

February 21, 2023

TO: Seattle City Council Councilmembers

CC: Human Rights Commission Manager Meredith Stone

Via Email Only to Council@seattle.gov and Meredith.Stone@seattle.gov

RE: Organizational Statement in Support of Ordinance Banning Caste-Based Discrimination

Dear Councilmembers:

We, the undersigned 175+ organizations, are committed to respect, dignity, justice, and human rights for all peoples, locally and globally. We oppose racism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, antisemitism, and other forms of hate and bigotry. We are troubled that caste-based discrimination is not currently prohibited under our anti-discrimination framework. Like racism, casteism is a system of oppression; it is a very real – and growing – problem in our country and our local communities, but one that is not understood by most Americans. Recognizing that the struggle against casteism is part of the broader struggle against injustice, we stand with those oppressed and harmed by caste and write to express our support for the ordinance to add caste as a prohibited category for discrimination.

We strongly urge you to support the proposed ordinance and unanimously pass the first-in-the-nation legislation to ban caste-based discrimination in the City of Seattle. Such an ordinance aligns with our moral values as organizations as well as our vision for the kind of city that Seattle should be.

The attached document details the many reasons why we need and support this ordinance. Please feel free to reach out to SeattleIndians@gmail.com, if you have any questions or wish to discuss any of this further.

Thank you in advance for your commitment to dignity for ALL of Seattle's residents, workers, and visitors, including the caste-oppressed. Your vote to outlaw caste discrimination will reaffirm Seattle's commitment to a city that does not condone prejudicial treatment, bias or discrimination based on immutable characteristics, and will set an appropriate (and long-overdue) precedent for the whole nation. We look forward to celebrating this significant and historic achievement with you.

Signed by:

1. Ambedkar Association of North America
2. Ambedkar International Center
3. Ambedkar King Study Circle
4. Coalition of Seattle Indian Americans
5. Equality Labs
6. Access To Our Community (ATOC)
7. ACLU of Washington
8. Admiral Church UCC
9. Afghan American Community of Washington
10. Afghans of Puget Sound Alliance
11. Afghans of Seattle
12. Al Kariim Islamic Center
13. Alki United Church of Christ
14. Ambedkar International Social Reform Organization, Canada
15. Ambedkarite Buddhist Association of Texas
16. Americans for Refugees and Immigrants
17. Amnesty International USA
18. Anti Caste Discrimination Alliance (ACDA)
19. Aotearoa Alliance of Progressive Indians
20. API Chaya
21. Asian Counseling and Referral Service (ACRS)
22. Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance
23. Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance - Seattle
24. Awake Church, Seattle
25. Begumpura Cultural Society
26. Bethany United Church of Christ (Seattle)
27. BIPOC ED Coalition
28. Boston South Asian Coalition
29. Boston Study Group
30. Byrd Barr Place
31. CAIR Washington
32. Casa Latina
33. Center for Security, Race and Rights
34. Central Washington Justice For Our Neighbors
35. Centro Cultural Mexicano
36. Chetna Association of Canada
37. Chicago Coalition for Human Rights in India
38. Chief Seattle Club
39. Chinese Information and Service Center (CISC)
40. Church Council of Greater Seattle
41. Coalition Against Fascism
42. Colectiva Legal del Pueblo
43. Columbia City Church of Hope
44. Degh Tegh Community Kitchen
45. DFW Shri Guru Ravidass Organization
46. Dr. Ambedkar Education Aid Society
47. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar International Mission Center – Houston
48. Eastside For All
49. El Centro de la Raza
50. Essentials First
51. Faith Action Network (FAN)
52. First AME Church
53. Gethsemane Lutheran Church
54. Global NRI Forum
55. Guru Ravidass Sabha
56. Gurudwara Nanak Darbar
57. Gurudwara Sacha Marg
58. Gurudwara Singh Sabha of Washington
59. Gurudwara Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur
60. Hate Free Delridge
61. Hindus for Human Rights
62. Husaynia Islamic Society of Seattle

63. Immanuel Lutheran Church (ELCA)
64. Immigrants Women's Community Center
65. India Civil Watch International
66. India Labour Solidarity
67. Indian American Community Services (formerly India Association of Western Washington)
68. Indian American Muslim Council
69. Indian Workers Association GB
70. Indivisible Bainbridge Island
71. Indivisible Eastside (WA)
72. Indivisible Plus Washington
73. Indivisible Vashon
74. Indivisible Vashon Immigrant/Refugee Rights Group
75. Indivisible Washington's 8th District
76. International Bahujan Organization
77. International Solidarity for Academic Freedom in India (InSAF India)
78. Iraqi Community Center of Washington
79. Islamic Center of Olympia
80. Islamic Center of Tacoma
81. Islamic Community Center of Anchorage Alaska
82. Islamophobia Studies Center
83. Jakara Movement
84. Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), Seattle Chapter
85. Jewish Coalition for Immigrant Justice NW
86. Jewish Voice for Peace - Seattle Chapter
87. Kadima Reconstructionist Community
88. Khalra Mission Organization
89. Khalsa Academy
90. Khalsa Gurmat Center
91. Khalsa University
92. King County Jews Against Antisemitism
93. La Resistencia
94. Landlords Association of Washington
95. Lane Consulting Group
96. Latino Advocacy
97. Latino Community Fund
98. Lutheran Community Services Northwest
99. MAPS-AMEN (American Muslim Empowerment Network)
100. Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Church
101. Middle Eastern Legal Association of Washington
102. Modest Family Solutions
103. MPower Change
104. Muslim American Youth Foundation
105. Muslim Association of Northwest
106. Muslim Community and Neighborhood Association (MCNA)
107. Muslim Community Resource Center
108. Muslim Counterpublics Lab
109. Muslim Educational Trust
110. Muslim Forum of the Pacific Northwest
111. Muslims for Community Action and Support
112. Never Again Seattle
113. Northlake UU Church
114. Northwest Immigrant Rights Project (NWIRP)
115. OneAmerica
116. OneAmerica Votes Muslim Council
117. Pacific Northwest Ambedkar Group
118. Paths to Understanding
119. People of Color Community Coalition
120. Periyar Ambedkar Study Circle
121. Periyar Ambedkar Thoughts Circle-Australia (PATCA)

122. Periyar International USA
123. Plateaupians For Peace
124. Plymouth Church United Church of Christ
125. Poetic Justice Foundation
126. Presbytery of Seattle (P.C.U.S.A)
127. Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action (PSARA)
128. Queen Anne Baptist Church
129. Rachel Corrie Foundation for Peace and Justice
130. Radha Swami Rasila Satsang Center
131. Radical Women
132. Real Change
133. Refugee Women's Alliance (ReWA)
134. Researchers and Critical Educators (RACE) from California State University Fullerton
135. Royal Academy of Punjab
136. Sadhana: Coalition of Progressive Hindus
137. SALAAM Center
138. Sammamish Muslim Association
139. SCM Medical Missions
140. Seattle Indivisible
141. Shikshan Jagruti Abhiyan Goa (Seattle)
142. Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha of Fresno
143. Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha of New York
144. Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha of Union City
145. Shri Guru Ravidass Temple of Pittsburgh
146. Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF)
147. Sikh Center of Seattle
148. Sikh Coalition
149. Singh Sabha Gurdwara
150. Snohomish County Indivisible
151. SOCH Center Seattle
152. Socialist Alternative
153. Somali Family Safety Task Force
154. Somali Health Board
155. South Asia Scholar Activist Collective (SASAC)
156. South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)
157. South Asian Dalit Adivasi Network, Canada
158. South Asians Building Accountability & Healing (SABAH)
159. Stand for Children WA
160. Subcontinental Drift Boston
161. Sustainability Concepts
162. Swaraj Abhiyan Chicago
163. Tasveer
164. The Chardi Kala Project
165. The Feminist Critical Hindu Studies Collective
166. The Humanism Project
167. The Practicing Church (WA)
168. Tibbetts United Methodist Church (Seattle)
169. Veterans For Peace
170. Veza Global
171. Vietnamese Community Leadership Institute
172. WA Partners for Social Change
173. WA Poor People's Campaign
174. Wallingford Indivisible
175. Wasat Community
176. Washington Advocates for Palestinian Rights
177. Washington Fair Trade Coalition
178. Washington Immigrant Solidarity Network (WAISN)
179. Washington Indivisible Podcast
180. World Without Hate
181. Yemen Relief and Reconstruction Foundation

Background

On January 24, 2023, Councilmember Kshama Sawant (District 3) introduced an [ordinance](#) to ban caste-based discrimination in Seattle.

The caste system is unfortunately practiced by many from the South Asian American community. Caste is a system of rigid social stratification characterized by hereditary status, endogamy (completely closed categories), and social barriers based on birth and descent. Caste discrimination occurs in the form of social segregation, economic deprivation, physical and psychological abuse, and even violence. It also manifests in employment, education, and housing, and has been growing in the United States across many industries, including technology, construction, restaurants and the service industry, and in domestic work.¹

As [Dr. Shailaja Paik](#), Taft Distinguished Professor of History at the University of Cincinnati (but speaking in her individual/personal capacity), explained in her letter to the City Council supporting this ordinance:

[C]asteism, just like racism, is a system of hierarchy creating divisions amongst human beings. According to the ideology of caste, hereditary groups of people are ascribed a particular social status based on inherited privileges or a lack thereof.

Although it originates in South Asia the consequences of casteism are not confined to this region, nor are they confined to Hindu populations. As the number of South Asians in the US has grown, casteism has become a major problem and caste atrocities have been on the rise Caste consciousness exists among South Asian immigrants as well as South Asians born in the U.S.

If left invisible and unchecked, casteism perpetuates suffering amongst those in our vicinity and beyond. So casteism no less than racism, patriarchy and homophobia must be actively contested.

The caste system operates at institutional, interpersonal and individual levels, and like racism impacts mental, physical and work related outcomes. Health research points to high rates of depression, anxiety and suicide among caste oppressed students and individuals. Implicit and explicit forms of casteism contribute to a hostile academic environment and result[] in significant educational and health disparities among caste oppressed individuals.

¹ You can read more about the caste system and the associated discrimination in this [What Is Caste?](#) primer.

. . . In the 21st century caste has transnationalized in an unprecedented manner and South Asians carry the baggage of caste cultures across oceans and seas with dominant oppressor castes trying to recreate structures of power, privilege and differentiation thus marginalising, excluding and oppressing those lower than them and more specifically Dalits who are affected in the most negative manner in a variety of ways: social, economic, ideological, religious and cultural. The U.S legal system and citizens need to pay attention to this discrimination based on descent that has produced material and psychological horrors.

For many people, despite making it to the top, Dalits are told over and over again that they cannot work, or they do not have the necessary skills or that they do not belong to the tech world of Seattle, for that matter. ([Full letter in Appendix](#); emphasis added)

The distressing tale of illegal sex, labor, and human trafficking of “lower caste” Indian girls to the US from 1986 to 2000 in the case of *United States v. [Lakireddy Bali Reddy](#)* and the ongoing lawsuit against technology giant [Cisco in California](#) are two extreme examples, cut across decades, of caste-based discrimination and the role caste plays in the South Asian diaspora even in our present time.

Equality Labs (a national non-profit Dalit² civil rights organization) conducted a first-of-its-kind community survey of caste in the United States. The key findings from that 2018 “[Caste in the United States: A Survey of Caste Among South Asian Americans](#)” report are provided in Table 1 below, and reveal the extent to which caste is a real and grave contributor to discrimination, bias, fear, and suffering, even in the United States. From its findings, Equality Labs concluded in its report: “All of the inequalities associated with Caste status have become embedded in all of the major South Asian American institutions and they extend into American institutions that have significant South Asian immigrant populations.”

Testimonies collected by [Ambedkar King Study Circle](#) further demonstrate that people from the “lower castes” face bias, discrimination, segregation, and harassment based on their caste in the workplace, housing, employment, and beyond.

More and more caste-oppressed individuals are speaking out and sharing their heartbreaking and horrifying stories, even if anonymously (for fear of retaliation).

² Dalits are in the lowest social group of the caste hierarchy and were previously known as “untouchables.”

Table 1: Key Findings from 2018 [“Caste in the United States: A Survey of Caste Among South Asian Americans”](#) report



Bottom line: the absence of a protection policy against caste-based discrimination has enabled and facilitated covert and blatant discrimination, exclusion, and exploitation of those born into the “lower castes.”

Caste Discrimination Exists and Causes Harm in Seattle

The State of Washington is home to more than [167,000 people](#) from the South Asian diaspora, largely concentrated in the Greater Seattle area. A May 2022 article entitled [“Hidden discrimination: Casteism persists in South Asian spaces”](#) noted how caste discrimination “remains a largely hidden and unreported issue” in Seattle. The same article quotes a spokesperson from the City of Seattle Office for Civil Rights, who wrote that “Caste Status is not a recognized protected class in the City of Seattle and if our office were to receive a complaint based solely on caste discrimination, we would not be able to investigate it...”

Sadly, there are many individuals even in Seattle who have in fact faced such discrimination, and many are even in fear of being “outed” as Dalit or “lower caste.” As one of our local Seattle-based Dalit community members (a respected computer scientist working for a large technology

company) shared in a message, while the caste-oppressed have experienced the trauma, stigma, and oppression of the caste system throughout their lives, they do not have adequate remedies:

[U]nlike the other marginalized communities in the US, that are protected under the law and have a [recourse] for standing against racial, gender and other forms of discrimination, Dalit community largely remains hidden and suffers through it silently. Two years ago, a person at my workplace, who was subject to caste-based discrimination shared their story, anonymously, and with a lot of courage, with the leaders in the company. But it fell on deaf ears with vague promises of “doing better” When a group of us urged the company to add “caste” to the anti-discrimination policy, I was told by some that “this is not a place for activism” - not in my backyard they said, for the fear of lending voice to this community and disrupting the perceived norm. ([Full letter in Appendix](#); name removed for safety)

Others have provided public comment sharing their personal experiences with caste discrimination too, including in the Seattle area. Videos are available of those sessions, including the [January 24, 2023 Press Conference](#), the [January 24, 2023 Seattle Council meeting](#), the [January 31, 2023 Seattle Council meeting](#), the [February 7, 2023 Seattle Council meeting](#) and the [February 14, 2023 Seattle Council meeting](#). A few highlights are provided below.

- A Seattle-based architectural designer and Dalit Christian stated: “I come from an oppressed caste in India. I am only the third generation in my family to have access to education. The stories of my ancestors have been those of forced labor and oppression until we won a democratic right to equality. Unfortunately we continue to face violent crimes. When I moved to the United States for a masters degree, my struggles with caste discrimination followed. The social exclusion of Dalit students and microaggressions towards us is a common practice amongst Indian student communities in the US. The hidden biases of caste are also a reality for generations of Indian immigrants here. However we do not have the legal protection against this human rights violation.”
- An Information Technology Executive working in multinational tech companies in the Seattle area for the last 13 years stated: “I grew up as an untouchable in a small town in middle India. In our small town, I constantly witnessed stories of active discrimination against my family members in Indian academia and employment opportunities. Working in downtown Seattle for over a decade surrounded by thousands of my countrymen, my fear didn’t go down. I was worried about being outed and having a setback to my career. Like many successful people from the lower castes, I avoided talking about my identity. Some of my cousins went a step further and changed their last names to avoid getting associated with the lower caste to avoid any potential discrimination. For decades, I practiced dissonance where I actively avoided thinking about discrimination of my own people.”

