



University of California Student Association
1020 12th St., Suite #232
Sacramento, CA 95814
510-834-8272 | www.uksa.org

In Support of UCSA Including Caste Protections in Their Anti-Discrimination Statement
February 17, 2022

Authors: Riya Master (Berkeley EVP)

WHEREAS, caste discrimination and perceived caste discrimination negatively affect the lives of many lower caste students through discrimination in classrooms, social situations, and job applications¹, while overall lending itself to negligence towards lower caste students and,

WHEREAS, UC Berkeley does not include caste protections in its anti-discrimination policy, while UC Davis recently adopted changes to their anti-discrimination policy to include caste protections, becoming one of the first universities in the nation to do so²; and,

WHEREAS, the caste system is one of the oldest forms of social stratification, dating back thousands of years to the Indian subcontinent, originating from Hinduism. There are 4 main castes in the following order: Brahmins who are priests and religious leaders, Kshatriyas who are soldiers and political leaders, Vaishyas who are merchants and bankers, and Shudras who are artisans and workers³; and,

WHEREAS, the caste system was created as a form of social control, such that everyone had a place in society and those who practiced it were promised salvation and a better life when they were reincarnated. The caste system is analogized to the body of God: Brahmins are the mouth that speaks on behalf of God, Kshatriyas are the arms that give God strength, Vaishyas are the stomach that conducts many of God's important tasks, and Shudras are the legs that the rest of him rest upon. Each caste is meant to support the castes above them⁴; and,

WHEREAS, below the main hierarchy, exist Dalits, commonly known in the west as untouchables. Dalits work low-skill labor, agriculture, and sanitary jobs that often involve dangerous conditions, low pay, and long hours. Dalits are at the bottom of the caste system and face the most discrimination, given that they aren't treated humanely by other castes⁵; and,

¹ <https://www.equalitylabs.org/castesurvey>

² https://www.instagram.com/p/CVgGCICpP_g/?utm_medium=copy_link

³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-35650616>

⁴ [https://vaniquotes.org/wiki/The_brahmanas_represent_the_Lord%27s_mouth_the_ksatriyas_His_arms_the_vaisyas_His_abdomen_\(belly_waist_thighs\)_and_the_sudras_are_born_of_His_legs](https://vaniquotes.org/wiki/The_brahmanas_represent_the_Lord%27s_mouth_the_ksatriyas_His_arms_the_vaisyas_His_abdomen_(belly_waist_thighs)_and_the_sudras_are_born_of_His_legs)

⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-35650616>



University of California Student Association
1020 12th St., Suite #232
Sacramento, CA 95814
510-834-8272 | www.ucsa.org

WHEREAS, beyond the traditional caste system, regional ethnic groups such as the Jats and Patels face discrimination and have requested the Indian government to receive legal recognition as a low caste, such that caste protections extend to these groups⁶; and,

WHEREAS, for those who practice it, caste impacts every aspect of life. Rural communities are segregated by caste, with separate food and water supplies. Members of different castes aren't allowed to marry, eat food prepared by other castes, or even touch in some cases⁷; and,

WHEREAS, though caste may not be visually identifiable, it is often easy for South Asians to identify another South Asian's ethnicity and caste simply based on their name, allowing for discrimination to take place in the first place. In certain cases, people can be misidentified as certain castes, leading to perceived caste discrimination⁸; and,

WHEREAS, during and after the Indian revolution, low caste activists, such as Dalit BR Ambedkar (author of the Indian Constitution), worked to rid India of the caste system through legal protections and quota systems for members of lower castes in schools and businesses. Though these efforts have made considerable progress, caste discrimination still runs deep in Indian society, particularly in rural areas, and castes are still socioeconomically stratified⁹; and,

