

California's divisive

SENATE BILL 403

VETOED

STOP
The HATE



California's divisive Senate Bill 403 vetoed

Policymakers, legislative bodies and city councils in US may have exercise more vigilance against divisive manipulative agendas and be compassionate, sensitive to supporting minority Hindu community that seeks to protect Sanatan dharma based values that propagate an inclusive and all pervasive, peaceful, progressive and prosperous America

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Executive Summary

- 1. Seattle's Amendment on Caste:** On February 21, 2023, the Seattle City Council made a significant move amending its anti-discrimination statutes. The primary focus was the inclusion of "caste" as a distinguishing category, a decision that ignited intense debates, particularly dissent from a majority of American-Hindu communities and Indian diaspora.
- 2. Influence of US Groups:** Behind this amendment were US groups like Equality Labs and Hindus for Human Rights. These organizations played pivotal roles in amplifying the discussion and spreading misinformation around caste discrimination. Their involvement led to mounting concerns and accusations with many American-Hindus singling them to have Anti-Hindu bias, harbouring and promoting anti-Hindu sentiments.
- 3. Introduction of Senate Bill 403:** In the aftermath of a similar Seattle amendment, Senator Aisha Wahab, a first-time senator from US Democratic Party, took the legislative lead on the issue. On March 22, 2023, she introduced Senate Bill 403 (SB-403) in California which took a nuanced approach by attempting to position "caste" under broader category of "ancestry" in anti-discrimination policies.
- 4. Inspirations for SB-403:** An influential factor behind SB-403 was the 2020 caste-based discrimination case involving Cisco Systems. This case, which shed light on workplace discrimination experienced by an engineer hailing from deprived section, provided a tangible instance fueling the discussion for more explicit anti-discrimination measures.
- 5. Opposition and Criticisms:** As SB-403 began to gain attention it was met with substantial resistance by American-Hindu community and the diaspora. American Hindus flagged concerns over the bill's potential origins, citing biased influence especially from Equality Labs and Hindus for Human Rights. They pointed to potential inaccuracies and generalisation about Hindus and broader South Asian communities. The bill's definition of "caste" was especially contested with allegations of it being shaped by biased entities and activists.
- 6. HAF's Stance:** The Hindu American Foundation (HAF), a notable Hindu Rights organization in the US, offered a critical perspective. They argued that caste-based discrimination was fundamentally against Hindu teachings and prevailing US laws. They emphasised that central debate around SB-403 wasn't about necessity of protections and crafting right solutions.
- 7. Advocacy & Hunger Strike:** Supporters from US-based controversial organizations led by Equality Labs undertook a rigorous advocacy campaign. They staged a two-week hunger strike right outside office of California Governor Gavin Newsom to exert public pressure for the bill's affirmative ratification.

8. **Governor Newsom's Veto:** In a pivotal decision on October 7, 2023, Governor Newsom opted to veto SB-403. This action was perceived by many in Hindu American community as a clear rebuke to what they deemed misinformation campaigns targeting their own beliefs and practices. The veto not only marked a significant moment in the legislative journey but was also celebrated as a demonstration of the community's resilience against challenges to their faith and traditions.
9. **Anti-Hindu Sentiment in US:** There's growing concern regarding endorsement and amplification of Anti-Hindu sentiments by various entities in US from charity institutions to for-profit organizations. By leveraging general population's lack of awareness about Hindu traditions and faith, these entities create and further a potentially damaging narrative. The repercussions of these narratives range from societal exclusion to potential future persecution, disrupting societal harmony and possibly leading to more tangible harms against the community.
10. **Consequences of Information Manipulation:** Narrative against Hindus is propelled by strategic use of information operation techniques. This includes spread of disinformation, academic manipulation, and propagation of unsupported opinions. Such tactics not only impact individual rights but also have broader societal implications, fostering divisions, intolerance, and unrest.
11. **Need to address biased narrative:** Recognising and countering misleading narratives is of paramount importance. They have the potential to influence discriminatory policies, perpetuate social exclusion and incite violence against communities. Fostering an informed and respectful public discourse, based on principles of equality, dignity, and respect for all cultures and faiths, is essential.
12. **Urgent Investigation into Anti-Hindu Actions:** Increasing frequency of actions like City council resolutions and Senate Bills that seem to target American Hindu community necessitates a deep dive into their underlying motivations and implications. It's vital to ensure that such actions do not inadvertently harm a peace-loving community with ethos for hard work.
13. **Intricate Web of Lobby:** SB-403 drew endorsements from controversial entities like Alphabet Workers Union, Ambedkar Association of North America and Equality Labs. Controversial endorsements from Equality Labs, Hindus for Human Rights, and Indian American Muslim Council raised concerns about potential anti-Hindu biases. Over 40 representatives across these entities lent their support, intensifying skepticism around the bill's underlying motives.
14. **US Senator Aisha & SB-403:** Despite SB-403's apparent aim to classify caste discrimination under "ancestry," Wahab's historical allegations concern campaign finance irregularities, controversial affiliations, and remarks perceived as inimical to American traditions raise