- A Microsoft technologist and author stated: “Dalits have little institutional support in the [tech] industry. It is difficult to file complaints of caste discrimination at work to lead to disciplinary action, especially if [] co-workers claim religious discrimination in response. Religion, unlike caste, is a protected category in the workplace. You can’t even bring a complaint, and the burden of proof is always going to be on the [caste-oppressed] survivor. Dalits who are born into marginalized castes in India’s rigid hierarchies have to face oppression for a long [time]. So to ban what has been carried to the US, I urge the city council to take the lead on this human rights issue.”
- Raghav Kaushik, a veteran Microsoft technologist shared: “I work at Microsoft and I can tell you from my own experience that caste-based discrimination takes place in the Tech sector, here in this area. In 2006, when the Indian government announced affirmative action to help the oppressed castes, there was a discussion about this in the Microsoft emails thread. Various employees expressed very bigoted and hideous comments mocking caste-oppressed people, questioning their intelligence and merit. No one was held accountable for that. Microsoft (didn’t) bat an eyelid. They didn’t do anything. So caste discrimination exists right here in our midst. Caste legitimizes itself in various ways. One of the big examples is the education system, where there is an attempt by caste oppressors and right-wingers to sanitize [caste] or to minimize its horrors. Another way in which it legitimizes itself is diversity and inclusion, that is, by co-opting progressive language. For example, if you hear that India is a diverse country with 4,000 castes, you should cringe, as it is a cringe-worthy statement. It is legitimizing a horrific system. Such legitimization is a common phenomenon in this country, locally.”³

This discrimination that caste-oppressed individuals experience, even here in Seattle, is not only real but has a significant impact on their health and well-being too. The South Asian Behavioral Health Initiative - Pacific Northwest (SABHI-PNW) shared in their letter to the Seattle City Council supporting the ordinance: “Although caste-based discrimination historically has been a South Asian issue, it’s now a global and U.S. issue, given the numbers of South Asian immigrants across

³ Indeed, Raghav Kaushik (who was born into a dominant caste) was directly involved in exposing the derogatory caste emails at Microsoft and helping raise awareness about the pervasiveness of the caste system in the tech sector, leading to national reporting on the issue by the Washington Post and more. See Seattle Times article [“India’s engineers have thrived in the tech industry. So has its caste system.”](#) (Oct. 27, 2020) (“Dalit engineers said that most Indian workers from upper castes do not seem aware of their caste privilege and believe caste bias is a thing of the past. . . . Internal Microsoft emails from 2006 obtained by The Post indicate that caste bias is a long-standing problem within the industry.”). For another article exposing the prevalence of caste discrimination in the tech sector, see Bloomberg’s [How Big Tech Is Importing India’s Caste Legacy to Silicon Valley](#) (March 11, 2021).

the world in positions of authority, **including in our Pacific Northwest communities.**” ([Full letter in Appendix](#); emphasis added) They added that as mental health professionals, they “have visibility into how caste-based oppression impacts [their] clients’ lives, including trauma, lowered self-esteem, and struggles with depression and anxiety, increased risk of suicide. Caste oppression is a hidden risk factor in the health of South Asian communities.” This harm could be addressed through legislation, which is why SABHI-PNW concluded that “[a]nti-casteism legislation is crucial for advocating and protecting people in our communities.”

Other Institutions Have Also Started Banning Caste Discrimination Recognizing Its Harm

Caste-oppressed individuals and allies have started a growing anti-caste movement in America to raise awareness about the existence and extent of caste-based discrimination, bigotry, exclusion and harm. Thanks to these efforts, U.S. universities, civil rights organizations, workers’ unions, and even corporations have started to prohibit caste discrimination explicitly. [Brandeis University](#), [California State University](#) (CSU), [Brown University](#), [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People](#) (NAACP), [Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance](#) (APALA), [Harvard Graduate Students Union-United Auto Workers](#) (HGSU-UAW), and the [California Democratic Party](#) are some of the growing list of institutions that have endorsed caste equity and added caste to their non-discriminatory policies. In addition, companies like [Apple](#) and [Amazon](#) updated their employee conduct policies to explicitly prohibit caste discrimination. The category was added alongside race, religion, gender, age, and ancestry.

These institutions understand what we collectively, as signatories to this letter, recognize: caste discrimination is a real problem that must be explicitly named and prohibited to achieve equity and justice, in the workplace, educational system, companies, and public accommodations – in our cities, counties, and country.

The Proposed Ordinance Is Necessary to Protect the Caste-Oppressed in Seattle

The legislation introduced by Councilmember Sawant will ensure that “caste” is explicitly enshrined as a prohibited basis of discrimination and necessary protections are in place in Seattle for caste-oppressed South Asian residents, workers, and visitors, who, at present, do not have adequate legal remedies.

Specifically, the legislation will prohibit businesses from discriminating based on caste with respect to hiring, tenure, promotion, workplace conditions, or wages. It will ban discrimination based on caste in places of public accommodation, such as hotels, public transportation, public restrooms, or retail establishments. The law will also prohibit housing discrimination based on caste in rental housing leases, property sales, and mortgage loans.

These protections will bring visibility to, and address, the "hidden and unreported issue" of caste discrimination in our city.

Extending protections on the basis of caste is necessary because such protections are not already covered by existing anti-discrimination policy. As [Dr. Ajantha Subramanian, Harvard Professor](#), explained in elaborating this point in the letter of support she submitted to the City of Seattle on January 24, 2023: "Oppressed castes are a minority within a minority. They are doubly disadvantaged by virtue of being both racially marked and caste marked. Recognizing caste as a source of discrimination is the recognition of this double disadvantage. It acknowledges that there are stark differences of caste power and status within the South Asian American community that carry over from a long history of inequality in South Asia." ([Full letter in Appendix](#))

Legal protection is the proper mechanism through which to protect the caste-oppressed in Seattle and beyond. Such institutional protection will support vulnerable caste victims in reporting and combating the oppression they face, while taking away the argument that discrimination allegations based on caste should be stricken because caste is not a protected category ([as Cisco argued](#) in the lawsuit it is facing).

Those who oppose extending protections through the rule of law to the marginalized are often in positions of privilege when they claim such protections are not necessary, just as in other human/civil rights struggles. But as part of its responsibility of creating a city that promotes safety and well-being for ALL its residents – and given its commitment to diversity and equity – the City of Seattle should heed the call of those most directly impacted who are desperately seeking such protection, even if they are smaller in number and have limited power in relation to those in "upper castes" who claim such protections are not necessary.

Over 3,000 individuals have called on the City of Seattle to pass this ordinance. The Seattle City Council should listen to these voices, stand with the oppressed, and be on the right side of history on this civil and human rights struggle.

Introduction of the Ordinance Alone Has Had a Powerful Impact on the Caste-Oppressed

For marginalized individuals, even formal recognition of the discrimination they face can have profound impact. Indeed, the introduction of the ordinance and possibility that the City of Seattle would prohibit caste-based discrimination has inspired some among the caste-oppressed to speak out – to claim their identity, to raise their voices against caste oppression, and to face their oppressors. Some admitted this in public comment or letters of support sent to the City Council.

One such example is [Rita Meher](#), Co-Founder and Executive Director of Tasveer, the largest South Asian Film Festival in the world that is hosted in Seattle. In her message to the Council in support of the ordinance, she stated:

Over the past two decades I have amplified the voice of South Asian representation in media and on the screen. I have also produced the extremely successful South Asian equivalent of Eve Ensler's Vagina Monologues called Yoni Ki Baat, in addition to creating a new national fund for South Asian filmmakers, a Tasveer film fund, partnering with Netflix. Our films from Tasveer Film Festival are carried on Alaska Airlines. I have also most recently created a literary festival under the Tasveer umbrella.

*I say all of this so you understand that while I have been immensely successful in America, there is something I want Seattle City Council members to know about **what an important personal emotional moment this proposed ordinance banning caste discrimination announcement was for me on January 24th 2023. For the first time in my life, I publicly came out as an Adivasi and I tweeted in support of this ordinance.***

*Adivasis are indigenous tribal people in India referred to as Scheduled Tribes in India. Along with Dalits who have faced untouchability, Adivasis are outside the caste system, and I have faced socio economic ostracism growing up in India. **I continue to face pernicious caste oppression in the South Asian settings even here in Seattle. Until now, I have never talked publicly about my caste location as a caste oppressed indigenous woman yet I have been discriminated against due to the other markers about me-** from my name to the food I eat to knowing about my family background in India. ([Full letter in Appendix](#); emphasis added)*

This is how ingrained and powerful the caste system is, and also how important and impactful this ordinance can be, in the lives of those oppressed by caste.

Justice-Oriented Leaders and Organizations Support this Ordinance on Human Rights Grounds

Many public officials, leaders, and academics (speaking in their individual/personal capacities) across the globe have heard about this precedent-setting ordinance by the City of Seattle, and have lauded this historic step, on social media or through direct letters/messages to the Seattle City Council. These include [Dr. Noam Chomsky](#) (American public intellectual, author, linguist, philosopher, cognitive scientist, historian, social critic, and political activist), [M.K. Stalin](#) (Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, India), [Dhanya Rajendran](#) (Editor in Chief, News Minute India), [Prachi Patankar](#) (anti-caste champion and daughter of late Gail Omvedt), [Yashica Dutt](#) (anti-caste author of “Coming Out as a Dalit”), [Rev. Abi John](#) (Rector, Church of the Ascension, Rochester, NY), [Dr.](#)

[Ajantha Subramanian](#) (Professor of Anthropology and South Asian Studies at Harvard University), [Dr. Shailaja Paik](#) (Taft Distinguished Professor of History at the University of Cincinnati), [Dr. Gulrez Azhar](#) (Aspen New Institute Voices Fellow and Physician Health Researcher), [Dr. Jeremy Rinker](#) (Associate Professor at the University of North Carolina Greensboro's Department of Peace and Conflict Studies), [Dr. Sonja Thomas](#) (Associate Professor, Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies, Colby College), [Dr. Gaurav Sabnis](#) (Associate Professor, Marketing at the School of Business, Stevens Institute of Technology), [Dr. Roja Singh](#) (Assistant Professor, Sociology, St. John Fisher College), and [Dr. Amritjit Singh](#) (Langston Hughes Professor Emeritus of English, Ohio University).

Local respected South Asian academics have expressed their support too, including in letters written directly to the Seattle City Council (some of which are provided in the [Appendix](#)). They include the following professors (speaking in their individual/personal capacities): [Dr. Sareeta Amrute](#), [Dr. Radhika Govindrajan](#), [Dr. Sunila Kale](#), and [Dr. Christian Lee Novetzke](#) from University of Washington; [Dr. Nalini Iyer](#) from Seattle University; and [Dr. Vik Bahl](#) from Green River College.

A number of organizations also provided supportive statements, some included in the [Appendix](#), including [Amnesty International USA](#), [Feminist Critical Hindu Studies Collective \(FCHS\)](#), [Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance](#), [AFI-CIO \(APALA\)](#), [Alphabet Workers Union- Communication Workers of America \(AWU-CWA\)](#), [South Asian Behavioral Health Initiative SABHI-PNW](#), [Equality Labs](#), [Ambedkar International Center](#), [Ambedkar Association of North America](#), [Ambedkar King Study Circle](#), [Ambedkarite Buddhist Association of Texas](#), [Hindus for Human Rights](#), [Radha Swami Rasila Satsang Center](#), [Indian American Muslim Council](#), and [Boston Study Group](#).

Similarly, local Asian/South Asian American organizations have called on the City to adopt this ordinance. Some of their messages are provided here and their full statements are in the [Appendix](#).

- **Coalition of Seattle Indian Americans:** "Coalition of Seattle Indian Americans represents the diverse community of Indian Americans in the Seattle area. We are well aware of issues of caste that infect our community and lack of any internal process to manage it. We know that discriminatory, exploitative and violent acts enabled by this system cannot be addressed without institutional support and authority. Protection of caste oppressed will strengthen our community, not target it."
- **Indian American Community Services (formerly known as India Association of Western Washington):** "[C]aste based issues impact our community negatively in personal and professional settings. We urge the Seattle City Council to consider the proposed ordinance on caste based discrimination. This ordinance will allow for accountable processes that will only empower the vulnerable in our community."

- **Asian Counseling and Referral Services (ACRS):** “[ACRS] strongly supports the proposed ordinance to ban caste-based discrimination. . . . we know this is a pervasive, worldwide issue, including here in Seattle. As a social justice organization, we hold a deep responsibility to trust and believe our most vulnerable community members, including those who are caste-oppressed, when they say they are experiencing discrimination, harm, and oppression. We urge you to stand with us and vote in favor of the proposed ordinance to add caste as a prohibited category for discrimination.”
- **Tasveer:** “Our cinematic work has regularly featured films that depict the horrors of the caste system. As such, we are well aware of the continuing brutality of caste and recognize the need to fight it wherever in the world it raises its ugly head, including right here in our backyard. We are excited about the historic ordinance sponsored by Kshama Sawant and urge all council members in Seattle to vote for it.”
- **API Chaya:** “We see the impact of caste discrimination directly through our work in the community. Abusive partners leverage their upper caste status in the course of several tactics to maintain power and control in relationships. These harmful acts include: coercion, threats of deportation, minimizing/denying blame, emotional and physical abuse, as well as denying/controlling access to shared children. API Chaya stands strongly in support of the proposed ordinance, recognizing and actively working against this pervasive issue in our survivor communities.”
- **South Asian Behavioral Health Initiative - Pacific Northwest:** “Although caste-based discrimination historically has been a South Asian issue, it's now a global and U.S. issue, given the numbers of South Asian immigrants across the world in positions of authority, including in our Pacific Northwest communities. . . . As mental health professionals, we can see how incidents of structural oppression, including casteism, could be addressed by enacting explicit legislation. Anti-casteism legislation is crucial for advocating and protecting people in our communities. Dedicated to our clients' holistic well-being, we fully support an ordinance that protects our Dalit siblings.”
- **Indian American Muslim Council, Seattle Chapter:** “This proposed legislation sends a clear message that caste discrimination will not be tolerated in Seattle and that the city is committed to promoting equality and justice for all its residents. We stand as allies with the Dalit community, which has tirelessly worked to raise awareness on the issue of caste discrimination here in the United States, as well as to protect the people who battle this pervasive form of oppression on a daily basis..”
- **American Muslim Empowerment Network (AMEN):** “[S]ince introduction of the ordinance, our leadership has been hearing devastating testimonials from caste-oppressed individuals who have been suffering (often silently) even as they have and continue to face

blatant bias and ugly discrimination in the workplace, in social settings, in housing, and beyond. We stand as allies with our Dalit and other caste-marginalized communities in calling for the City of Seattle to end this pernicious form of suffering, as part of the broader struggle for civil and human rights for all.”

