performs religious service
Shahid	Martyr
Sikh	A member of the Sikh community and religion
Singh Sabha	A society of Sikhs that originally emerged as a movement against the conversion of Sikhs to Christianity and Hinduism in the nineteenth century

Sudras	The lowest castes of the four varnas (castes) in the Hindu caste system
Sukh Asan	The resting place of the Sikh scripture after the final evening prayer
Takhat	Throne upon which Sikh scripture is placed
Tirtha	Holy water dropped in devotees hands in Hindu temples
Vaisakhi/Baisakhi	A harvest festival in Punjab. It also marks the new year in the Sikh tradition
Valmiki	A follower of Valmik, the writer of the epic *Ramayana*
Varnashramdharma	The four-fold division of the caste system
Vihara	Buddhist temple
Vilayati	A foreigner, especially refers to the British
Waheguru	God in Sikhism, who is believed to be formless and omnipresent

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