concerns. Her contentious stance on Israel - Palestine conflict and allegations of workplace misconduct further question her advocacy's authenticity.

15. **Kshama Sawant's controversy:** As a member in Seattle City Council, Sawant's radical position including her arrest at SeaTac protest and critique of U.S. foreign policy highlight her divisive nature. Her association with Black Lives Matter movement, potential anti-American nature and Islamist ties along with consistent criticism of foreign governments including India reflect her contentious reputation at local level and global stage.
16. **Controversial Equality Labs:** At first glance, Equality Labs champions rights of those from socio-economically deprived sections. Beneath this facade lies an anti-Hindu sentiment that often zeroes in on particular sections of Hindu community. This narrative alongside affiliations with people like Jack Dorsey and ties to Islamist interests reveals a more layered and potentially divisive agenda. Their connection to prominent philanthropists like George Soros and his Open Society Foundation (OSF) adds complexity to their operations. Notably, Thenmozhi Soundararajan's early grants from Open Society Institute point to intertwined efforts in shaping the caste dialogue.
17. **Equality Labs, affiliations & motives:** Diving deeper into Equality Labs' roster, individuals like Sharmin Hossain bring forth a mosaic of Islamist affiliations, given her lineage linked to Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal in Bangladesh. Additionally, her recognition by Soros-driven Open Society Youth Exchange program adds another layer to the intricate narrative. Aruna Lohitakshi Sanghapali's campaign involving Twitter's leadership, advocating against Brahminical patriarchy, is another piece of the puzzle. Together, these links sketch a picture of socio-political motivations interwoven with philanthropy and activism aiming to steer global perspective on caste.
18. **H4HR's ambiguous advocacy:** While positioning itself as an advocate of Hindu rights, Hindus for Human Rights (H4HR) frequently engages in actions and associations that seem to veer towards anti-Hindu stances. Its participation in events like 'Dismantling Global Hindutva' and connections with figures linked to Pakistan's intelligence agency, ISI, raise concerns about the group's genuine intentions and underlying geopolitical interests.
19. **H4HR's web of affiliations:** H4HR's early associations with groups known for anti-Hindu and anti-India narratives like OFMI and IAMC (Indo American Muslim Council) set the tone for its trajectory. This extends to affiliations with groups such as ICNA and CAIR, known for their controversial stance. Key figures within H4HR, especially Sunita Vishwanath have deep connections with Islamist entities in West Asia further complicating the organization's perceived agenda.
20. **H4HR & financial ties:** Beyond advocacy, H4HR's operational foundation is interlaced with geopolitical implications. Financial ties to entities like Palayam Foundation coupled with Sunita Vishwanath's expansive connections to organisations like Open Society Foundation hint at a

broader narrative that transcends advocacy for Hindu rights and delves into larger global discourse and power play.