The possibility of the City of Seattle becoming the first in the nation to adopt this kind of ordinance has garnered attention in local, national and even international media, reflecting the significant human interest in this recently-growing civil rights struggle.⁴

Banning Caste Discrimination is a Human Rights Issue, Not an Attack on any Religion

Despite the clear human rights rationale for supporting caste equity, those who seek to uphold the status quo (which allows caste discrimination) have wrongly claimed that this ordinance targets Hindus or Hinduism. But that is not the case. As Lama Rangdrol, a Seattle-based African American Buddhist teacher, aptly stated at the [January 24 press conference](#): "This is not a condemnation of a religion, it's a condemnation of a behavior which we have long avoided in this country.”

Harvard Professor [Dr. Subramanian](#) also explained in the January 24 letter of support she submitted to the Council how the ordinance is not anti-Hindu:

Caste is a structure of inequality that is not limited to Hinduism. It is present within every South Asian religion. Moreover, many oppressed caste individuals are themselves Hindus. Extending protections to oppressed castes will in no way scapegoat the Hindu community specifically. To claim that adding caste to anti-discrimination policy is anti-Hindu distracts attention from the pressing issue of caste discrimination by making privileged caste Hindus and not oppressed castes into the real victims. . . .

Extending protections to oppressed castes will in no way scapegoat Hindus. This is tantamount to saying that race as a protected category scapegoats whites or that gender as a protected category scapegoats men. ([Full letter in Appendix](#); emphasis added)

Another professor, Dr. Sonja Thomas (Associate Professor of Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies at Colby College), who researches caste and has written about caste misinformation, elaborated in her letter to the Seattle City Council:

⁴ The coverage includes [Seattle Times](#), [KUOW NPR](#), [Real Change](#), [Fox News](#) (Q13), [US News, American Kahani](#), [Asam News](#) (Asian American), [The News Minute](#), [South First](#), [The Quint](#), [Telegraph India](#), [The Caravan](#), and [Sabrang](#).

While we normally associate caste with South Asia, casteism can function in other areas of the world as well, and it migrates with the diaspora. Casteism can also be seen in multiple religions.

I research [caste in Christianity](#) in India, and in the US Indian Christian community. It is FALSE to equate recognizing caste as discriminating against a religious minority. Such a smoke and mirrors tactic fails to protect oppressed caste Christians, Muslims, Sikhs and Buddhists while it simultaneously diverts attention away from the experiences that so many caste oppressed Hindus have been sharing with news media and in public testimonies in the US. Christians are a minority in India, but those Christians with caste power can still perpetuate casteism. In the same way, religious minorities in the US with caste power can still perpetuate casteism. ([Full letter in Appendix](#); emphasis added)

Similarly, Hindus for Human Rights addressed this concern in its letter to the City Council:

Some community members argue that openly discussing caste-based discrimination in workplaces and in schools would unfairly point fingers at all Hindus and/or Indian-Americans. We find such an argument deeply demeaning and insulting. As Hindus, our faith teaches us to value humility and growth, and to not shy away from self-critique when needed.

...

If the City Council takes a strong stand on caste-based discrimination and passes this legislation, it will only strengthen the work being done by students, employees, and community groups across the nation who are fighting to ensure that caste is defined as a specific category of possible discrimination under existing civil rights laws. ([Full letter in Appendix](#))

Caste discrimination unfortunately is a reality in the U.S., and in Seattle. By extending protections to the caste-oppressed, we can make visible caste inequality and discrimination in our city and beyond. The arguments by those who oppose this ordinance are similar to arguments made by those challenging other human and civil rights advances. The [Feminist Critical Hindu Studies Collective](#) and [Harvard Professor Dr. Subramanian](#) have thoroughly debunked these arguments in their respective letters sent to the Council, provided in the [Appendix](#). We ask the Seattle City Councilmembers to review those letters; reject the arguments of those opposing human/civil rights, justice, and equity; and stand with the large group of South Asian Americans and allies in combating caste discrimination and suffering.

Just as racism is not the result of an “inevitable” racial friction between White and Black people, caste oppression does not have to be an “inevitable” part of Hinduism. Challenging the scourge of casteism is not the same as attacking Hinduism, as [Hindus for Human Rights](#) further illustrates:

We practice our Hindu faith by rejecting caste entirely, and by insisting that all of us, regardless of race, religion, caste, or gender, are equally deserving of dignity and justice. We aim to create a radically inclusive space, and our organization includes members nationwide and in the Seattle area of all caste backgrounds, including members of the Dalit community.

Conclusion: Supporting the Ordinance Affirms Your Commitment to Combating Oppression

For all the above reasons, we – a broad, diverse coalition of groups representing Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Ravidasias, Atheists/Agnostics, Ambedkarites, Dalits, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color), immigrants/refugees, and more – strongly urge you to support Councilmember Kshama Sawant's proposed legislation to ban caste discrimination. Your vote to outlaw caste discrimination will ensure legal protections for the caste-oppressed; provide much-needed support for those suffering to speak out; reaffirm Seattle’s commitment to recognizing the dignity of all its residents, workers, and visitors by protecting them from prejudicial treatment, bias, and discrimination; and set a precedent for the whole nation.

We call on the City Council to stand with the caste-oppressed, and we look forward to celebrating this historic achievement together. With your vote in support of this ordinance, our City can be a leader in helping end the devastating legacy of caste bias and bending the “arc of the moral universe” toward justice, as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. taught.

APPENDIX

Organizational Support Statements:

- [Hindus For Human Rights](#)
- [Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFI-CIO \(APALA\)](#)
- [Asian Counseling And Referral Service \(ACRS\)](#)
- [Radha Swami Rasila Satsang Center](#)
- [Amnesty International USA](#)
- [Alphabet Workers Union- Communication Workers of America \(AWU-CWA\)](#)
- [Tasveer](#)
- [API Chaya](#)
- [Indian American Community Services](#)
- [Coalition of Seattle Indian Americans](#)
- [Ambedkar Association of North America \(Seattle Chapter\)](#)
- [Equality Labs](#)
- [Ambedkar International Center](#)
- [Indian American Muslim Council](#)
- [Ambedkar King Study Circle](#)
- [Ambedkarite Buddhist Association of Texas](#)
- [Boston Study Group](#)
- [American Muslim Empowerment Network](#)
- [South Asian Behavioral Health Initiative SABHI-PNW](#)
- [Feminist Critical Hindu Studies Collective \(FCHS\)](#)
- [India Civil Watch International](#)

Individual Support Statements:

- [Seattle Computer Scientist \(*identifies as Dalit caste location*\)](#)
- [Dr. Ajantha Subramanian, Harvard University Professor of Anthropology & South Asian Studies](#)
- [Dr. Cornel West, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Chair at Union Theological Seminary, former Professor of the Practice of Public Philosophy at Harvard University & Professor Emeritus at Princeton University](#)
- [Dr. Shailaja Paik, University of Cincinnati Taft Distinguished Professor of History](#)
- [Dr. Gulrez Azhar, Aspen New Institute Voices Fellow & Physician Health Researcher](#)
- [Dr. Noam Chomsky, American Public Intellectual](#)
- [Rita Meher, Co-Founder & Executive Director, Tasveer, Seattle](#)
- [Dr. Jeremy Rinker, University of North Carolina Greensboro Associate Professor](#)
- [Rev. Abi John, Rector, Church of the Ascension, Rochester, NY](#)

- [Dr. Sareeta Amrute, Associate Professor, Strategic Design Parsons, The New School](#)
- [Dr. Radhika Govindrajan, University of Washington Associate Professor of Anthropology and International Studies](#)
- [Dr. Sunila Kale, University of Washington Professor in South Asian Studies](#)
- [Dr. Vik Bahl, Green River College Professor](#)
- [Dr. Christian Lee Novetzke, University of Washington Professor in South Asia Studies](#)
- [Dr. Sonja Thomas, Associate Professor, Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies, Colby College](#)
- [Dr. Gaurav Sabnis, Associate Professor, Marketing at the School of Business, Stevens Institute of Technology, Hoboken, NJ](#)
- [Dr. Roja Singh, Assistant Professor, Sociology, St. John Fisher College, Rochester, NY](#)
- [Dr. Nalini Iyer, Professor English, Seattle University, Seattle, WA](#)
- [Dr. Amritjit Singh, Langston Hughes Professor Emeritus of English, Ohio University, Athens](#)

ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT STATEMENTS

• **HINDUS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS:**

On behalf of [Hindus for Human Rights](#), I am writing in support of caste-oppressed communities and to ask that the Seattle City Council support and pass Councilmember Kshama Sawant's legislation to ban caste-based discrimination in the city of Seattle.

Hindus for Human Rights is a US-based nonprofit nonpartisan organization founded in 2019. We advocate for pluralism and civil and human rights in South Asia and North America, rooted in the values of our Hindu faith: shanti (peace), nyaya (justice) and satya (truth). We provide a Hindu voice of resistance to caste, Hindu nationalism, racism, and all forms of bigotry and oppression.

We practice our Hindu faith by rejecting caste entirely, and by insisting that all of us, regardless of race, religion, caste, or gender, are equally deserving of dignity and justice. We aim to create a radically inclusive space, and our organization includes members nationwide and in the Seattle area of all caste backgrounds, including members of the Dalit community.

We applaud the Councilmember Sawant for introducing a bill to protect the residents of Seattle from caste-based discrimination. We stand with anti-caste groups, including Equality Labs, the Ambedkar International Circle, the Ambedkar Association of North America, the Ambedkar King Study Circle, Coalition of Seattle Indian-Americans who have led this push to formally include caste as a protected category in the city of Seattle.

Some community members argue that openly discussing caste-based discrimination in workplaces and in schools would unfairly point fingers at all Hindus and/or Indian-Americans. We find such an argument deeply demeaning and insulting. As Hindus, our faith teaches us to value humility and growth, and to not shy away from self-critique when needed. The City of Seattle Office of Civil Rights said, "Caste Status is not a recognized protected class in the City of

Seattle and if our office were to receive a complaint based solely on caste discrimination, we would not be able to investigate it.” This legislation will provide the City the tools to begin addressing caste-based discrimination in Seattle.

If the City Council takes a strong stand on caste-based discrimination and passes this legislation, it will only strengthen the work being done by students, employees, and community groups across the nation who are fighting to ensure that caste is defined as a specific category of possible discrimination under existing civil rights laws. We also strongly suggest that corporations based in Seattle mandate caste sensitivity training, similar to the way they train managers on race and gender discrimination issues and on sexual harassment.

*Sincerely,
Ria Chakrabarty
Policy Director | Hindus for Human Rights*

- **ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN LABOR ALLIANCE, AFL-CIO (APALA):**

I am writing on behalf of the [Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO \(APALA\)](#), which is a labor constituency group and nonprofit organization of API workers affiliated with the AFL-CIO, national federation of labor unions. APALA represents a wide diversity of Asian American and Pacific Islander union members and unorganized workers advocating together for racial minority, immigrant, and workers’ rights. It is in this capacity that we are writing to urge Seattle City Council to pass the new ordinance to ban caste discrimination. If passed, the ordinance would add caste to the city’s list of protected classes, outlawing discrimination in employment, housing, public places and contracting. It would also empower the Seattle Office for Civil Rights to investigate complaints of caste discrimination and facilitate a settlement for monetary damages or other forms of recompense.

APALA unconditionally supports the ordinance proposed by Councilmember Kshama Sawant to ban caste-based discrimination in Seattle city. We stand in full solidarity with our allies at [Equality Labs](#) and the coalition of brave caste-oppressed workers, caste oppressed, racial, and gender justice organizations whose tireless organizing made this historic ordinance possible.

Freedom from caste discrimination is inextricably tied to workers’ rights. In 2021, APALA [passed a resolution](#) condemning caste discrimination and added caste to our own list of protected classes. We have also publicly supported the listing of caste among the protected classes in the public sector in order to ensure that oppressed castes have unobstructed access to good jobs, quality education, social benefits, and representation at the federal, state, county and city levels including school districts. The seriousness of caste discrimination complaints arising from multiple industries including tech, university, construction, and domestic workers makes this an urgent issue.

Despite this urgency, we know that a small group of opponents are trying to use disinformation and bigotry to derail this process by intimidating dalit civil rights organizations and workers rights organizations who are coming together to build power. They use common

anti-worker tactics of smearing Dalit leaders and workers who are braving violence and discrimination to break the silence in their advocacy. These acts are deeply anti-democratic. And we ask that the Seattle City council ensure safe access for all so this ordinance can pass as swiftly as possible.

As Seattle begins to ensure accountability for the discrimination and harassment that caste-oppressed Seattle citizens and workers face within the city, it is imperative to continue the path forward by ratifying and implementing caste protections as quickly as possible, given the grave complaints of caste oppressed stakeholders.

Any attempt to derail this ordinance by opponents to caste equity would harm Seattle workers and would undermine the legally guaranteed, democratic processes of civil and workers rights . Workers often face attacks for their organizing on behalf of their workplace and civil rights, and while we are dismayed at the attacks that caste-oppressed workers and students have faced, we believe that their courage and their foundation in the law will ultimately bear fruit. We strongly believe that attempts to discredit these vulnerable stakeholders and their demands for equity and safety are rooted in casteism and make it even clearer that these institutional protections are imperative to ensuring equity. In the United States, one's future should not be determined by the family you are born into. The oppression of caste goes against the very principles and ideals on which this country was founded.

For this reason we believe that it is significant for both civil and workers' rights that Seattle leads the nation and passes this historical ordinance. Including caste as a protected category is in line with other institutions who have added caste including Cal State University System, Brown, Brandeis, and Colby college as well as academic union contracts, such as the one passed by the California Faculty Union, Harvard Graduate Student Union, and many ongoing collective bargaining projects underway. We urge you to pass this resolution immediately and thank you again for your courage in standing with caste-oppressed workers and moving Seattle as a leader in diversity and inclusion in the nation.

Sincerely,

APALA Seattle

Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO

- **ASIAN COUNSELING AND REFERRAL SERVICE (ACRS):**

Asian Counseling and Referral Service strongly supports the proposed ordinance to ban caste-based discrimination. As an organization that serves vulnerable Asian, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander immigrants and refugees in Seattle, we are well aware of the nuanced and culturally-specific systems of oppression that our clients must navigate, in addition to and compounded with poverty, mental health, linguistic barriers, and more. One of these systems is caste-based discrimination, and we know this is a pervasive, worldwide issue, including here in Seattle. As a social justice organization, we hold a deep responsibility to trust and believe our most vulnerable community members, including those who are caste-oppressed, when they say they are experiencing discrimination, harm, and oppression. We urge you to stand with us and

vote in favor of the proposed ordinance to add caste as a prohibited category for discrimination.

