

John Doe- I support the legislation to ban caste discrimination in the city of Seattle proposed by council member Kshama Sawant. As a member of the Dalit community, formerly known as the Untouchables, a resident of Washington, and a member of the South Asian community, working for a major tech company in Seattle. I say it is about time we ban caste discrimination practices in Seattle. As a Dalit myself, I faced discrimination first-hand at work, at cultural gatherings, and even when hanging out with friends. I will share some personal experiences that will help you understand how caste discrimination works in today's society. At one incident I was on a team lunch from work in a restaurant. Now there is a beef burger which is normal for a person like me to like. But soon enough, my other Indian colleague asked me what caste I belonged to since generally, the so-called upper caste considers eating beef as an offence. And when I refused to answer directly, one of my close colleagues made a comment that the only Indians who eat beef are tribal or downtrodden or minority, who will eat anything which the upper castes don't eat like beef or pork. It was a microaggression, where I was forced to reveal myself to other colleagues Indian and non-Indian. I had to explain my background to my colleagues, after which my colleagues started looking at me through a different lens which definitely was an inferior one. For an upper caste person, it is easy to introduce themselves as who they are, but for people like me, we have to first show and prove other qualities like caring, kindness, generosity or just being a human, before we can open up about our caste history. It is not because I don't want to show who truly I am but it's because, I introduce myself as Dalit first

Samir Khobragade

My name is Samir Khobragade and I come from a caste-oppressed community in India commonly referred to as Dalits, that consists of 300 M people who suffer living conditions created by thousands of years of Untouchability. It is the most horrendous part of the caste system which still prevails in South Asia, and is in fact one of its fundamental faultlines, an original sin much like race in America. I grew up in the midst of this society, worked my way up and managed to migrate to the USA in the hope that I will finally be free of the chains of casteism.

Success in my career was my only way to stay safe from falling back into the miserable conditions waiting for me back home. I decided to never talk about myself and my caste background anywhere. Twenty years of a closeted existence, of hiding from myself to avoid direct discrimination became increasingly difficult.

Constantly guarding my thoughts, my opinions, and my actions, I thrived professionally but struggled at a human level with my contradictions. Until recently, I did not even share with my children the superhuman struggles my parents and grandparents underwent to win basic rights for us.

It was at the height of Black Lives Matter protests in 2020 that I could no longer hold this contradiction inside. I wanted to express solidarity with the Black community. I went public with my identity. Embracing my real self has been immensely liberating. It has brought me closer to my community in Seattle, whose existence I was not aware of. I constantly meet people, who like me, stayed in 'hiding', not able to find each other for decades.

This is why I strongly support the ordinance proposed by Kshama Sawant outlawing caste discrimination.

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. 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 legitimation is a common phenomenon in this country, locally.”

Prashant Nema, a veteran tech worker who has worked in Microsoft, Dell/EMC, Meta (Facebook).

“As an insider into the dominant caste community I can confirm widespread practice of caste in our City and surrounding area. I have many friends and colleagues who will never refer any candidate who has been a beneficiary of affirmative action for a job in their company, no matter how much experience they have. This comes from their deep

rooted hatred of those from the so-called lower caste and not from ignorance of how affirmative action works. Referrals are a great source of opportunity for work and for more lenient interviews. Derogatory jokes even at workplaces about people from marginalized communities and their social justice heroes is also common in closed circles. Often at workplaces members from so called higher castes also flash their caste pride making the place unwelcomed for the members from oppressed communities. I was also the witness to the derogatory caste emails at Microsoft that were mentioned in the Oct 27 2020 edition of Seattle times. Many times people invite their colleagues to Indian worship places and explore their caste there. I have also seen teams in some of these companies where managers hire more than 30% people from the same caste. If any company runs a simple estimator on their org charts it is easy to see what I have said. At least anyone who grew up in a casteist society can clearly see these clusters. This is clear sign of discrimination”

Suresh- I urge this council to pass this law. I have faced discrimination in the workplace while working in Seattle due to my lower caste status. I have been denied equal wages and promotions due to my lower caste status here in Seattle. Additionally, I play matchmaker for the south Asian community. And I have seen over the past 15 years, I have been told by my clients repeatedly who are from the oppressing caste that wants to find boys or girls to marry to be only of a higher caste so that they can maintain their bloodline. This is how disgusting this caste mindset is. Please vote yes and protect the oppressed caste. Remember, this bill is not hurting any religion, but it targets the discriminatory mindset. The world is watching. Council members, please be on the right side of history.