21. **IAMC lobbying and ties:** Indian American Muslim Council (IAMC) has been pivotal in leveraging platforms like US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) to target India on purported religious freedom concerns. Closely tied to Jamaat-e-Islami and its US counterpart ICNA, IAMC's efforts often alongside Burma Task Force (BTF), manifest a broader scheme to tarnish India's global reputation.
22. **Disinformation & propaganda tactics:** IAMC, among other US-based entities linked to Jamaat, has been instrumental in fostering a misleading narrative of "Islamophobia" against India. This narrative, often magnified through manipulated or false stories on platforms like the "DOTO Database," intertwines with other parallel narratives suggesting fascism and perceived genocidal threats in India. Their promotion of distinguishing "Hindu" from "Hindutva" and spearheading campaigns like #BoycottIndianProducts highlights strategic propagation of divisive sentiments.
23. **Affiliations & global motive:** Interconnectedness of organizations supporting SB-403 like IAMC, Equality Labs and H4HR hints at a broader, meticulously planned objective. This network, deeply embedded in anti-Hindu and anti-India agenda, manipulates democratic liberties of countries like US. Their strategic use of platforms and collaborations, both overt and covert, underscores the need for deep scrutiny and understanding of their true intentions, beyond human rights advocacy.
24. **SB-403 dubious backdrop:** The complex interplay of organizations, endorsements, and advocacies surrounding SB-403 unveils a concerning nexus. This nexus, comprising various individuals and funding pathways, is steered by anti-Hindu and anti-India agendas. Through manipulative exploitation of the democratic principles championed by nations like the U.S., this network has crafted a concealed strategy to amplify divisive sentiments globally. The intricate affiliations and past of its central figures necessitate thorough scrutiny to unearth real motives masked behind their human rights façade.
25. **Flawed caste narrative:** American Hindu community strongly resisted California's Senate Bill 403 and Seattle amendment viewing them as pushing an inaccurate caste narrative. This stands in contrast to foundational Hindu teachings emphasizing unity and spiritual equality. The bill's introduction of caste into state law was seen as redundant, risking the perpetuation of caste identities in US and unfairly stereotyping South Asian communities. Over 1400 individuals and numerous organizations rallied in opposition.
26. **Hindu Communities resilience & commitment:** Formidable opposition to SB-403 demonstrated American Hindu community's deep bonding with their values and identity. They viewed the bill as more than a legislative concern, seeing it as a challenge from forces with

possible Anti-Hindu and Anti-India biases. Their collective efforts served as a declaration of their dedication to preserving their cultural and religious beliefs against perceived prejudices.

27. **Governor's veto:** On October 07, 2023, California's Governor Gavin Newsom vetoed Senate Bill 403 aimed at purported ban on caste discrimination. He asserted that existing laws already cover such possible discrimination. He reinforced the state's commitment to ensuring everyone is treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their background. The veto is seen as an affirmation of California's comprehensive anti-discrimination framework striking a balance in addressing multifaceted sociocultural issues.
28. **Hindu Americans' prevail:** Hindu American community, prominent Indian-Americans and several American Dalit advocacy groups applauded the veto, viewing the bill as flawed to stereotyping their community. Key figures like Samir Kalra of Hindu American Foundation emphasised the bill's potential negative implications for Californians and critiqued its reliance on contentious backing and data sources. HAF Executive Director, Suhag Shukla, highlighted the extensive community advocacy against SB-403, emphasizing that caste-based discrimination contradicts Hindu teachings. Vaishali V, head of Ambedkar - Phule Network of American Dalits and Bahujans stated that primary purpose behind this rejected bill was to typecast communities among Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Muslims, and other South Asian groups
29. **Sentiments and implications:** Beneath discussions around SB-403 lies a complex web of organizations, endorsements and claimed advocacy hinting at deep-rooted anti-Hindu and anti-India sentiments. This network appears to strategically manipulate democratic principles to subtly push their narratives. The veto underscores the need for comprehensive scrutiny, skepticism and understanding to ensure that efforts to combat discrimination don't advertently or inadvertently be used for prejudice or division.
30. **Recognise and address narratives:** Propagation of certain narratives can have far-reaching consequences, potentially leading to discriminatory policies, social exclusion and even targeted violence against specific communities and individuals. For a harmonious society, fostering inclusivity and respect for all cultures and religions is paramount. Thus, it becomes crucial to delve deeper into roots of anti-Hindu sentiment, often surfacing as City council resolutions and Senate Bills to ensure that peace-loving and industrious American Hindu community isn't unfairly targeted or misrepresented.

Context

On February 21, 2023, Seattle City Council introduced an amendment adding "caste" to its anti-discrimination statutes, sparking heated debate, particularly among American-Hindu community and Indian diaspora. Backing and influence of contentious US groups like Equality Labs and Hindus for Human Rights, known to harbour anti-Hindu sentiments, was evident. This apprehension of a majority of Hindu Americans was cemented when Seattle City Council approved divisive anti-caste discrimination resolution backed by these very entities and introduced by controversial activist turned politician and Seattle city council member Kshama Sawant. Ever since, both Equality Labs and Hindus for Human Rights along with certain council members are accused of leveraging this amendment to spread misleading representations about Hindu practices and traditions.