- **RADHA SWAMI RASILA SATSANG CENTER:**

Radha Swami Rasila Satsang Center, Fresno, California endorses the caste ordinance being proposed in the Seattle City Council. We are a group of erstwhile caste-oppressed people who were emancipated by Dr. Ambedkar. We had to convert to Buddhism to escape caste oppression. We are happy that Seattle City will be the first city to adopt a resolution banning Caste Discrimination. Taking up such an ordinance is the need of the hour since caste discrimination is present and thriving in the US. The oppressor caste people will deny they practice caste or even the existence of caste. In fact, that is their first defense. If that doesn't work, they will argue that caste is a British construct. These are all plain lies. They will argue that they will become a suspect if the prevention of caste discrimination ordinance is passed. It is like saying white people will be suspect if race-based discrimination is banned. Caste is so much ingrained in the mind of the South Asian diaspora that in the first few meetings, they want to find your caste so that they can decide whether to include or exclude you from their social circles.

Passage of the Caste Ordinance will force organizations to educate and sensitize employees to understand how caste bias operates and also will provide much-needed teeth for the victims of caste discrimination to confront the perpetrators of caste violence. Radha Swami Rasila Satsang Center is thankful to the Citizens of Seattle Indian Americans (CSIA) for taking the lead and our special thanks to city councilor Kshama Sawant.

- **AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL USA:**

I write to you as the India Country Specialist for [Amnesty International USA](#). As you are no doubt aware, Amnesty International is a global movement of more than 10 million people who campaign for a world where human rights are enjoyed by all.

On January 24, Tuesday, Councilmember Kshama Sawant (District 3, Central Seattle) introduced an ordinance to ban caste-based discrimination in Seattle. I am writing in support of the ordinance, to urge your support and vote to pass the first-in-the-nation legislation to ban caste-based discrimination in Seattle.

Caste is a central phenomenon in South Asian society around the world. Caste transcends across religions in South Asian communities including the diaspora communities here in the United States of America. Though caste-based discrimination is now illegal in India, its impacts are still far-reaching and can manifest in every aspect of life. With the growing Indian diaspora in the United State of America, this pernicious system has been brought to the shores of our country.

Caste is an enabler of discrimination, harassment, and exclusion in education, workplace, housing, and employment not only all across the United States of America but also in cities like Seattle. According to a recent article I read in a recent [2022 article published by Seattle's Real](#)

Change publication. "Seattle is one of the cities where caste discrimination 'remains a largely hidden and unreported issue'". The article quotes a spokesperson from the City of Seattle Office of Civil Rights, who wrote that "Caste Status is not a recognized protected class in the City of Seattle and if our office were to receive a complaint based solely on caste discrimination, we would not be able to investigate it"

There are several public cases relating to caste discrimination Cisco case in California and the horrific human trafficking of "oppressed caste" Indian girls. But, importantly many private incidents that happen in cities like Seattle that do not come to light because there are no caste protections for the caste oppressed. The absence of a protection policy against caste-based discrimination has enabled and facilitated discrimination, exclusion, and exploitation of those born into the "lower castes"

The NAACP passed a resolution two years ago, opposing the practice of the caste system in the United States. Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA), AFL-CIO, and the California Democratic Party have endorsed caste equity and added it to their non-discrimination policies. The California State University system (the largest four-year public university system in the United States), and Brandeis University have both banned caste discrimination. The Alphabet Workers Union, which represents over a thousand Google workers, has said that the "fight for the civil rights of caste-oppressed people is a workers' fight." Additionally, even giant tech corporations like Apple and Amazon have added caste to their non-discriminatory policies in their respective employee handbooks

The legislation introduced by Councilmember Sawant will ban caste discrimination and the protection policies will bring visibility to, and address this "hidden and unreported issue". I urge you all to support Councilmember Kshama Sawant's legislation to ban caste discrimination. Your vote to outlaw caste discrimination will ensure legal protections for the caste-discriminated, reaffirm Seattle's commitment to recognizing the dignity of all its residents, workers, and visitors that does not subject them to prejudicial treatment, bias, and discrimination, and set a precedent for the whole nation.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

*Govind Acharya
India Country Specialist
Amnesty International USA*

- **ALPHABET WORKERS UNION- COMMUNICATION WORKERS OF AMERICA (AWU-CWA)**

Alphabet Workers Union—Communication Workers of America (AWU-CWA) stands in support of the [historic ordinance to ban caste discrimination in Seattle introduced by Councilmember Kshama Sawant](#). AWU-CWA recognizes that caste is a civil rights and a labor issue globally. The [complaints of caste discrimination arising from multiple tech companies](#) makes addressing it urgent. We write as one of the first and largest unions in the tech sector, for whom caste has

become a significant issue for our rank and file members given its prevalence in Alphabet. And we join allies like [The Tech Workers for Caste Equity](#) in making a stand to ban caste discrimination in Seattle.

Workers of AWU-CWA have been organizing against caste discrimination within Alphabet and pushing the company to add caste protections to its code of conduct globally. This is why in the wake of the [historic lawsuit](#) filed by the California DFEH against Cisco for caste-based discrimination, we had [asked Alphabet to add caste as a protected category](#). Despite this, Alphabet has only created a hostile work environment for caste-oppressed workers and allies by [canceling a talk that Thenmozhi Soundararajan, Executive Director of Equality Labs](#) was scheduled to give, on the topic of caste in newsrooms. The talk was canceled as opponents of caste equity at Alphabet spread discriminatory and casteist disinformation about Equality Labs and Thenmozhi herself, who comes from an oppressed-caste background. The organizer, [Tanuja Gupta](#) was retaliated against (leading to her resignation) for wanting to further the cause of caste equity at the workplace. Following this incident, due to the AWU-CWA caste campaign efforts, [Google announced new policies for external speakers](#) that don't undermine Google's culture of belonging. Alphabet's is legally mandated to prohibit caste-based discrimination in India, so its anti-discrimination policy in India explicitly lists caste as a protected category, but the company has yet to expand the policy globally. This is why Seattle City's ordinance matters. Google currently has over 4000 workers in Seattle and over 7200 workers in the state of Washington. This ordinance would legally bind private institutions to enforce caste based protections in their workplaces, including Alphabet which has a sizable presence in Seattle and Washington. If an ordinance like this had existed, victims of caste discrimination would have had a legal recourse to justice.

"As Seattle considers this historic step to address this civil rights issue and address the discrimination that caste-oppressed citizens and workers face in the city, We urge the city council to weigh in on the side of human, civil, gender and worker rights and vote yes on this Caste ordinance to ensure Seattle is safe and welcoming for all. We also condemn the attacks on caste oppressed workers and civil rights organizations. These are anti-democratic tactics to deplatform caste oppressed communities from achieving legal rights to advocate against discrimination. We urge the council to prevent disinformation, bigotry and violence against partners like Equality Labs and the coalition working to ban caste in Seattle. These attacks are not unlike the gaslighting that workers face whenever they take on management and we urge you to continue to create safe space for all protected classes of people coming to break the silence on caste", said Alex Gorowara, Software Engineer at Alphabet and member of Alphabet Workers Union-CWA. Please reach out to us directly if you have questions about this statement. A copy of this statement is available on our website [here](#).

- **TASVEER:**

Tasveer is in full solidarity to endorse the proposed ordinance outlawing caste based discrimination in the city of Seattle. Our cinematic work has regularly featured films that depict the horrors of the caste system. As such, we are well aware of the continuing brutality of caste and recognize the need to fight it wherever in the world it raises its ugly head, including right

here in our backyard. We are excited about the historic ordinance sponsored by Kshama Sawant and urge all council members in Seattle to vote for it.

- **API CHAYA:**

API Chaya is a survivor-led organization focused on serving survivors of sexual violence, human trafficking, and domestic violence in Pacific Islander, Native Hawaiian, Asian, and South Asian communities. We center those at the margins through the provision of culturally relevant support services. We see the impact of caste discrimination directly through our work in the community. Abusive partners leverage their upper caste status in the course of several tactics to maintain power and control in relationships. These harmful acts include: coercion, threats of deportation, minimizing/denying blame, emotional and physical abuse, as well as denying/controlling access to shared children. API Chaya stands strongly in support of the proposed ordinance, recognizing and actively working against this pervasive issue in our survivor communities.

- **INDIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY SERVICES:**

The Indian American Community Services acknowledges that caste based issues impact our community negatively in personal and professional settings. We urge the Seattle City Council to consider the proposed ordinance on caste based discrimination. This ordinance will allow for accountable processes that will only empower the vulnerable in our community.

- **COALITION OF SEATTLE INDIAN AMERICANS (CSIA):**

Coalition of Seattle Indian Americans represents the diverse community of Indian Americans in the Seattle area. We are well aware of issues of caste that infect our community and lack of any internal process to manage it. We know that discriminatory, exploitative and violent acts enabled by this system cannot be addressed without institutional support and authority. Protection of caste oppressed will strengthen our community, not target it.

As a member of a broad coalition demanding the outlawing of caste discrimination in Seattle we commend city council member Kshama Sawant for sponsoring such an ordinance and urge all council members to vote yes on it unanimously.

- **AMBEDKAR ASSOCIATION OF NORTH AMERICA (AANA, SEATTLE CHAPTER):**

Ambedkar Association of North America (AANA) strongly encourages the Seattle City Council to officially recognize “caste” as a protected category, urgently. Caste is a global reality. Seattle is home to a growing South Asian community, many of whom are from caste-oppressed backgrounds. The discrimination and human rights abuse that caste inflicts on these individuals in South Asia is now, unfortunately, being observed right in Seattle and all over the USA. AANA is thankful to the Seattle City council for its willingness to take this historic step.

- **EQUALITY LABS:**

Equality Labs is proud to join Councilmember Kshama Sawant and Seattle citizens in this historic ordinance to add caste as a protected category to its non-discrimination policy. As a national Dalit civil rights organization that has worked with many institutions around the country to add caste as a protected category, this act is the necessary first step to ensure the rights of all Seattle citizens. Caste is a feminist, queer, and workers' rights issue, and the time has come to ensure that discrimination, bias, and worker exploitation on the basis of caste is not only illegal, but will be properly enforced throughout the city.

“Through the proposed ordinance making caste discrimination illegal, Seattle is taking the lead in a historical battle for caste equity and is ensuring that the necessary protections are in place for caste-oppressed Americans,” added **Shahira Kaur**. “As a caste-oppressed woman, I am ecstatic about this, and would urge the City Council to vote for it!”

- **AMBEDKAR INTERNATIONAL CENTER (AIC)**

Ambedkar International Centre (AIC) endorses the caste ordinance being proposed in the Seattle City Council. This is among the many firsts by Seattle City. Taking up such an ordinance is the need of the hour since caste cancer is very much present in the US. Passage of the Caste Ordinance will educate and sensitize organizations to understand how caste bias operates and also will provide much-needed teeth for the victims of caste discrimination to confront the perpetrators of caste violence. The infamous Cisco caste discrimination case, where AIC filed Amicus Brief in California court, would not have happened had such explicit legislation been passed. AIC hopes that such an ordinance will be passed soon by other cities as well.

AIC thanks Citizens of Seattle Indian Americans (CSIA) to take lead and especially city councilor Kshama Sawant.

AIC would also like to thank all supporting organizations in this fight. Making caste a protected category resolutions by the universities and an ordinance in city councils are the small steps in making caste-based discrimination, a criminal activity. We hope these small steps will culminate into nationwide legislation.

Given the stark cast realities in India, we urge American organizations operating out of India to make special provisions to hire employees from underprivileged castes in line with Indian affirmative action laws and the US “equal opportunity employer” guidelines.

- **INDIAN AMERICAN MUSLIM COUNCIL (IAMC):**

(A national organization with a Seattle chapter)

The Indian American Muslim Council (IAMC), a Washington DC-based nonprofit organization dedicated to social justice, peace, and pluralism, today commended the introduction of legislation in the Seattle City Council to ban caste discrimination.

Introduced by Councilmember Kshama Sawant (District 3, Central Seattle), the legislation, if passed, will prohibit, “businesses from discriminating based on caste with respect to hiring, tenure, promotion, workplace conditions, or wages.”

The proposed legislation will also ban discrimination based on caste in places of public accommodation, such as hotels, public transportation, public restrooms, or retail establishments. It will also prohibit housing discrimination based on caste in rental housing leases, property sales, and mortgage loans.

“Caste discrimination is a pervasive and systemic issue that has a devastating impact on individuals and communities. It is unacceptable that in this day and age, people are still facing discrimination based on caste,” IAMC President Syed Ali said.

“Caste is a crime against humanity, it’s a blot on our society, and it’s a shame that it is practiced in the 21st century in Seattle,” said Hasan Khan, IAMC board member from Seattle who testified on the issue before the Seattle City Council.

“This proposed legislation sends a clear message that such discrimination will not be tolerated in Seattle and that the city is committed to promoting equality and justice for all its residents,” Khan added.

“We stand as allies with the Dalit community, which has tirelessly worked to raise awareness on the issue of caste discrimination here in the United States, as well as to protect the people who battle this pervasive form of oppression on a daily basis,” said Javed Sikander, who also represented IAMC’s Seattle chapter before the City Council. “We urge the Seattle City Council to act swiftly to pass this important legislation and take a stand against caste discrimination.”

- **AMBEDKAR KING STUDY CIRCLE (AKSC):**

Legal protection is the only means to guard the vulnerable from caste exploitation in places where dominant castes have privilege and preponderance. The Seattle city ordinance sponsored by Kshama Sawant to outlaw caste discrimination will set a strong precedent for the rest of the United States. We urge the City Council to pass the legislation.

- **AMBEDKARITE BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS (ABAT)**

Ambedkarite Buddhist Association of Texas (ABAT) endorses the caste ordinance being proposed in the Seattle City Council. We are a group of erstwhile caste-oppressed people who were emancipated by Dr. Ambedkar. We had to convert to Buddhism to escape caste oppression. We are happy that Seattle City will be the first city to adopt a resolution banning Caste Discrimination. Taking up such an ordinance is the need of the hour since caste discrimination is present and thriving in the US. The oppressor caste people will deny they practice caste or even the existence of caste. In fact, that is their first defense. If that doesn't work, they will argue that caste is a British construct. These are all plain lies. They will argue that they will become a suspect if the prevention of caste discrimination ordinance is passed. It is like saying white people will be suspect if race-based discrimination is banned. Caste is so

much ingrained in the mind of the South Asian diaspora that in the first few meetings, they want to find your caste so that they can decide whether to include or exclude you from their social circles.

Passage of the Caste Ordinance will force organizations to educate and sensitize employees to understand how caste bias operates and also will provide much-needed teeth for the victims of caste discrimination to confront the perpetrators of caste violence. ABAT is thankful to the Citizens of Seattle Indian Americans (CSIA) for taking the lead and our special thanks to city councilor Kshama Sawant.

