

**Subject:** Stand for Human Rights. Vote Yes on ordinance to Ban Caste-Based Discrimination  
**Date:** Monday, February 13, 2023 at 1:34:17 PM Pacific Standard Time  
**From:** Nalini Iyer <iyernalini@gmail.com>  
**To:** LEG\_CouncilMembers <council@seattle.gov>  
**CC:** Stone, Meredith <Meredith.Stone@seattle.gov>

**CAUTION: External Email**

Dear Councilmembers,

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 Seattle. 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.

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