On March 22, 2023, Senator Aisha Wahab of the US Democratic Party introduced Senate Bill 403 (SB-403) in the aftermath of a fiercely contested amendment by the Seattle City Council. Senator Wahab, serving her first term, initially saw an earlier version of the bill gain approval from the state Senate. This draft, however, underwent revisions. The refined bill, positioning caste under the category of "ancestry" instead of isolating it as a separate class, was subsequently ratified by the State Assembly in August with a 55-3 majority.

By early September, the State Senate echoed this sentiment, passing the bill with a 31-5 vote. A significant catalyst for the bill was Department of Fair Employment and Housing v. Cisco Systems, Inc. case of 2020. Here, an engineer from Cisco Systems asserted caste-based discrimination by two supposed higher-caste superiors. US groups like Equality Labs initiated several campaigns to solidify perception about the bill. The core intent of SB-403 was to refine Unruh Civil Rights Act's anti-discrimination clause by enlisting caste as a safeguarded class. However, the bill faced fierce opposition from American Hindus, Indian diaspora and Hindu Rights advocacy entities in the United States.

Their contention was that SB-403 was underpinned by unsubstantiated data from divisive groups like Equality Labs and unfairly targeted South Asian communities and people of colour. Detractors argued that the bill was anchored in racially charged narrative, an unfounded lawsuit, questionable conduct by Civil Rights Department, inaccurate assertions about Hindu faith, broader South Asian community and questionable caste survey by Equality Labs. Critics emphasised the bill's flawed definition of "caste" alleging that it was influenced by biased entities and activists. In a statement, the Hindu American Foundation (HAF), a prominent Hindu Rights organization in the US, remarked that they firmly believed that any caste-based discrimination contravenes Hindu teachings and current state and federal laws. The debate surrounding SB-403 is less about the necessity for protection against such discrimination, but more about finding the most appropriate remedy for it. Hindu American in the US, argued that the existing US statutes already prohibit discrimination based on ancestry.

They contend that a bill specifically addressing caste only functions to inadvertently stereotype and potentially marginalise the broader community, predominantly comprising Hindus and South Asians. In the midst of these unfolding legislative events, US-based organizations, spearheaded by Equality Labs, orchestrated a concerted effort to influence legislative decisions. They initiated a two-week-long hunger strike situated directly outside the office of California Governor Gavin Newsom. The intention behind this act of civil disobedience was to lobby the governor directly, exerting public pressure on him to affirmatively sign the legislation into law. However, in a significant turn of events on Saturday, October 07, 2023, Governor Newsom decided to veto the bill. This action was met with palpable relief and gratitude from the Hindu American community. Many viewed Governor Newsom's decision as a triumphant repudiation of what they perceived to be misinformation campaigns, which they felt unfairly targeted and misrepresented Hindu beliefs and practices. The veto was celebrated as a testament to the resilience of the community in the face of challenges to their faith and traditions.

Rise of anti-Hindu tide in US

Persecution and discrimination are pervasive issues affecting various communities and groups worldwide. Among those most affected are religious minorities in codified Islamic nations, communist regimes, ethnic groups, women and others. This complex phenomenon is influenced by a range of factors, including cultural, social, economic, and political conditions. However, at its core, persecution often begins with the outcasting of individuals, groups, and communities. Over the years, various ideologies holding superiority in the global information race have been known to cultivate and carve out spaces for their point of view in the media, academic institutions, and intellectual platforms. The use of such spaces is not new, and the use of information for building perspectives and shaping public discussions and policy is not unheard of. However, it is important to note that certain minority groups, such as American Hindus or Hindus of Indian origin in America or simply Hindus around the world, may be more vulnerable to the effects of such information manipulation than others.

In the US, certain individuals of power, self-proclaimed activists, institutions, both nonprofit and for-profit, may have an information advantage over average American Hindus, who are often misrepresented and under-represented in media, politics and academic spaces. Despite the abundance of sociological and psychological research on the factors that drive political and social activism, the ongoing trend of American charity institutions, non-profit organisations, and even for-profit companies in the United States endorsing and amplifying Anti-Hindu sentiment is a cause for concern in American society and its ethos. These proponents of the anti-Hindu narratives in the US exploit general unawareness among American population about Hindus, their traditions, and their faith. By doing so, such individuals and groups aid in building an anti-Hindu perspective that could ultimately result in societal exclusion and, at worst, future persecution. As evidenced in our report, this worrisome upswing is fueled by the motivated strategic use of information operation techniques such as disinformation and academic manipulation, furthered by unsupported opinions that lack factual or reasonable evidence. More so, it is essential to recognise that influence of these biased narratives and myths violate the fundamental human rights of people and communities but also hurt society as a whole by dividing communities, promoting intolerance and stoking discord in societies. Thus, it is crucial to address misinformation and motivation driven activism by fostering informed public discourse based on respect for all cultures and faiths and ensuring that all persons and communities are treated with equality, dignity and respect.