- **BOSTON STUDY GROUP (BSG):**

Boston Study Group (BSG) endorses the caste ordinance being proposed in the Seattle City Council. This is among the many firsts by Seattle City. BSG was the first organization to start this initiative on University Campuses. We worked with Brandeis University's professors - Prof Larry Simon and Rajesh Sampath - and the university administration. We are happy that Seattle City will be the first city to adopt a resolution banning Caste Discrimination. Taking up such an ordinance is the need of the hour since caste cancer is very much present in the US. Given our experience, while passing the resolution - you will face many hurdles from the oppressor castes, - they will say they have left their caste behind while proudly introducing themselves as Brahmin. Passage of the Caste Ordinance will educate and sensitize organizations to understand how caste bias operates and also will provide much-needed teeth for the victims of caste discrimination to confront the perpetrators of caste violence. BSG thanks the Citizens of Seattle Indian Americans (CSIA) for taking the lead and especially city councilor Kshama Sawant.

- **AMERICAN MUSLIM EMPOWERMENT NETWORK (AMEN):**

As a frontline, grassroots organization that combats hate, oppression, and violence while standing firmly for justice for all, we are proud of the City of Seattle for considering legislation to address the growing danger of caste oppression in our region. Indeed, since introduction of the ordinance, our leadership has been hearing devastating testimonials from caste-oppressed individuals who have been suffering (often silently) even as they have and continue to face blatant bias and ugly discrimination in the workplace, in social settings, in housing, and beyond. We stand as allies with our Dalit and other caste-marginalized communities in calling for our cities, county and country to end this pernicious form of suffering, as part of the broader struggle for civil and human rights for all.

- **SOUTH ASIAN BEHAVIORAL HEALTH INITIATIVE- PACIFIC NORTHWEST (SABHI-PNW)**

We are the South Asian Behavioral Health Initiative, an organization founded in 2018. SABHI seeks to build community and connection for practicing South Asian therapists, to be a mental health resource for our communities in the Pacific Northwest, and to destigmatize South Asian mental wellness via the visibility of our stories and expertise. As an organization, we promote collective liberation, which we define as an understanding that

without the liberation of those who are Dalit, queer, trans, and most impacted by colorism, we cannot all be free. We are not an insulated group; we acknowledge and hold ourselves accountable to the idea that our liberation is inextricably tied to the liberation of the oppressed, within our communities and with those in non-South Asian communities.

Mental wellness is not solely linked to a person's neurochemistry or biological makeup; it cannot and should not be divorced from our larger societal and political context. Simply put, oppression in all forms deleteriously impacts mental health—and caste-based oppression is no exception. Although caste-based discrimination historically has been a South Asian issue, it's now a global and U.S. issue, given the numbers of South Asian immigrants across the world in positions of authority, including in our Pacific Northwest communities.

As mental health professionals, we have visibility into how caste-based oppression impacts our clients' lives, including trauma, lowered self-esteem, and struggles with depression and anxiety, increased risk of suicide. Caste oppression is a hidden risk factor in the health of South Asian communities. As mental health professionals, we can see how incidents of structural oppression, including casteism, could be addressed by enacting explicit legislation. Anti-casteism legislation is crucial for advocating and protecting people in our communities. Dedicated to our clients' holistic well-being, we fully support an ordinance that protects our Dalit siblings.

In recent years, as our South Asian communities have become more and more vocal about our solidarity with civil rights movements in the U.S., including Black Lives Matter, there have been fair reminders that we should also reflect internally on South Asian culturally-sanctioned forms of segregation, dehumanization, and oppression. Acknowledging the trauma of caste has felt necessary for us to be genuine in our calls for equity and the abolition of oppressive ideologies.

We are grateful for the advocacy and work of Equality Labs and stand proudly with their efforts to enact this measure. As mental health professionals, we call on Seattle City Council to be on the right side of justice and ensure that all people feel safe, welcome, and valued. We hope this Council will lead the country toward liberation for all.

Sincerely,

The South Asian Behavioral Health Initiative of the Pacific Northwest (SABHI PNW)

Ata U. Karim, PhD

Bina Hanchinamani Ellefsen, JD, MACP, LMHCA

Gitika Talwar, PhD

Jaya Ramesh, LMHC

Kiranmayi Neelarambam, PhD

Krysta Walia, MSW, LICSW

Mehvash Ali, PhD

Neha Chawla, PhD

Nidhi Berry, MSW, LMHC, LSWAIC

Piya Banerjee, MA, LMHC
Portia Bajwa, MSW, LICSW
Israt Audry, MSW, LSWAIC

- **FEMINIST CRITICAL HINDU STUDIES COLLECTIVE (FCHS)**

We are the [Feminist Critical Hindu Studies Collective \(FCHS\)](#) and we are writing our second letter of support for the historic ordinance proposed by Councilmember Kshama Sawant to ban caste-based discrimination in Seattle city. It has come to our attention that Dalit civil rights organizations like Equality Labs are facing ongoing attacks, disinformation, and bigotry while engaged in advocacy around this ordinance. We write this email not only to endorse all of the Dalit Civil rights organizations work to ban caste in Seattle, but also to debunk from our academic perspective as experts, and members of the Hindu community, some of the most heinous arguments against these civil rights leaders.

Our background

Feminist Critical Hindu Studies Collective (FCHS) was founded in 2018. The ethics of FCHS begins with an awareness that contestations over the category “Hinduism” are political and, therefore, studying Hinduism is always also political. In every context in which we encounter it, we must interrogate how Hinduism is being constructed and by whom, who is served by the forms of power it enables, and what forms of injustice it perpetuates or resists. Employing the term “Hindu formations,” FCHS seeks to examine the intersecting processes of racialization, the regulation of sexuality, and the violence of caste. Using the idea of Hindu formations, we hope that scholars and students will come to better understand the ways in which religious traditions emerge over time and are deployed to various ends. FCHS asserts that the categories—Hinduism and Hindu—not only arise in conjunction with forms of white supremacy and caste supremacy but are imbricated with them. Currently, with the generous support of the Wabash Center for Learning & Teaching Theology, we are engaged in a project to explore Critical Hindu Pedagogies, with a cohort of other scholars from institutions of higher education from throughout the country.

Debunking Bigotry

After reviewing much of the opponents messaging and submissions to the council we have identified some of the following points to share.

1. All of the groups that oppose this issue including Coalition of North American Hindus, Hindu American Foundation, Hindu Pact, and others are known to take extreme positions in the Hindu community and are led by dominant caste leadership that is aligned with right wing ethnonationalist movements in India. They have a long history of opposing caste equity and are continuous in their attempts to preserve caste privilege for the bigoted. They use intimidation tactics like bullying, cyber harassment, disinformation, and litigation to try to stop their opponents. As scholars who work on Hindu traditions in South Asia and the American diaspora, we can assure you that these organizations do not represent the entirety of Hindu Americans. In fact, there is a cultural war in our community as to what constitutes a Hindu in a time when our community is deeply polarized around issues of caste and genocide. Progressive

Hindu organizations such as Hindus for Human Rights and Sadhana that work alongside Dalit civil rights organizations. As scholars of Hindu studies, the FCHS Collective stands with Dalit civil rights organizations like Equality Labs, and we urge the council not to allow the aforementioned Hindu organizations to be the only voice in an ideologically diverse Hindu American community; that would be akin to saying the Proud Boys are reflective of all white people.

2. There are repeated attempts to attack the coalition of Dalit civil rights organizations who are working on this issue like Equality Labs and Ambedkar King Study Circle as anti Hindu and anti-Dalit. This absurd line of attack that we have seen repeated by these fringe bad actors who want to use alarmist smears and innuendos to delegitimize the urgent work of Dalit civil rights organizations. As scholars of dominant caste Hindu descent who study Hindu traditions in the North American academy, we have stood with Equality Labs and critiqued organizations such as HAF and CoHNA for their ongoing perpetuation of discourses on Hinduphobia. For example, in our recent article, [“Hindu fragility and the politics of mimicry in North America,”](#) we draw attention to the ongoing efforts by Equality Labs to support caste protections in the tech industry and higher education. The response by North American Hindu groups of invoking Hinduphobia is a supremacist narrative that invokes the rhetoric and strategies employed by North American white Christian conservatives.

In reality, there are many dominant caste Hindus who partner with and support Dalit civil rights organizations. **It is not anti-Hindu to fight for caste abolition.** As researchers, we know that many everyday people in the Hindu community are exploring and reflecting on how to center those that have been historically harmed by caste discrimination and violence.

3. There are several incorrect arguments that we have found that conservative Hindu organizations like HAF and CoHNA repeatedly level against anti-caste activists and organizations. Below, we identify and respond to each one.

Their allegation: Equality Lab’s survey data is falsified and their assertions about caste are rebutted by The Carnegie Endowment Survey on Indian American Attitudes.

Our response:

This disinformation tactic has become one of the key talking points that is iterated by the opponents to caste equity. Whether it is in argument from [Coalition of Hindus of North American, Hindu American Foundation](#), or opponents in Seattle like [Debadutta Dash](#) this harmful talking point is insidious not just because it is false but also for the corrosive and casual dismissal of such an important data set in the field of South Asian American studies. Equality Labs is a well-respected community based research organization that has worked for many years with scholars across the discipline of feminist, South Asian and Asian American studies. This report is used by researchers around the world, it is an essential part of the syllabus in North America. Additionally, it is now formally a part of the library of congress. We stand behind this data set and acknowledge the violence inflicted on Equality Labs for holding this first data set and also how difficult it is to conduct research on caste because of the severity of

caste bigotry in our community. Any attempt to besmirch the reputation or to assert this data set is false, and we and hundreds of other scholars in the field would agree to that.

The specific points that differ between Equality Labs survey, which was explicitly on caste, and the Carnegie Endowments reports on Indian American attitudes in 2020, include:

- The Carnegie Endowment report focuses on Indian Americans and Equality Labs focuses on immigrants from all South Asian ethnic immigrant groups including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. and Indentured communities.
- The authors of Carnegie Endowment report have not disclosed their caste location while Equality Labs authors and research team were explicit about their Dalit Identity. Casteless authorship is not neutral. It is a reflection of the authors not being transparent in their caste location. There is no neutrality when it comes to researchers and it is important that they disclose their backgrounds to better understand their biases. Further, the Carnegie Endowment report did not consult with any leading U.S. based caste oppressed civil rights organizations or researchers in crafting the survey portions that speak to caste. As a result, there are some serious methodological flaws and ethical gaps given that Indigenous and racial epistemic battles in knowledge production have pushed for researchers to be in relationship with and accountable to marginalized groups they intend to study. This is even more important for this survey as it attempts to argue with data inferences about Dalits that has had harmful ongoing impact.
- One such methodological flaw of the Carnegie Endowment report is that **caste questions were only asked of Hindu participants despite caste practices existing in all religious communities**. That was a massive oversight especially since faiths like Islam, Christianity, and Sikhs, have large numbers of caste oppressed people.
- Even more egregious is that out of the 1200 respondents, 632 are Hindu, and 293 identify with a caste group. Of those 293, 83% identify themselves as “general or upper caste,” 1% as Dalit/ Scheduled Caste, and 16% as an “Other Backward Community.” Calculating what this means in absolute numbers, this indicates that there were very few in the whole sample who were ready to say openly that they belong to the castes that we know to be the main targets of caste-discrimination.
 - 293 identified as members of caste groups
 - 83% were upper caste (total of 243 respondents)
 - 16% were “other backward caste” (total of 47 respondents)
 - 1% was Dalit (total of 3 respondents)

You would not guess from media coverage and disinformation of this study, which imply that caste discrimination is negligible to non-existent in the Indian American community.

We question the legitimacy of a study that can make such a large claim about caste discrimination on the basis of surveying 3 or 4 people from the harmed communities.

- The authors in footnote 29 also stated this about the Equality Labs Survey: “This study relied on a nonrepresentative snowball sampling method to recruit respondents. Furthermore, respondents who did not disclose a caste identity were dropped from the

data set. Therefore, it is likely that the sample does not fully represent the South Asian American population and could skew in favor of those who have strong views about caste. While the existence of caste discrimination in India is incontrovertible, its precise extent and intensity in the United States can be contested.” In the sociological and statistical research, particularly when working with vulnerable groups, snowball sampling (or chain sampling, chain-referral sampling, referral sampling) is a nonprobability sampling technique where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances. Thus, the sample group is said to grow like a rolling snowball. As the sample builds up, enough data are gathered to be useful for research.

This was very much the case for Dalit Americans in 2016 when we conducted this survey. The harassment and threats that Equality Labs endures now show this remains the case today. For vulnerable communities like Dalits, snowball sampling is one way to document the voice of the oppressed. Especially given the resistance of the majority, dominant caste diaspora to break the silence on caste. Many Dalits were afraid and spoke openly about their fear regarding what would happen if they were outed. Despite that fear, people trusted the Equality Labs team and they built on that trust by reaching out to hundreds of South Asian groups across caste, language and political spectrums. We agree with this footnote in that there should be more research, but dispute that this survey is not a foundational initial contribution to understanding the scope and breadth of caste discrimination in the U.S.

Their allegation: Caste discrimination does not exist in the US.

Our response:

Equality Labs found that 1 in 4 Dalits experience physical or verbal assault, 1 in 3 experience discrimination in universities, and 2 out of 3 face discrimination in the workplaces. This is also why half of all Dalits who took this survey chose to remain unnamed for fear of the consequences of being outed.

In addition, in 2022 the [National Academic Coalition for Caste Equity](#) and Equality Labs also conducted the Caste in Higher Education Conference and Survey, the preliminary analysis of which revealed that within U.S. higher education, 4 in 5 caste-oppressed students, staff, and faculty reported experiencing caste-discrimination at the hands of their dominant caste peers. Further, 3 out of 4 caste-oppressed stakeholders did not report caste-based discrimination in their universities or colleges because caste was not added as a protected category and/or their Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion departments lacked caste competency due to a lack of provisions and trainings.

These are troubling statistics, reflecting the serious extent of caste oppression. In the face of stiff opposition from caste-privileged communities, we have also publicized such stories in mainstream outlets like [NPR](#), [CNN](#), [Washington Post](#), [Harpers Bazaar](#), [PRI](#), [New York Times](#), [Time](#), [Vice](#), [Wired](#), [BBC](#), [Slate](#), [New Yorker](#), and more.

The reality can no longer be denied: [Caste discrimination exists, and South Asians have brought it to the U.S.](#) Like other systems of discrimination, it must be tackled through the enforcement of civil rights law.

Their allegation: A bill like this will cause South Asians to lose jobs

Our response:

This is a statement rooted in fear not evidence. There is no known evidence that shows that employers will stop hiring a protected class of people because they have been established as a protected class. This is not how civil rights law works, and using this same logic one could say employers are not hiring Black people because they fear that they will be subjected to legal action related to racial discrimination, or the same might be said in regard to queer people, the protected class of gender expression and/or sexual orientation.