Jasmine K- I urge you all to vote yes on the ordinance proposed by Kshama Sawant to ban caste-based discrimination in Seattle city. I am a Dalit Caste oppressed Sikh woman and a member of Equality Labs. I have experienced caste-based discrimination in the US. Most recently, I have experienced microaggressions at a tech start-up I used to work at, which also has offices in Seattle. My south Asian supervisor would constantly ask where my family was from, that Kaur wasn't my real last name and what my real last name was. This question was deliberately asked to know my caste background. As a caste-oppressed person, I felt very uncomfortable, and protections must be in place. Over 30 people have emphasized this on this call and shared their stories of being caste oppressed. Caste is real and is here in the US. Given that the

caste oppressions south Asians face in Seattle and nationally required immediate redressal. Please pass the ordinance to ban caste oppression.

Swati Rayasam- I am a dominant caste organiser based in the bay area. I am giving this comment on behalf of 'South Asians taking Action', which is a bay area organization with roughly 40 members and about 500 volunteers, the majority of which are Indian Americans and of Hindu descent as well as from privileged caste backgrounds. And many of our members and leaders have community ties in Seattle. I personally have about 16 family members in Seattle. Our organization was formed in January 2000 in response to charges against a local landlord in the city of Berkeley CA, who was convicted of bringing dozens of people from rural India to work without pay in his restaurants and businesses. These people were predominantly, if not entirely, comprised of low caste workers. So as an organisation formed and inspired by Dalit feminists such as folks from Equality lab, I urge you to vote Yes.

G- I am a community clinical psychologist, and I work. I am a Hindu and a practising Buddhist. I am also a first-generation immigrant from India. I am calling in support of the ordinance to ban caste-based discrimination in Seattle city. It is important to recognise that through years of work with the south Asian community, and as someone who is caste privileged. I have seen the indelible impact of caste oppression on Dalit folks. I have seen how upper-caste communities continue to invalidate Dalit struggles. As a Seattle city person, I can speak very strongly about the importance of banning caste-based discrimination beginning with the city of Seattle. This will be historic. We can not allow Hindu nationalists or upper caste Hindus to allow the dangerous weaponisation of our beautiful ancient scriptures. Caste discrimination is a complete problem and needs to be outlawed. I urge the council to vote in favour of banning caste-based discrimination in Seattle.

Bhim

I was born in India and after my graduation in Electronics and communication Engineering, I started working for major Indian tech companies called X since December 2006 As SAP technical consultant.

I came to the United States in August 2009 for an EBS project at major US company called Y and was working at Beaverton.

During my tenure at X, I would feel my progress was being halted, being one of the better performing Employee for X at Y. I never felt appreciated for my Work by X Manager, whereas I got many appreciations letter and medal from Y, for my contribution to various Y initiatives and Project.

I noticed a sudden change in the Behavior of my Manager after he got to know which caste I belong to. Earlier he used to invite me to his house for food and drinks as I was among Top rated X employee at Y. Rating is generated by the Y COE team(center of Excellence team). I did not get any promotion and even my role was not changed, almost working for 6 years at X and 3+ years assigned at Y. Whereas other consultants who joined X after working at Y as consultant to X and even from X offshore employees got promotion.

I had to go to India in January 2012 for my marriage, because of VISA stamping date availability issues I had to stay a bit longer in India which was the responsibility of the X VISA team.

After getting my VISA I had to return back to the USA to join the team at Y in Beaverton, after working for March, my payroll was not generated from February onwards stating that I left for India. My manager had requested to stop my payroll after I left for India. This process or policy I had never heard or happened to anyone in X. After coming back, I requested to reinstate my payroll, but that was not happening, so to take care of my financial obligation I applied for Vehicle loan at X, A per offshore employee policy that was automatically approved. Finally, my payroll was generated in the month of MAY 2012.

At that time, I brought to X Notice that my February paycheck has not yet been generated as I was on PTO for 10 days for the month of February. But nothing was done.