It is imperative to recognise and address the significant impact of such narratives, which can result in discriminatory policies, social exclusion, and even violence against communities and individuals. To create a more equitable and harmonious society, it is vital to promote inclusive and respectful attitudes towards diverse cultures and religions. Therefore, it is essential to investigate the underlying reasons for the endorsement of Anti-Hindu sentiment that regularly manifests in the form of City council resolutions and Senate Bills, targeting the peace-loving and hardworking American Hindu community.

Lobby behind SB-403

California's Senate Bill 403 (SB-403), titled "Discrimination on the Basis of Caste," drew conspicuous support, raising eyebrows due to the intense lobbying behind it. It was not only backed by a myriad of groups, including the Alphabet Workers Union – Communication Workers of America, the Ambedkar Association of North America, the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, Equality Labs, Hindus for Caste Equity, Jakarta Movement, the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund, the Sikh Coalition, the South Asian Network, and the Tech Equity Collaborative, but also controversial organizations like Equality Labs, Hindus for Human Rights, Indian American Muslim Council and Hindus for Caste Equity. In total, over 40 representatives from these entities had thrown their weight behind the legislation. Alarming, SB-403 secured endorsements from entities and figures with contentious reputations. The newly-formed Californians for Caste Equity had lauded Aisha Wahab for her role in introducing the bill. More so, support from divisive figures such as Thenmozhi Soundararajan, Sunita Viswanath, and Shakeel Syed, executive director of the South Asian Network in Artesia, California, added a layer of suspicion. Given that many American Hindus have previously identified these endorsers for potential anti-Hindu biases, their association with SB-403 intensified skepticism about the underlying motives of the bill's promotion. The legislative and political dynamics surrounding California's Senate Bill 403 serve as more than just policy manoeuvres. They highlight an intricate interplay of affiliations, Anti-Hindu biases, and potentially deeper, more troubling motivations that extend far beyond the apparent concerns of caste discrimination.

US Senator Aisha Wahab, at helm of this controversial piece of legislation, evoking memories of a contentious amendment initiated by the Seattle City Council. Despite the seemingly straightforward goal of SB-403 — placing caste discrimination within the bounds of "ancestry" — the shadows cast by its chief backers generate disquiet. Wahab, already a controversial figure, has had a history fraught with allegations related to campaign finance irregularities, questionable affiliations, and comments that many deemed disrespectful to American traditions. Her contentious views on the Israel-Palestine issue, combined with allegations of workplace harassment, further erode the credibility of her advocacy.



Planned online campaigns in support of Aisha Wahab on X (formerly Twitter) after the introduction of SB-403



Kshama Sawant, a known socialist from the Seattle City Council, took the lead at 'Black Lives Matter' protests in Seattle (2020).

However, **Kshama Sawant of the Seattle City Council** represents an even more pronounced example of a controversial political trajectory. Her long history of advocating for radical positions is evident in her actions, from her arrest at the SeaTac protest to her vocal demands regarding global warming and U.S. foreign policy. Her association with the Black Lives Matter movement, render her one of the most polarising figures in the contemporary political landscape. While Black Lives Matter branded itself a poignant call against racial injustice, the movement's broader Anti-American strategies and Islamist connections have ignited myriad debates. Sawant's alignment with such movements, paired with her inclination to critique actions of foreign governments—like that of India—magnifies her contentious image in both local and global domains.