Their allegation: We have not seen caste discrimination therefore it does not exist

Our response:

These are the arguments of the privileged. Of course, privileged people do not see caste. That is part of their privilege. Hundreds of testimonies have now come into the Seattle City council about first-person accounts of caste discrimination. This coupled with the data should firmly establish its existence and the need for remedy.

Their allegation: Even with institutions that have added caste there are no reports. This is a solution to a problem that does not exist.

Our response:

This is another bad faith argument and reflects a complete misunderstanding of protected categories work. Reports of discrimination especially in workplaces and universities are anonymous to protect individuals who report. We should not be hearing about those cases because it would be a violation of privacy. It is unclear why these organizations feel like they would be privy to federally protected information, under Title IX and VII laws.

Their allegation: This is a malicious bill and is design to target hardworking Indians of merit

Our response:

This is a reiteration of the Asian American model minority trope, and it is not rooted in evidence but again fear and fragility. This bill only targets those who discriminate.

Their allegation: South Asians are unfairly targeted and face racial profiling

Our response:

There is no racial profiling in adding caste as a protected category. People who will avail themselves of caste include those of South Asian origin and also any minority within a minority that experiences discrimination based on work and descent. As such, these categories are taken up by those who have experienced harm and who will raise these issues

to appropriate human rights and civil rights personnel to anchor the investigation into the protected class of the victim and the mindset of the perpetrator. There is no racial profiling involved.

Their allegation: Dalit civil rights groups and individuals are fronts for terrorist organizations in Pakistan and separatist movements.

Our response:

This is an absurd claim to have to rebut, and it reflects the broader trend of Islamophobia within Hindu organizations. As scholars of Hindu studies, we want to underscore that such critiques are rooted in centuries of caste violence, religious bigotry, and Islamophobia, and no serious legislator should listen to such bigoted attacks.

Their allegation: This ordinance unfairly targets Hindus.

Our response:

This is untrue as caste is found in communities across South Asia and in other cultural and historical contexts. In South Asia, forms of caste difference exist among Sikhs, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, and other religious communities. Recently, Shahira Bangar [wrote](#) that her “Dalit Sikh family faced unrelenting caste violence in the diaspora” and that she has been bullied by dominant caste Sikh children. Shahira’s article tells us two things: 1). caste apartheid and caste violence exist in non-Hindu communities; and 2). caste violence is taught to children, even here in the diaspora, meaning that caste-dominant parents have work to do, akin to the work that white parents have to do in terms of teaching their children equality and kindness as opposed to oppression and hate. This ordinance would bring attention to caste violence, which is an initial step in stemming this violence.

Their allegation: The ordinance is unfair because caste is a complex issue and requires nuance.

Our response:

Caste is a complex social issue, but legislation to prevent caste discrimination is not. Discrimination under all American civil rights and International human rights law is illegal and local governments are in jeopardy if they create liability for themselves by not preventing discrimination that exists within the city. Arguments for nuance are another way of dismissing the urgency and punting responsibility for discrimination on the excluded.

Their allegation: The ordinance falsely claims that “caste” is a hereditary system sanctioned by law or religion.

Our response:

This is simply not true. Historically caste rules and laws existed into the 20th century, and caste practices continue to be socially and culturally pervasive. Without going into centuries of legal history of the subcontinent, we can cite one example from Nepal. From the work of Sebash Nepali in his paper “The Role of Dalit Civil Society in Combatting Caste-Based Discrimination,”

he writes, “Nepal’s first written law, the Civil Code of 1854, “sanctioned and privileged functions of the Brahmins as spiritual teachers and priests,” and Chhetris, particularly Shah and Ranas “were members by birth of the highest legislative and judicial body.” Brahmins were also employed at court as performers of the state cult or as advisers to bhardari kausal (a council of nobles). Royal descents were secured for the Shah and Rana clans of the Chhetri caste. In addition, the Code arranged the justice system structured in a hierarchical order with severe forms of punishment for Sudra or peasant castes. It applied the caste rules to law in all areas, including food and beverages, sex and marriage, and property rights. Oppressed caste people faced greater punishments than dominant people for the same crime. For example, as late as 1940, Tanka Prasad Acharya, a Nepali Brahmin, was imprisoned for protesting the autocratic regime as per caste-based justice. His four friends, who were non-Brahmin and charged with the same crime, were hanged and shot to death. This law continued to dictate Nepali society until 56 years ago.

We should not need any other further refutation of these points.

We are happy to address any of these points further as we believe this disinformation is intended to harm the necessary civil rights organizing across Seattle and the nation around caste equity. As dominant caste allies and scholars committed to feminist, intersectional, anti-caste work, it is our moral responsibility to stand forward at this time and also offer our continued academic expertise if you need any further questions. We believe documented evidence and scholarship on caste and religion should inform this evidence driven process towards providing remedy to grave caste discrimination.

Thank you,

Feminist Critical Hindu Studies Collective

Dr. Shreena Gandhi, Michigan State University

Dr. Sailaja Krishnamurti, Queen’s University

Dr. Harshita Mruthinti Kamath, Emory University

Dr. Shana Sippy, Centre College

- **INDIA CIVIL WATCH INTERNATIONAL**

We, the co-chairs of India Civil Watch International, a human rights monitoring and advocacy group based in North America with over 120 members, are writing with reference to the ordinance to ban caste based discrimination introduced by Councilmember Kshama Sawant (District 3).

As a human rights monitoring group, we at ICWI know intimately the scourge of caste-based discrimination, exploitation, violence, and sexual violence in India. The toll that this violence, committed by dominant caste groups upon oppressed caste groups, is horrific and continues to this day. The caste system is deeply entrenched in the social lives and psyche of communities across South Asia. As a system, it infiltrates into the most basic of human relations, from relations of labor (with caste-based restrictions on professions) to intimate relations (with prohibitions against intercaste marriages, reinforced by innumerable “honor killings”).

Dominant caste groups routinely subject oppressed caste groups to humiliation, ostracization, and negative stereotyping.

Unfortunately, as with other deeply entrenched social and psychological structures, casteism is not easily gotten rid of, and travels with people across borders. As the South Asian community grows in size in the United States, we are starting to see more and more examples of this odious and historic form of oppression coming to the US as well. From caste categories in [dating apps](#), to caste-based organizations that exclude people from historically oppressed castes, to proposals for [gated communities](#) ("Agraharams") where only members of a dominant caste can buy homes, to the exploitation of workers from oppressed caste groups through [forced labor](#), to emails sent out to mailing lists exhorting managers to not hire workers from oppressed caste groups, we are seeing numerous and concerning examples of caste-based discrimination right here in the US.

Given the rising population of South Asians in Seattle, and the fact that caste status is not recognized as a protected class, and therefore the system as it exists is not equipped to deal with caste-based harms in the United States, we are encouraged by the introduction of this proposed legislation. We hope that you will recognize this growing threat to values of equality and nondiscrimination, and take action now by passing this ordinance. We need this recognition to travel across the United States, and key universities and unions have led the way, including Brandeis University and California State University, and the Alphabet Union and the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA). We hope that, with the Seattle City Council taking action, this terrible form of exploitation by dominant caste groups can be challenged and defeated in the United States.

*Yours sincerely,
Biju Mathew and Sirisha Naidu
Co-Chairs, India Civil Watch International*

INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT STATEMENTS:

- **SEATTLE COMPUTER SCIENTIST (*identifies as Dalit caste location*)**

I live in Seattle and I work here in a large technology company. I belong to one of the many oppressed Dalit castes and have experienced and seen those close to me experience the trauma, the stigma, and the oppression of the caste system throughout most of my life.

Like the Black and other marginalized communities in the United States, Dalits have been struggling with the challenges of social segregation, perception of inferiority and stereotyping and just blatant discrimination.

Among many others, I distinctly remember an incident when I was sixteen. I rented a small room, hundreds of miles away from my home and family to study at a better school. After several months, when the landlady learned about my caste, a minor dispute was enough to throw me out, with comments like "I should have asked your caste before renting out"; and "all

that you people are capable of are cleaning the sewers and should stay that way". Without doubt, this experience of hate and discrimination towards a mere child scarred me and lives with me even today.

Sadly, this system of caste oppression, this mindset of superiority, the implicit and explicit bias has penetrated the Indian diaspora here in the US too.

However UNLIKE the other marginalized communities in the US, that are protected under the law and have a discourse for standing against racial, gender and other forms of discrimination, Dalit community largely remains hidden and suffers through it silently. Two years ago, a person at my workplace, who was subject to caste-based discrimination shared their story, anonymously, and with a lot of courage, with the leaders in the company. But it fell on deaf ears with vague promises of "doing better" but had no consequences. When a group of us urged the company to add "caste" to the anti-discrimination policy, I was told by some that "this is not a place for activism" - not in my backyard they said, for the fear of lending voice to this community and disrupting the perceived norm.

I sincerely urge the council members to unanimously approve the ordinance to make caste discrimination illegal in Seattle. This will not only give a voice to us and let us be our true self without hiding our identity; but also, will have a ripple effect throughout the state, the nation and even globally as these large companies are required to amend their policies.

Thank you.

- **DR. AJANTHA SUBRAMANIAN, Professor of Anthropology and South Asian Studies and Mehra Family Professor of South Asian Studies at Harvard University**
(<https://anthropology.fas.harvard.edu/people/ajantha-subramanian>)

I am writing in support of Councilmember Sawant's Draft Ordinance to Ban Caste

Discrimination in the City of Seattle. The decision to expand the parameters of your anti-discrimination policies to explicitly include caste would be far-reaching and would attest to your commitment to fostering a truly safe, supportive and inclusive city.

I offer my thoughts as a South Asian American and specialist on caste. As with race, it is important to think of caste as a source of inherited privileges and disadvantages. This is evident in the caste backgrounds of South Asian Americans. The inheritances of caste, most importantly the inter-generational access to higher education, have largely determined who has the means to come to the U.S. and succeed economically and professionally. In effect, caste operates as a filter: first, of which groups have access to education, second, of who can succeed in elite higher education, and third, of who can use elite higher education as a stepping stone to economic and professional success in the U.S. As a result, the composition of the South Asian American community is skewed towards privileged castes with oppressed castes existing as a minority within this minority.

The pervasiveness of casteism in South Asia makes its entry into American society and

workplace not in the least bit surprising. Even if there is a general ignorance of caste in the U.S., South Asian social and professional networks guarantee that privilege and disadvantage continue to be reproduced here. The Cisco case and the testimonies gathered by the Ambedkar KingStudy Circle and Equality Labs show that the same forms of discrimination found in India – from the practice of untouchability to social exclusion and workplace discrimination – continue to thrive in the U.S. The number of Dalits testifying anonymously about their experiences attests to the fact that the stigma of caste and fear of exposure has followed them to the U.S.

Seattle is a city in which South Asians are the fastest growing ethnic group. Making caste a protected category is thus an urgent need for several reasons. One, it will compel institutions to prevent caste-based discrimination. Two, it will enable oppressed caste individuals to seek redress for experiences of discrimination. And three, it will encourage U.S. institutions to expand the scope of diversity and inclusion by consciously recruiting underrepresented oppressed castes.

The importance of caste protections has already been recognized by a number of institutions including, Brandeis University, the California State University system, the Alphabet Workers Union, the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, APALA and the NAACP. Seattle would make history by becoming the first American city to do so.

Unfortunately, as with all advances in civil rights, this one too is being met with opposition by constituencies who are determined to see it overturned. Their arguments are spurious. I urge you to stand firm alongside the large group of South Asian Americans and allies who stand with you. As a South Asian American and specialist on caste, I wanted to offer some critical analysis of the opposing arguments.

Argument 1: Extending protections on the basis of caste is unnecessary because such protections are already covered by existing anti-discrimination policy. This argument does not acknowledge that oppressed castes are a minority within a minority. They are doubly disadvantaged by virtue of being both racially marked and caste marked. Recognizing caste as a source of discrimination is the recognition of this double disadvantage. It acknowledges that there are stark differences of caste power and status within the South Asian American community that carry over from a long history of inequality in South Asia.

Argument 2: Such protections are anti-Hindu. Caste is a structure of inequality that is not limited to Hinduism. It is present within every South Asian religion. Moreover, many oppressed caste individuals are themselves Hindus. Extending protections to oppressed castes will in no way scapegoat the Hindu community specifically. To claim that adding caste to anti-discrimination policy is anti-Hindu distracts attention from the pressing issue of caste discrimination by making privileged caste Hindus and not oppressed castes into the real victims.

Argument 3: Such protections would unconstitutionally single out and target Hindus of Indian and South Asian descent as members of a suspect class.

Extending protections to oppressed castes will in no way scapegoat Hindus. This is tantamount to saying that race as a protected category scapegoats whites or that gender as a protected category scapegoats men.

Argument 4: Such protections are going to create divisions where they simply do not exist. The argument that caste discrimination is not a reality in the U.S. simply does not hold. The case brought against Cisco Systems by California's Department of Fair Employment and Housing and the numerous testimonies from oppressed caste individuals that followed its filing show that these forms of discrimination continue to operate in the U.S. Privileged castes in the U.S. may well insist that caste is non-existent. But just as race-blindness does not erase racial privilege or disadvantage, caste-blindness does not erase caste privilege or disadvantage. Indeed, the claim that caste is non-existent is itself an expression of privilege that belies the experiences of oppressed castes.

It is only by extending such protections that we can make visible caste inequality and discrimination in the U.S. In order to protect caste-oppressed populations, we have to be willing to insist that protection against discrimination cannot stop at the minority boundary. We have to be willing to go further and recognize that there are minorities within minorities who need recognition and protection. I commend you again for your leadership in this effort.

Thank you so much for your time,

*Ajantha Subramanian
Mehra Family Professor of South Asian Studies
Professor of Anthropology and of South Asian Studies
Harvard University*

- **DR. CORNEL WEST, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Chair at Union Theological Seminary, former Professor of the Practice of Public Philosophy at Harvard University & Professor Emeritus at Princeton University (<http://www.cornelwest.com/>)**

My name is Dr. Cornel West and I am the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Chair at Union Theological Seminary. I teach on the works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, as well as courses in Philosophy of Religion, African American Critical Thought, and a wide range of subjects — including but by no means limited to, the classics, philosophy, politics, cultural theory, literature, and music. I was also the former Professor of the Practice of Public Philosophy at Harvard University and Professor Emeritus at Princeton University. [I] graduated Magna Cum Laude from Harvard in three years and obtained [my] M.A. and Ph.D. in Philosophy at Princeton. Over the course of my career I have written 20 books and edited 13. I am best known for my work 'Race Matters and Democracy Matters', and for my memoir, 'Brother West: Living and Loving Out Loud. My most recent book, 'Black Prophetic Fire', offers an unflinching look at nineteenth and twentieth-century African American leaders and their visionary legacies.

I am writing to the council with unapologetic support for the historic ordinance proposed by

Councilmember Kshama Sawant to ban caste-based discrimination in Seattle city. I stand in full solidarity with our Dalit brothers and sisters who are struggling under the most trying of circumstances to fight for their civil rights with this legislation.