I decided to make a move from X and got a new Job offer from another Indian IT company.

So, I sent my Resignation letter with two weeks' notice and my manager initially accepted my resignation and discussed my projects and transition plan with me and the Y Team.

On my last day at X my manager told me that I had to give two months' notice as I am an offshore employee, otherwise my exit will be marked as not a clean exit. I asked everyone from left for new Job they all gave 2 weeks' notice and almost most of them

are offshore employee's whom I knew personally. I informed my X Manager it's too late. I can't because my travel arrangements have been done and I was flying to Minnesota the next day and Joining my Employer on the coming Monday. I Again said to him if you had told me earlier when we discussed my resignation, if that was the case I would have asked for more time from my new employer to join the company, but I can't do anything about it now.

After Year Passed by I joined a major tech company Z in Seattle and the company was sponsoring me for green card, so for Green card processing I need to get detailed experience letter from X, I asked my Manager repeated to provide me the detailed experience letter even after providing reference of my previous managers and colleague with whom I had worked with my request was turned down my repeated request. I could say this never happened to any of my high caste colleagues who worked in X and Left X in the USA after giving two weeks' notice, as I asked them about their process of getting a X Experience letter.

During this period when I was requesting for Detailed experience letter X Final settlement team came back to me for unpaid Vehicle loan which I took in April 2012, when my payroll was stopped and I again had to bring to their notice that my February 2012 paycheck has not yet been generated and please generated my payroll and deposit the remain amount to me after deduction of Vehicle loan. So the final Settlement was done after almost 16 months of leaving X and I was still not able to get a detailed experience letter because my Indian manager at X said mine was not a clean exit and he couldn't provide me with a detailed experience letter from X.

Finally, I had got the Detailed experience letter from my colleagues at X with whom I had worked because that was an Important part in my green card application of having worked 6 years at X for GC application.

I had a great time in the new company Z. My manager was not an Indian and I got ample chance to display my talent and got several promotions. Recently I was moved under an Indian manager from the highest caste. He was friendly initially but when he saw me eating and discussing meat one day he found out that I was not from a higher caste. Things have changed since then. Our team has 60% people from the same highest caste and I feel that my manager has been trying to provide me with non-impactful work and is avoiding having meetings with me. But he constantly checks if I am working (WFH) or not. I am always confused about what he wants to do. I fear a repeat of my previous experience and losing my job in this difficult layoff period. An ordinance of this nature will help in many ways. First it will be a deterrent for those with

a casteist mindset. There will be no confusion that the civil rights department is equipped to handle such cases. It will also help me be confident while working that I have a recourse to justice.

Anonymous

I have faced caste discrimination in Seattle.

There are three cases

1) in the Church office. where Indian immigrant christians who are so called upper caste converts used Casteist term to describe me calling out my caste identity hence I should be avoided from church activities in Churches led by Indian immigrant pastors.

2) In The Indian Grocery store, I asked a person about his background from india he proudly mentioned his dominant caste identity and asked me back you look like a 'Bhangi' are you?

Note:- Bhangi is a Caste Slur used against one of dalit caste who are assigned to do sanitation work and are doing it since thousands of years, this system is called 'manual scavenging' the 'slur' is banned in North India same like 'N' word banned in United States.

3) In the public places (Garden) Indian immigrant kids from so called upper caste background used a Casteist 'slur' against me calling me 'Junglee' meaning 'uncivilized Forest dweller' because of the way I was dressed

This is a slur is purely Casteist

To demean tribal people of india.

Email to City Council, 2/12/23

Ganga, Dalit worker:

"I am a naturalized US citizen from India supposed to be a caste oppressed with in the caste embedded Hindu community.

I left India to be away from the caste discrimination from dominant castes. But here in Seattle too I have experienced when used to consult for a major supplier to a truck manufacturer.

The dominant Indian caste Hindu manager has always had this discriminative attitude as he know my caste background.

I am happy to know that Seattle is leading to ban caste discrimination by bringing an ordinance to include caste as a protected category. I also would like to record my bad experiences in Seattle by dominant caste Hindus from India.

Email to City Council, 2/11/23

Alok, Dalit tech worker:

“I live in Seattle and I work here in a large, trillion-dollar 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.”

“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.”