Kshama Sawant, passing resolutions on Indian laws and professing the highly contested Seattle Caste Amendment

Amidst the web of socio-political dynamics, organisations such as **Equality Labs** occupy the darkest space. On the surface, they champion themselves as stalwarts fighting for the rights of Dalits. However, a more profound dissection reveals layers that may diverge from this altruistic veneer. The organisation's tangible anti-Hindu narratives, their discernible focus on segments within the Hindu community, specifically targeting Brahmins, and their overarching affiliations hint at a broader and potentially more divisive agenda. This narrative veers considerably from the ideals of unadulterated caste rights advocacy they purport to champion. Their associations with personalities like former Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey, accentuate the organisation's tendency towards deep-rooted biases. These biases, at times, appear to override the principles of genuine human rights and social justice they claim to uphold.



Jewish billionaire George Soros, who founded the Open Society Foundation, is infamous for interfering in the affairs of democratically elected governments and sponsoring regime change agendas worldwide

Notably, the intricate tapestry of philanthropy and its association with global movements further complicates the landscape. Many philanthropists, under the noble flag of charity, often support causes that align with their personal or political beliefs. One such controversial figure is George Soros and his Open Society Foundation (OSF). Soros, through his extensive philanthropic ventures, has subtly entered the caste discourse, a complex societal issue that has historically plagued South Asia and has recently made its way to Western narratives. In recent years, the US, a country grappling with its own history of racial disparities, has witnessed a surge in discussions surrounding caste dynamics. Prominently among them is Equality Labs. Founded by Thenmozhi Soundararajan, an American-born Dalit techie and activist, Equality Labs asserts its mission to combat caste discrimination. The organization, while active since 2016, was officially registered only in 2022. Here an intriguing connection emerges as Thenmozhi Soundararajan received grants from the Open Society Institute as early as 2014.

Delving deeper into the constituents of Equality Labs, several members present a mosaic of controversial affiliations. Sharmin Hossain, a Bangladeshi American and former Political Director of Equality Labs, traces her lineage to Mohamed Hossain, a socialist student organiser with the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal in Bangladesh. Further solidifying the Soros connection, Sharmin was

named the Open Society Youth Exchange Fellow in 2015, under which she founded the Bangladeshi Historical Memory Project.

Another cog in the Equality Labs machinery is Aruna Lohitakshi Sanghapali. As an anti-caste activist and Executive Director of Project Mukti, Sanghapali's associations also lean controversial. She was notably instrumental in orchestrating a campaign involving former Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey and Vijaya Gadde, where they held placards advocating for 'Smash Brahminical Patriarchy' and 'End Caste Apartheid' in 2018. Piecing these links together, a broader narrative emerges. It suggests a convergence of socio-political motivations, philanthropy, and activism, all interwoven to influence the global discourse on caste and its associated dynamics.



Planned online campaigns in support of SB-403 from contentious organisations on X (formerly Twitter) after the introduction of SB-403

Hindus for Human Rights (H4HR) presents a perplexing aspect in the tapestry of socio-political groups. Despite their titular implication of advocating for Hindu rights, their activities seem to be more inclined towards non-Hindu and, at times, anti-Hindu causes. Their involvement in polarising events, such as the 'Dismantling Global Hindutva' conference, raises eyebrows and intensifies the aura of suspicion surrounding them. The association of key figures within H4HR, like Sunita Viswanath, with individuals such as Ghulam Nabi Fai, prosecuted and convicted in the United States for links Pakistan's intelligence agency ISI, hints at the possible entwining of geopolitical intrigue and subterfuge within the group's mandate. Established in October 2019, Hindus for Human Rights (H4HR) brands itself as a beacon for progressive Hindu voices, advocating for civil and human rights both in South Asia and North America. However, its inception paints a picture more convoluted than its mission statement. Even before its formal establishment, H4HR was seen liaising with entities like the Organizations for Minorities of India (OFMI) and the Indian American

Muslim Council (IAMC), both known for their anti-hindu and anti-India campaigns. H4HR's early days were not just marked by associations but also by active collaborations. It partnered with OFMI and IAMC to forge the Alliance for Justice and Accountability (AJA). It becomes evident that H4HR's trajectory aligns well with a nexus that includes groups like Jamaat-e-Islami and anti-India lobbyists. Their regular engagement with organizations like the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA), Justice For All (JFA), IAMC, and the Muslim Brotherhood affiliate, Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR), further solidifies this alignment.