I taught one of the first classes on Dr. Ambedkar and Harvard and have mentored many Dalit Scholars in time at Harvard and Union Theological including Joshua Samuel, Thenmozhi Soundararajan, and Suraj Yengde. I also was present for the 2018 launch of Equality Lab's Caste in the United States survey and stood by my Dalit sisters Thenmozhi and Dr. Maari Zwick Maitreyi who produced that survey under duress from bigoted forces. I know that my liberation is connected to my Dalit Kin and there should be no question in the council's mind that caste is an urgent issue in Seattle and in the U.S. and should be addressed immediately.

I ask you to not be swayed by those who use disinformation, bigotry, and innuendo to dismiss the hard and good work of Dalit Civil rights organizations. These tactics of obfuscation are well known to those of us in the Black struggle. For every step forward we take for civil rights is often met with hostility by those who are held hostage to the evil of bigotry. Even now black scholars are being banned in 2023 by those who would hide from the sin of racism and slavery.

Discrimination is evil be it racial or caste. And it is not complex in how you address this issue. You must act with your full legal authority to ban and ensure that Seattle is safe for all. To not do so is to fail your duty as council leaders and to fail your moral call to action. There is a history of how American institutions have failed black people in ensuring our rights to be free from violence and discrimination over and over again. And we have had to use every tool we have from our culture, strategic litigation, and our movements to force governments to do the right thing. Learn the lesson from our shameful history of anti-blackness in the U.S. and do not repeat the failures of the past with my caste-oppressed kin.

I urge you my brothers and sisters on Seattle City Council, hold the right course here and stand with justice and vote yes on the caste ordinance. History will judge you on the choice you made to uphold civil rights or to postpone the path to freedom. I pray you will choose wisely.

*In struggle,
Dr. Cornel West*

- **DR. SHAILAJA PAIK, Taft Distinguished Professor of History and affiliate in women, gender, and sexuality studies at the University of Cincinnati**

Hello I am Professor Shailaja Paik and I am the TAF distinguished professor at the University of Cincinnati in the department of history and I'm affiliate faculty with women gender sexuality studies and Asian studies.

I talk today to support the Seattle City council offices' proposed legislation to ban caste-based discrimination in the city of Seattle, in solidarity with South Asian and other immigrant community members and all working people.

It is important to do so in order to entrench diversity and inclusion efforts and strengthen our commitment to addressing issues of discrimination, harassment and retaliation in Seattle and other cities.

This is important, to create an environment that is respectful, fair and just. And casteism, just like racism, is a system of hierarchy creating divisions amongst human beings. According to the ideology of caste, hereditary groups of people are ascribed a particular social status based on inherited privileges or a lack thereof.

Although it originates in South Asia the consequences of casteism are not confined to this region, nor are they confined to Hindu populations. As the number of South Asians in the US has grown, casteism has become a major problem and caste atrocities have been on the rise both within and outside of the universities. I'm speaking more specifically about the university because that is this space where I work.

Caste consciousness exists among South Asian immigrants as well as South Asians born in the U.S.

If left invisible and unchecked, casteism perpetuates suffering amongst those in our vicinity and beyond. So casteism no less than racism, patriarchy and homophobia must be actively contested.

The caste system operates at institutional, interpersonal and individual levels, and like racism impacts mental, physical and work related outcomes. Health research points to high rates of depression anxiety and suicide among caste oppressed students and individuals. Implicit and explicit forms of casteism contribute to a hostile academic environment and results in significant educational and health disparities among caste oppressed individuals.

At a time when the world is reeling, we're still fighting the coronavirus pandemic and the after effects of it, the caste system is an even more dangerous mutating virus with multiple strains. It is a shape-shifting virus that protects ruling castes, travels across continents and mutates over time managing to prevail and maintaining the hierarchical structure intact. In the 21st century caste has transnationalized in an unprecedented manner and South Asians carry the baggage of caste cultures across oceans and seas with dominant oppressor castes trying to recreate structures of power, privilege and differentiation thus marginalizing, excluding and oppressing those lower than them and more specifically Dalits who are affected in the most negative manner in a variety of ways: social economic ideological religious and cultural. The U.S legal system and citizens need to pay attention to this discrimination based on descent that has produced material and psychological horrors.

For many people, despite making it to the top, Dalits are told over and over again that they cannot work, or they do not have the necessary skills or that they do not belong to the tech world of Seattle, for that matter.

Hence I urge you to help the Seattle City council in fighting this atrocity. Thank you very much.

- **DR. GULREZ AZHAR, Aspen New Institute Voices Fellow & Physician Health Researcher** (<http://www.gulrezazhar.com>)

As someone who was raised Muslim in India, I can tell you that the menace of caste impacts the social practice of Indian Muslims as well. A vast majority of Indian Muslims are from the "pasmenda" caste which is an oppressed caste. As such caste is a phenomenon that transcends religion. In fact, caste is a founding truth of Indian society that is a big factor contributing to the rise of the right wing and the rise of Islamophobia. I support the proposed ordinance which would be historic, and see the fight against caste discrimination to not only be important in its own right, but also important in the fight against Islamophobia and other forms of oppression.

- **DR. NOAM CHOMSKY, American public intellectual: a linguist, philosopher, cognitive scientist, historian, social critic, and political activist & "the father of modern linguistics"** (<https://chomsky.info/>)

(Signed petition calling for passage of ordinance, and made statement below)

It's inspiring to see the struggle against caste discrimination in Seattle. Wish you the greatest success in this essential task.

- **RITA MEHER, Co-Founder & Executive Director, Tasveer, Seattle (host of largest South Asian Film Festival)** (<https://tasveer.org/team/>)

I'm [Rita Meher, an Executive Director & co-founder of Tasveer](https://tasveer.org/team/), a non-profit organization that is driven to increase South Asian representation and promote diversity and inclusion in the films and arts over two decades. We run the largest South Asian Film Festival in the country. I have also produced other successful programs in Seattle, called Yoni Ki Baat, South Asian equivalent of Eve Ensler's Vagina Monologues, in addition to creating a new national fund for South Asian filmmakers, a Tasveer film fund, partnering with Netflix. Our films from Tasveer Film Festival are carried on Alaska Airlines.

I say all of this so you understand that while I have been immensely successful in America, there is something I want Seattle City Council members to know about what an important personal emotional moment this proposed ordinance banning caste discrimination announcement was for me on January 24th 2023. For the first time in my life, I publicly came out as an Adivasi and I tweeted in support of this ordinance.

Adivasis are indigenous tribal people in India referred to as Scheduled Tribes in India. Along with Dalits who have faced untouchability, Adivasis are outside the caste system, and I have faced socio economic ostracism growing up in India. I continue to face pernicious caste oppression in the South Asian settings even here in Seattle. Until now, I have never talked publicly about my caste location as a caste oppressed indigenous woman yet I have been discriminated against due to the other markers about me- from my name to the food I eat to knowing about my family background in India.

The legislation introduced by Councilmember Sawant will ban caste discrimination, and the protection policies will bring visibility to and address this "hidden and unreported issue". This legislation will ensure that "caste" is explicitly enshrined as a prohibited basis of discrimination and that necessary protections are in place in Seattle for caste-oppressed South Asian residents, workers, and visitors, who currently have no legal remedies.

I urge the Seattle City Council members to vote YES and to pass this ordinance banning caste discrimination as proposed by Councilwoman Kshama Sawant

- **DR. JEREMY RINKER, Associate Professor at the University of North Carolina Greensboro's Department of Peace and Conflict Studies**

I urge you to vote YES to ban CASTE based discrimination that Councilmember Kshama Sawant's office has brought forward.

A legal ban on caste discrimination will protect oppressed caste community members such as many friends from the gross injustices they endure on a daily basis, here in Seattle. As Martin Luther King Jr., said "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere", I URGE you to vote YES on banning CASTE-based discrimination, thus making Seattle the first city in the country to do this.

*Thank you
Jeremy A. Rinker
Associate Professor
UNCG
Greensboro USA*

- **REV. ABI JOHN, Rector, Church of the Ascension, Rochester, NY**

As a Dalit Christian from India, I am saddened by the caste practices among the Indian caste Christians because most of them are still practicing caste in hidden ways. It can't be expressed but I have personally experienced it. Caste identities resonate in uncanny and shuttle ways despite the transitions from east to west. The irony of Indian Christianity is that I have heard a few stories from caste Indian Christians in America who justify caste practices by using Biblical text. It's a shame to see how ill structures are endorsed by caste minds forgetting the truth about life for all with values of equality and equity. Caste crosses boundaries. It is purely a mental construct. Unfortunately despite the education, cognitive eloquence, and cross-cultural exposures, caste minds still operate in the land of America in the land of free and brave. It's another form of Jim Crow! I am proud to say I am working in Episcopal diocese of Rochester which stands for all minorities and especially discusses the issues of Dalit and solidifies with all vulnerables reaffirming a beloved community.

Religious freedom and freedom of expression in the American land become a comfortable platform to continue the caste practices under the banner of culture, for caste people. Indian society is highly influenced by caste culture because the caste system is present in all domains

of life in different ways. So wherever the caste Indians go they go with the same mind of caste. It's all about purity and impurity norms, binary norms, it's all about power, prestige, privileges, and control over the vulnerable and also abuses the whole creation by adhering to strict segregation and discriminatory practices. It dehumanizes the majority and superhumanizes a minority with a tact of hidden hate for each other. It persistently articulates power to satiate the hunger of the dominant and powerful. Race and caste have similarities and supremacy tendencies are the connecting phenomenon. When someone thinks that he or she is greater than the other at birth then it is a serious mental issue. Caste's foundations are articulated with such a mendacious notion. It will affect the person who believes it and also the others. With all goodwill, I am practicing the precepts of Jesus, who believed in love to transform such selfish agencies to relate with one another with mutual love and respect. I am committed to such ethics and ethos of justice. I join all agencies that oppose any form of discrimination, oppression, segregation, exploitation, and domination in human society. I strongly feel that all of us are called to live a life of quality with self-dignity and decency. The quality will be justified by a genuine love for one another. My voice will never stop saying the Indian Church "destroy the caste otherwise the caste will destroy the church (the people of God)." I have been associated with the Dalit Solidarity forum since 2017 and I stand with their fight for social justice.

Let us destroy the monster called caste and all its manifestations, to save humanity. Otherwise, we put even America in danger!!!

Alleluia.

*Rev. Abi John
Rector
Church of the Ascension.
2 Riverside Street, Rochester.
New York.*

- **DR. SAREETA AMRUTE, Associate Professor, Strategic Design Parsons, The New School & Affiliate Associate Professor, University of Washington, Seattle**

Please accept this endorsement of the proposed ordinance to ban caste discrimination in the City of Seattle. I write this letter as an expert on race and technology in global economies. I am currently Associate Professor of Design Strategy at Parson, The New School and am Affiliate Associate Professor at the University of Washington, Seattle. I am the author of a study on race and technology called Encoding Race Encoding Class: Indian IT workers in Berlin.

Caste discrimination affects more than 250 million people worldwide. As a form of discrimination based on ancestry, caste discrimination affects populations across the globe and from all religious backgrounds. Furthermore, caste discrimination can often exist alongside and be hidden within other forms of discrimination such as those based on race, gender, or sexual identity.

Finally, those who may be experiencing caste discrimination may find it difficult to speak up because of their visa status on the one hand, and a lack of knowledge about caste discrimination in their workplaces and in housing law on the other. Adding caste as a protected category to city ordinances will encourage people experiencing caste discrimination to speak out and seek recourse.

It is vital to ban caste discrimination in Seattle. I urge all council members to vote YES on this issue.

*Sincerely,
Dr. Sareeta Amrute
Associate Professor, Strategic Design
Parsons, The New School*

● **DR. RADHIKA GOVINDRAJAN, Associate Professor of Anthropology and International Studies, University of Washington, Seattle**

I write as a resident of Seattle, a scholar of India, and a member of the South Asian-American diaspora to express my strong support for the proposed legislation banning discrimination on the basis of caste in Seattle. The explicit inclusion of caste as a category covered by the city's anti-discrimination policy will strengthen ongoing efforts to make Seattle a safer, more equitable and inclusive space for all its residents, a group that includes a large number of people from South Asia.

As numerous scholarly studies and personal testimonies have painstakingly documented, caste-based inequality, marginalization, and oppression is an integral part of the everyday experience of people who have inherited ancestral membership of castes that have historically been deemed "lower" by dominant caste groups. This stigma and discrimination has long-lasting, deleterious effects on oppressed caste individuals' physical and mental health as well as their access to and success in education and employment. This is true not just in South Asia, but also in diasporic South Asian communities across the world, including in the United States. For example, in a moving testimony of the caste-based discrimination he had faced when seeking employment in the United States, Prem Pariyar, a Dalit individual from Nepal, noted that he had to "endure the same discrimination and exclusion he faced in his home country" in the Bay Area. As a recent case against Cisco in a California Court (and the various Dalit testimonies that accompanied it) further demonstrated, discrimination by dominant castes against oppressed castes is ongoing in the American workplace. Adding caste to existing anti-discrimination laws will extend and deepen their impact, and offer more meaningful protection to members of oppressed-caste groups who have struggled to make their experiences of caste-based discrimination legible in the United States. The fact that several institutions, including Brandeis University, the California State University system, and the NAACP, have recently added caste to their non-discrimination policies speaks to the national momentum around this issue, and makes Seattle's impending move to ban discrimination on the basis of caste all the more urgent and historic.

Those who oppose such legislation often do so on the grounds that it is 'Hinduphobic' and will increase racial and religious discrimination against Hindus. However, many of the individuals who have experienced caste discrimination are themselves Hindu; in fact, they experience a 'double discrimination' being not just members of racially minoritized groups but also oppressed caste groups. Further, as numerous sociological studies have shown, caste discrimination is present not just in Hinduism, but also in other South Asian religions, including Islam and Christianity. The claim that explicitly banning discrimination on the basis of caste targets Hindus and Hinduism does not account for these broader realities.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate my support for the Seattle City Council's historic move to ban discrimination on the basis of caste ancestry. This is a crucial step in making our city a safer and more inclusive place, and deserves widespread support.

Thank you for your time and efforts.

Radhika Govindrajan

Associate Professor of Anthropology and International Studies

University of Washington, Seattle

- **DR. SUNILA KALE, Associate Professor, South Asia Studies and International Studies, University of Washington, Seattle**

I'm a faculty in South Asian Studies at the Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington. My research and teaching focus is on Indian politics, political economy, and development.

I'm writing to applaud and support the resolution regarding caste proposed by Councilmember Sawant, which would advance the cause of human rights and social justice in the US. Seattle would be leading the rest of the country on this important issue.

Best,

Sunila Kale

- **DR. VIK BAHL, Professor, English Faculty, Green River College, Auburn, Washington**

I am Professor Vivek Bahl, Ph.D., English Faculty, Green River College, Auburn, WA. I write to you today seeking your support for the Seattle City Council's proposed ordinance to ban caste-based discrimination in the City of Seattle. I stand in solidarity with South Asian and other immigrant community members and all working people.

