
From: Samir Khobragade <ksamir@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, February 16, 2023 5:28 PM
To: LEG_CouncilMembers
Subject: Caste Oppression: My testimony as an Untouchable

CAUTION: External Email

Hi all,

My name is Samir Khobragade and I have worked in the Seattle area for 13 years now. I come from a caste-oppressed community in India commonly referred to as Dalits, that consists of 300million 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.

Thank you,
Samir