Hindus for Human Rights purporting Anti-Hindu Campaigns targeting Hindu festivals and Hindu way of life

Delving into its foundational history, H4HR was the brainchild of Indian-origin individuals based in the US, including Sunita Vishwanath, Raju Rajagopal, Punya Upadhyaya, Deepak Gupta, and Sunil Sakhalkar. Rajagopal, based in Berkeley, has had affiliations with groups like the Coalition Against Communalism (CAC) and EKTA, which were integral to the Coalition Against Genocide (CAG). This coalition saw involvement from figures like Shaik Ubaid and Professor Angana Chatterji, the latter being closely connected to the US convicted ISI affiliate Ghulam Nabi Fai. Financially, H4HR also had links with the Palayam Foundation, receiving significant donations.

The fulcrum of H4HR's operations, however, seems to revolve around Sunita Vishwanath. Originally named Sunita Mehta, she co-founded H4HR and has been instrumental in its operations. Boasting about connections to a plethora of organizations with disputable ties including George Soros' Open Society Foundations (OSF), Sunita moved to the US at 19 and eventually married award-winning author Suketu Mehta. Her foray into activism began in the late 1990s to early 2000s, during which she co-founded the Women for Afghan Women (WAW), which received backing from notable entities like The Ford Foundation and Open Society Institute. Her connections don't end there. Sunita has been linked with groups such as SAKHI and The Sister Fund, both having associations with activists funded by philanthropic giants like the Ford Foundation and the Open Society Foundation. After her marriage to Suketu Mehta ended, she married Stephan Shaw, a notable figure in the Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), an organization vocally opposing Israel's policies towards Palestine and a major force behind the 'Boycott, Divestment, & Sanctions Movement against Israel'. Piecing this puzzle together, it's clear that H4HR, and particularly figures like Sunita Vishwanath, have intricate affiliations that may underpin their overarching objectives. It's a narrative that transcends mere advocacy for Hindu rights, venturing into geopolitical spheres that question its very essence.

Meanwhile, over the years, Jamaat-e-Islami has emerged as a central figure in manipulating the various socio-political fault lines within America. One of its primary strategies involves leveraging the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) to target India on religious freedom grounds. SB-403 supporter, the Indian American Muslim Council (IAMC) linked with Jamaat-e-Islami has been instrumental in lobbying the USCIRF, especially from 2013-14 and intensively during 2018-20. The lobbying has been facilitated through the Burma Task Force (BTF), another US-based front connected to Jamaat. Both IAMC and BTF were established by Shaik Ubaid and Abdul Malik Mujahid, former members of ICNA, the US arm of Jamaat-e-Islami, marking a concerted effort to undermine India's global image.

Parallel to these efforts, an "Islamophobia" narrative against India has been intensively peddled. This began with a deceptive campaign where Pakistani social media accounts masqueraded as Arab entities. This disinformation drive was further propelled by US-based organizations like IAMC, Justice For All, and ICNA. These groups, with ties to Jamaat, went on to construct the "DOTO Database," which purportedly documents instances of Islamophobia but has been accused of spreading fake news and manipulated stories. Notably, the DOTO Database collaborated with Syed Qasim Rasool Ilyas, a former member of the radical and proscribed terrorist organization Students Islamic Movement of India or SIMI.

In conjunction with the Islamophobia narrative, these fronts further promote stories of fascism and a potential genocide of minorities in India. They use these claims as a foundation to instigate boycott campaigns against Indian products and services. Campaigns like #BoycottIndianProducts are circulated with the active support of the global Muslim Brotherhood network. Furthermore, there's an effort to differentiate between "Hindu" and "Hindutva" by orchestrating events like "Dismantling Global Hindutva." This narrative is principally driven by frontal organizations such as Hindus for Human Rights (H4HR), as discussed above. Early in its inception, H4HR collaborated with groups like IAMC. Key figures within H4HR, like Sunita Vishwanath and Raju Rajagopal, other than deep links with the IAMC, have links to other organizations that align with this narrative, such as the Foundation The London Story.

In conclusion, the intricate web and interconnected nature of organisations, endorsements, and sponsorships around SB-403, coupled with a myriad of advocacy and human rights claims, exposes a dark underbelly. This underbelly reveals a complex, meticulously crafted ecosystem of individuals, funding channels, and entities driven by anti-Hindu and anti-India sentiments. The bill, along with others like it, appears to be part of a more extensive, well-organised effort to propagate these sentiments globally. By masterfully manipulating the liberal frameworks and freedoms provided by democracies like the United States, this network exploits principles of free speech, open dialogue, and inclusivity, making their modus operandi insidiously covert. The affiliations and histories of some of its key proponents underscore the pressing need for scrutiny, skepticism, and vigilance in understanding their motivations and discerning the real intentions behind their façade.