Caste is a systematic method of marginalization and exploitation of groups of people based on their birth. In its discriminatory characteristics, caste shares a lot in common with race. In fact, oppressed caste people in our South Asian diaspora face double discrimination owing to their intersectionality of being one marginalized minority within another.

While caste originated in and is still most prevalent in South Asia, decades of South Asian migration into America have, as would be expected, ensured the equally successful migration of

the caste system and caste-based discrimination as well. Organized demands to redress egregious caste-based discrimination in the US are rising, such as the ongoing [lawsuit against technology giant Cisco](#) case, [United States v. Lakireddy Bali Reddy](#) case, [the BAPS case](#), to name a few.

The stories from the subsequent testimonies from witnesses and survivors of caste-based discrimination (collected by [Ambedkar King Study Circle](#) and [Equality Labs](#)) tell us of an urgent need to protect this axis of discrimination. Existing legal protections are inadequate to protect caste-based discrimination given the victim's intersectionality of marginalization and that their discrimination happens at the hands of the people of their same race.

Contrarian views would hold that such a law would be anti-Hindu. Nothing could be further from the truth - caste cuts across religions and the protection would apply to oppressed castes of Hindus and non-Hindus alike. Another contrarian claim is that such a law would unfairly target Indian or South Asian communities. This is also not valid as it would be like saying that sexual discrimination laws unfairly target men or that transgender protection laws unfairly target cisgendered people.

Seattle has the fastest growing South Asian population of any city in America, and consequently is the city that most needs this law to protect more of its citizens. With this law, Seattle would be honoring its commitment to its residents, workers, and visitors, many of whom are minority South Asian caste-oppressed people who don't have legal protections. It would be setting a precedent for the rest of the nation to follow.

I urge all members of the City Council to join Councilmember Kshama Sawant in prohibiting caste-based discrimination in Seattle. Seattle will become the first city in the nation to outlaw caste discrimination and will have rippling repercussions across the United States to make caste a protected category.

*Thank you,
Vivek Bahl, Ph.D.*

- **DR. CHRISTIAN LEE NOVETZKE, Professor, South Asia Studies, University of Washington, Seattle**

I'm a faculty member in South Asia Studies at UW in the Jackson School of International Studies. I'm writing to express my support and admiration for the anti-caste discrimination resolution proposed by Councilmember Kshama Sawant. This is a visionary ordinance and essential to human rights and social justice within the cosmopolitan and international city of Seattle.

*Best,
Christian Lee Novetzke*

- **DR. SONJA THOMAS, Associate Professor, Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies, Colby College**

My name is Sonja Thomas and I am an associate professor at Colby College. In Oct 2021, Colby became the second college in the US (after Brandeis) to add caste as a protected category to our [non-discrimination policy](#). Students, faculty (such as myself), and the administration did this together--united. We educated Colby faculty, students, and staff about what casteism is, how it occurs in the US, and especially, how casteism can affect oppressed caste students in higher education. And we received no pushback whatsoever.

This is because when people are educated (rather than remain in ignorance) as to the ways casteism is embedded into the social fabric and manifests itself in segregation, employment and housing discrimination, education discrimination, sexual harassment and violence, in intimidation and exclusions, it really is a no-brainer to make sure that the peoples affected by casteism are protected and are able to seek recourse.

Casteism is a human rights violation. And in adding caste to our non discrimination policy, our community stood up for human rights.

I'm writing to the city council to encourage you to likewise stand up for human rights and to express my firm support for the addition of caste to Seattle's non-discrimination policy.

While we normally associate caste with South Asia, casteism can function in other areas of the world as well, and it migrates with the diaspora. Casteism can also be seen in multiple religions.

I research [caste in Christianity](#) in India, and in the US Indian Christian community. It is FALSE to equate recognizing caste as discriminating against a religious minority. Such a smoke and mirrors tactic fails to protect oppressed caste Christians, Muslims, Sikhs and Buddhists while it simultaneously diverts attention away from the experiences that so many caste oppressed Hindus have been sharing with news media and in public testimonies in the US. Christians are a minority in India, but those Christians with caste power can still perpetuate casteism. In the same way, religious minorities in the US with caste power can still perpetuate casteism.

Unfortunately, there are a few caste privileged individuals in the US who are spreading misinformation about casteism. (I've written about that misinformation [here](#)). The majority of Indian Americans in the US are caste privileged. And Indian Americans are the most wealthy racial minorities in the US. Because those with caste and class power see themselves represented in movies, television, literature, art, and politics, their caste privilege is taken to be "the norm" and their voice seems to be the loudest. Caste power is often invisibilized in the diaspora as we make demands on Dalit Bahujan oppressed caste peoples to continually share their stories of trauma, exclusions, and discriminations before those who do not experience this form of discrimination are swayed to act.

Thus, I doubly urge the city council to listen to the voices of oppressed caste peoples in the US, to understand how casteism affects people in multiple religions including Christianity, and to add caste as a protected category.

If you have any questions and would like to talk in depth, please don't hesitate to reach out to me.

All the best,

~Sonja Thomas

Associate Professor, Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies, Colby College

Senior Research Fellow, Religion Studies, Lehigh University, 2022-23

- **DR. GAURAV SABNIS, Associate Professor, Marketing at the School of Business, Stevens Institute of Technology, Hoboken, NJ**

I am Dr. Gaurav Sabnis, Associate Professor of Marketing at the School of Business, Stevens Institute of Technology, Hoboken NJ.

I write to you as an American citizen of Indian origin hoping to raise awareness about caste based discrimination that is rampant in much of the world and also in the United States.

I write to you today, seeking your support for the Seattle City Council's proposed ordinance to ban caste-based discrimination in the City of Seattle. I stand in solidarity with South Asian and other immigrant community members and all working people.

Caste is a systematic method of marginalization and exploitation of groups of people based on their birth. In that sense of its discriminatory characteristics, caste shares a lot in common with race. In fact, oppressed caste people in our South Asian diaspora face double discrimination owing to their intersectionality of being one marginalized minority within another.

While caste originated in and is still most prevalent in South Asia, decades of South Asian migration into America has, as would be expected, ensured the equally successful migration of the caste system and caste-based discrimination as well. Instances of egregious caste-based discrimination in the US are rising, such as the ongoing [lawsuit against technology giant Cisco](#) case, [United States v. Lakireddy Bali Reddy](#) case, [the BAPS case](#), to name a few.

The stories from the subsequent testimonies from witnesses and survivors of caste-based discrimination (collected by [Ambedkar King Study Circle](#) and [Equality Labs](#)) tell us of an urgent need to protect this axis of discrimination. Existing legal protections are inadequate to protect caste-based discrimination given the victim's intersectionality of marginalization and that their discrimination happens at the hands of the people of their same race.

Contrarian views would hold that such a law would be anti-Hindu. Nothing could be further from the truth - caste cuts across religions and the protection would apply to oppressed castes of Hindus and non-Hindus alike. Another contrarian claim is that such a law would unfairly target Indian or South Asian communities. That would be as laughable as saying sexual discrimination laws unfairly target men or that transgender protection laws unfairly target cisgendered people.

Seattle has the fastest growing South Asian population of any city in America, and consequently is the city that most needs this law to protect more of its citizens. With this law, Seattle would be honoring its commitment to its residents, workers, and visitors, many of whom are minority South Asian caste-oppressed people who don't have legal protections. It would be setting a precedent for the rest of the nation to follow.

I urge all members of the City Council to join Councilmember Kshama Sawant in banning caste-based discrimination in Seattle. Seattle will become the first city in the nation to outlaw caste discrimination and will have rippling repercussions across the United States to make caste a protected category.

*Thank you,
Prof. Gaurav Sabnis
Date: Feb 13th 2023*

- **DR. ROJA SINGH, Assistant Professor, Sociology, St. John Fisher College, Rochester, NY
President, Dalit Solidarity Forum in the USA; Executive Council, India Civil Watch
International, USA; South Asian Feminist Collective**

This is Dr. Roja Singh, President and cofounder of The Dalit Solidarity Forum in the USA, Inc (DSF). I am an assistant professor of Sociology in St. John Fisher University, Rochester, New York. I strongly endorse the Seattle City council's proposed legislation to ban caste-based discrimination in the city. In doing so, the council heroically is taking a historical stand to preserve human dignity and justice for all residing in the United States. Dalits and all other vulnerable groups in the USA should be protected under law. This cannot be just a suggestion, but an enforced mandate. As a Dalit mother, I seek to ensure the safety of my children and my future generations in this great land where I sought refuge as one that I believed represents rights to life, liberty and justice. As a Dalit woman, I urge Seattle to take a stand for what is right to protect its residents and set a model for other cities.

DSF was founded in 1999 as the first organization of its kind to be established in the United States to speak out and act against caste-based discriminations, primarily in India and now, globally. We never imagined that a day would come when caste would be a well-fed vicious animal in the United States practiced by those who religiously believe that humans are created unequal. DSF joins in solidarity with other caste oppressed groups who are mobilizing, such as: Equality Labs, Ambedkar International Center, Ambedkar King Study Circle, Ambedkar Association of North America, Dr. Ambedkar Education Aid Society, Boston Study Group Ambedkarite Buddhist Association of Texas, Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha and Begumpura Cultural Society.

Caste is the begetter of racism and all other "isms" that dehumanize others on the unthinkable irrational belief that some people are purer than the polluted others. Processes of such dehumanization include rape, murder, public humiliation, threat, verbal abuse, psychological abuse, economic and sexual violence mostly on women. We saw this pattern of dismissing personhood as perpetrated by colonialism upon the bodies of Native Americans and mostly that

of their women who were subject to horrific sexual violence. This is not what we want to see happen again by settler Indian-Americans craftily creating the same socio-cultural and political ethos of performing supremacy through their caste identity.

As citizens and residents of the United States we must eliminate every possible chance that this casteism would affect our and our future generations in the United States before it is too late and we have a beast gone dangerously loose. These perpetrators exhibit an entitlement to caste, and race privileges in the USA in the audacity that there is no legal policy to call them to accountability and they carry on with the assurance that they can get away with overt discrimination. The very fact that there is such strong opposition to the passing of this policy on caste is evidence of the determination to ensure the targeting of safe-preys here and face no consequences for it. This cannot be allowed simply because it is an unconscionable practice that is committed to strangle humanity and the sincere efforts of an "outcaste" individual to thrive in America. This is nothing short of a human dignity genocide.

As Dalit Christians we fled India seeking an unburdening of the fear of caste- based violence and discrimination in the USA. Unfortunately caste is not just a Hindu issue but is very much alive in other religions such including Christianity where my roots are. My late father, a renowned Dalit scholar and professor wrote that the hostility he faced as a Dalit was not so much from those following fundamentalist Hinduism, but from caste Christians who hated his guts as an overachieving Dalit scholar. The churches in the tristate area I am from are very diligent in maintaining their caste status. They ensure that their children marry within or "up" in caste. There are predominantly Dalit churches in the United States just as we see in India as well, due to being excluded from other churches. Though, inter-caste marriages are more prevalent among Christians, quite often the aftermath of those lead to severe consequences for the Dalit in that relationship.

Signed

Dr. Jebaroja Singh

President, Dalit Solidarity Forum, USA, Inc.

- **DR. NALINI IYER, Professor of English at Seattle University, Seattle, WA**

I, Dr. Nalini Iyer, am a long-term resident of the greater Seattle area and I am a Professor of English at Seattle University. The views expressed in this email are my personal ones and do not represent that of my employer.

I write in support of the ordinance to ban caste-based discrimination in Seattle and urge you all to vote YES and pass the first-in-the-nation legislation to ban caste-based discrimination in SeaUle. As you know, the Seattle area is home to a large South Asian immigrant population. While many may view us as a homogenous community, we are quite heterogeneous and include diverse religious, national, linguistic, gender, class, and caste identities. Caste as a category is unfamiliar to many people. Caste is an enabler of discrimination, harassment, and exclusion in education, workplace, housing, and employment not only in the US but in our local communities in Seattle. Caste is a central phenomenon in South Asian society. Caste

perpetuates across religions in South Asian communities including the diaspora communities here in the United States of America. Though caste based discrimination is now illegal in India, its impacts are still far-reaching and can manifest in every aspect of life. With the growing Indian diaspora in the United State of America, this pernicious system has been brought to the shores of our country.

Caste becomes invisibilized when we South Asians are seen as or identify as “people of color.” While we are a racialized minority, we carry with us the baggage of caste and its attendant discriminatory practices. As a woman born and raised in the dominant caste in India who has since migrated to the United States, I am aware of the many privileges caste identity has accorded to people like me. At the same time, there is plenty of documented evidence such as the work done by Equality Labs or the lawsuit against Cisco on caste discrimination that reveal how this pernicious practice and ideology has evolved and been sustained in the South Asian immigrant communities.

*As an academic, I specialize in South Asian studies. I am the co-author of the well-known cultural history of South Asian immigration, *Roots and Reflections: South Asians in the Pacific Northwest* (University of Washington Press, 2013) and serve as Editor in Chief of the academic journal *South Asian Review*. I also teach courses that include writing by Dalit authors and write about caste and its intersections with race and gender. From that standpoint, I believe that this ordinance to ban caste discrimination is a very important first step in making Seattle a progressive, inclusive, and welcoming place for those historically marginalized by the violence of caste.*

Many US universities, civil rights organizations, workers' unions, even corporations, et al recognize caste and have added it to their respective non-discriminatory policies. Brandeis University, California State University (CSU), Harvard Graduate Students Union-United Auto Workers (HGSU-UAW), Brown University, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA), and the California Democratic Party are some of the names in the growing list of institutions that have endorsed caste equity and added caste to their non-discriminatory policies.

I urge all members of the City Council to join Councilmember Kshama Sawant in banning caste-based discrimination in Seattle. Seattle will become the first city in the nation to outlaw caste discrimination and will have rippling repercussions across the United States to make caste a protected category.

Thank you,

Nalini Iyer, Ph.D.

Date: February 13, 2023

- **DR. AMRITJIT SINGH, Langston Hughes Professor Emeritus of English, Ohio University, Athens**

I write to you as an ally of caste oppressed communities in the US, and urge you to vote YES to ban CASTE based discrimination that Councilmember Kshama Sawant's office has brought

forward. I believe you will receive hundreds of more letters in support of what Ms Sawant has spearheaded.

A ban on caste discrimination will protect oppressed caste people, their family, and their children from the gross injustices they endure on a daily basis, here in the US. There is simply no reason for any city or state in the US to import a social disease from another part of the world. We have barely overcome our own challenges with race.

As Martin Luther King Jr., said "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere", I URGE you to vote YES to ban CASTE-based discrimination, thus making Seattle the first city in the country to do this.

Thank you

*Amritjit Singh
Langston Hughes Professor Emeritus of English
Ohio University
Athens, OH*