WHEREAS, India's upper caste households earned 47% more than the national average annual household income. The top 10% of these castes own 60% of the wealth of the upper caste wealth as of 2012 according to the World Inequality Database. And, to make matters worse, the wealth gap is increasing across all castes. From 1980 to 2016, the wealth owned by the top 10% of the Upper Castes has increased to 55%, leaving barely any wealth to the lower castes¹⁰; and,

⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-35650616>

⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-35650616>

⁸ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/10/27/indian-caste-bias-silicon-valley/>

⁹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-35650616>

¹⁰ https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/income-inequality-in-india-top-10-upper-caste-households-own-60-wealth-119011400105_1.html



University of California Student Association
1020 12th St., Suite #232
Sacramento, CA 95814
510-834-8272 | www.uksa.org

WHEREAS, lasting caste inequality has manifested in many socioeconomic indicators. The difference in the ability to read and write for the highest and lowest castes varies by almost 21 percentage points (76% literacy for Brahmins and 55% of Dalits). This gap is even higher in rural communities. Upper castes are more likely to have higher education and incomes (on average 62,000 INR per year for Brahmins vs. the 49,500 INR for Dalits¹¹); and,

WHEREAS, though the quota system has allowed for considerable social mobility among members of lower castes and has had overwhelmingly positive effects, with 22.5% of the government jobs and college seats being reserved for “Scheduled Castes”, or the lower castes, reducing wealth inequality.¹²

WHEREAS, it has also been used by politicians and members of higher castes to scapegoat members of lower castes as receiving too much of an advantage because of their caste, quite similar to how affirmative action is treated in American political discourse. For example, in 2006, the infamous anti-quota protests occurred throughout India, with many protestors stating the system is unfair towards those who “work hard” to secure their seats¹³; and,

WHEREAS, the caste system is not simply limited to the Indian subcontinent, and follows migrants to the United States, where those who come from caste and religious backgrounds are impacted by caste-based discrimination and find that caste has invaded South Asian diaspora communities, religion, and business; and,

WHEREAS, this phenomenon has led to many shocking experiences of caste discrimination in the United States that includes physical assault, verbal slurs, and discrimination in schools such as UC Berkeley, businesses, and workplaces such as those in the Silicon Valley. 25% of American Dalits have experienced verbal or physical assault, and 60% have experienced derogatory jokes related to their caste, and one in three have been discriminated against during their education¹⁴; and,

¹¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3379882/>

¹² <https://www.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-32968520080410>

¹³ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/anti-quota-stir-comes-back-to-life/articleshow/1917343.cms>

¹⁴ <https://www.equalitylabs.org/castesurvey>



University of California Student Association
1020 12th St., Suite #232
Sacramento, CA 95814
510-834-8272 | www.uksa.org

WHEREAS, this discrimination has seeped into seemingly progressive areas such as the Silicon Valley, where many don't understand the effects of the caste system, with high caste interviewers using subtle means to determine whether a potential job applicant is a Dalit. Recently, 260 low caste tech workers filed a lawsuit to protest against caste-based discrimination¹⁵; and,

WHEREAS, Caste is a social category created to exploit groups of people, and is distinct from the race and class-based discrimination because of its religious origins. The categories it creates are based on purity, profession, and skin color. Therefore, intersectionality is important in understanding how casteism affects racism and sexism, with caste, gender, and class having significant overlaps; and,

WHEREAS, people of different castes are not usually racially distinct and caste differences persist even if you move to a different class. For example, a low caste person may become wealthy, however, they will still more often than not be treated with and perceived through the specific lens of their lower caste.¹⁶

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the UCSA Chair shall work to implement into the UCSA anti-discrimination policies,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the UCSA Chair or President shall communicate the passage of this resolution to all of our sister campuses and encourage them to pass similar resolutions,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the UCSA staff work with the relevant organizational allies to draft and enact a caste discrimination training,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the UCSA work to increase awareness of caste and perceived caste discrimination through social and print media campaigns.

¹⁵ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/10/27/indian-caste-bias-silicon-valley/>

¹⁶ <https://www.equalitylabs.org/castesurvey>