



Dear Seattle City Council,

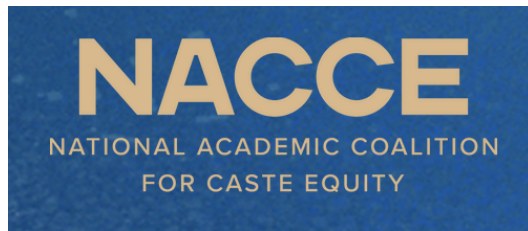
We – manmit singh (dominant caste Sikh) and Radhika Marwaha (dominant caste Hindu and Sikh) – are writing as members of the [National Academic Coalition for Caste Equity \(NACCE\)](#) community members to request that you vote **YES on the ordinance to ban caste discrimination in the city of Seattle, proposed by Council member Kshama Sawant.**

Previously, we have organized at California State University (CSU) system and worked with the administration there to add caste as a protected category, [resulting in the largest 4-year public university in the nation to ban caste discrimination](#). We are currently working alongside a national inter-faith, inter-caste, and multi-racial coalition to support such civil rights legislation in colleges and universities across the nation, which has led to huge victories at institutions like Brandeis, Harvard, UC Davis, Brown University, Bryn Mawr, Colorado College, Carleton College, and Colby College.

We have been involved in such anti-caste work for the past three years now despite coming from the positionality of being dominant caste/caste privileged. And the powerful truth is that our coalition is an inter-caste coalition, made up of both caste oppressed community members and those from the dominant caste working together in the spirit of love, accountability, and justice. As dominant caste Sikh and Hindu Panjabi community members, we have grown up seeing caste permeating all aspects of our communities. [From the music that reifies and celebrates the jatt](#) (dominant caste) identity and furthers jatt hegemony, to blatant discrimination at the places of worship (gurdwaras and temples), we have witnessed first-hand the violence of caste inequality that we are accountable to and for. Here, we also want to emphasize that all of [these discriminatory practices are rampant across our Sikh community](#)—and we name that explicitly because there are constant attempts to derail the movement for caste protections by making the argument that adding caste as a protected category singles out Hindus. This argument is rooted in disinformation, and as Sikhs, we can confirm that caste is not only a Hindu issue, but also a Sikh issue. It is, at large, an inter-faith issue, given that caste violence and discrimination is upheld across all faiths—Hindu, Sikh, Christian, Muslim, Jain, and Buddhist.

In 2022, we also conducted the [Caste in Higher Education Conference](#) and Survey, the preliminary analysis of which revealed that within US higher education, 4 in 5 caste-oppressed students, staff, and faculty reported experiencing caste-discrimination at the hands of their dominant caste peers. 60% of them also worked at least 20-40 hours a week outside classes and 2 in 5 had to apply for an emergency loan for unexpected crises, speaking to the level of systemic material inequity that caste-oppressed folks faced. Further, 75% of them 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 regarding the same.

One of our survey respondents (results forthcoming April 2023), for instance, testified as follows: “Seen leaders of South Asian student groups use caste slurs. Faced microaggression and gaslighting from a South



Asian professor in a tone that indicated that I was ungrateful for [their] support and not loyal to [them] when one of [their] collection projects fell through. Also did work collecting narratives of US dalits for a book project [a] professor, only to have [them] publish the book without acknowledging that caste was an issue in the US south asian diaspora, completely discarding the work I did for [them] around the experiences of Dalits in the US.”

The above not only speaks to the urgent need to add caste protections, but also affirms the Dalit feminist scholarship that Equality Labs has been sharing in the form of their [Caste in 2018 survey](#) and other data points. Their work is routinely attacked by caste bigots, as is evident in this process as well with dominant caste folks raising questions regarding the validity of their data. At the end of the day, it is important to realize that our commitments are to the most marginalized and that for even a single Dalit person to be discriminated and receive no redressal, is a failure on our part.

However, wherever there is oppression, there is always resistance against that oppression. It is for this reason that our coalition has so many dominant caste people from all faith communities who are continuously showing up to be on the right side of history. The heinous violence of caste is that it functions like a system of apartheid, keeping us all segregated along caste lines and producing a crisis of relationality where we do not know how to be in community with each other. However, this movement for caste protections is offering us another path collectively as South Asians—one in which we are learning how to be in inter-caste and inter-faith community and break free from the cycle of apartheid to rewrite our values to be based in accountability and care. We ask you to join us in this powerful work, and to stand firm in your commitment to supporting the most marginalized—including those marginalized on the basis of caste. It is not only a request, but a reminder of the very responsibility that you took on when signing up to be a representative and leader of the community. We ask you to also stand with us on the right side of history, and not be distracted by those using disinformation and bad-logic arguments to dismiss this ordinance.

In solidarity,
manmit singh and Radhika Marwaha
[National Academic Coalition for Caste Equity \(NAACE\)](#)