US Entities that backed Senate Bill 403



Alphabet Workers Union
Communication Workers of
America (co-sponsor)



Ambedkar Association of
North America
(co-sponsor)



Asian Pacific American
Labor Alliance
(co-sponsor)



Tech Equity Collaborative
(co-sponsor)



Sikh American Legal
Defense and Education
Fund (co-sponsor)



Jakara Movement
(co-sponsor)

EQUALITY LABS

Equality Labs
(co-sponsor)



South Asian Network
(co-sponsor)



Sikh Coalition
(co-sponsor)



Ambedkarites
International Mission
Society – Canada



Ambedkar International
Center



ACLU California Action



Alameda County
Democratic Party, Central
Committee



Ambedkar
International
Co-Ordination Society



Ambedkar
International Mission
Center Houston, USA



Ambedkar International
Mission Society, Calgary

AISRO CANADA

Ambedkar International
Social Reform Organization



Ambedkarite Buddhist
Association of Texas



Ambedkar King Study Circle



Ambedkar Times

Hindus for Caste Equity
(co-sponsor)

US Entities that backed Senate Bill 403



Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Asian Law Caucus



Asian American Disinformation Table

Begumpura Cultural Society of New York



Bend the Arc: Jewish Action California



Boston South Asian Coalition



Boston Study Group



California Association of Human Relations Commissions



California Employment Lawyers Association



California Faculty Association



California Immigrant Policy Center



Coalition of Americans for Pluralism in India



Coalition of Seattle Indian Americans



Consumer Attorneys of California

The Auntylectuals

Federation of Indian American Ambedkarities of Bay Area

Feminist Critical Hindu Studies Collective (The Auntylectual)



Friends for Education International



Council on American-Islamic Relations, California



DFW Shri Guru Ravidass Organization, Mesquite, TX



Dalit Solidarity Forum



Desh Doaba



Dhamma Waves



Dr. Ambedkar International Mission, Toronto

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Educational Aid Society, Fremont, CA



Dr. Cornel West

US Entities that backed Senate Bill 403



Saman Sangh



Santa Clara County Democratic Party



Seattle Council member
Kshama Sawant



Global NRI Forum

Global Bahujan Group



Great Truth



Hidden Leaf Foundation



Hindus for Human Rights



India Civil Watch International



Indian American Muslim Council



International Bahujan Organization

International Bahujan Organization CA



International Bodhisattva Guru Ravidass Organization Inc.

Legal Aid at Work



me too. International



Mental Health Professionals for Caste Equity and Healing

National Academic Coalition for Caste Equity



National Association of Social Workers – California Chapter



Periyar Ambedkar Study Circle



Periyar International USA

Power in Education



Proud Ravidassia Global Organization

Radha Swami Rasila Satsang Center, Fresno, CA



Sahayaatra International Alliance for Social Justice

US Entities that backed Senate Bill 403

Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha,
Fresno, CA

Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha,
New York

Shri Guru Ravidass
Temple, Pittsburgh, CA

Shri Guru Ravidass
Temple, Rio Linda, CA

Shri Guru Ravidass
Temple, Selma, CA

Shri Guru Ravidass
Temple, Union City, CA

Shri Guru Ravidass
Temple, Yuba City, CA



Sikh American Legal Defense
and Education Fund



Socialist Alternative –
Bay Area



South Asia Scholar Activist
Collective



South Asian Coalition to
Renew Democracy



South Asian Dalit Adivasi
Network, Canada



South Asian Left Activist
Movement



South Asian SOAR



Southern Asian Bar
Association of North
America



Sri Guru Ravidass Sabha
Ontario

Sri Guru Ravidass Society,
Calgary



Stanford Heisler
Sharp, LLP



Stop AAPI Hate



Tech Workers for Caste Equity
Tech Workers for Caste Equity

Workers Strike Back

V-Day

Fight against SB-403

The contentious introduction of California's Senate Bill 403 and its precursor, the Seattle amendment, ignited significant resistance, predominantly from the American Hindu community. This community mounted a staunch opposition against what they perceived as an erroneous caste narrative. Their fight was not just against the specifics of the bill but also against the underlying forces they believed harboured Anti-Hindu and Anti-India motives.

Caste, as it has come to be understood and practiced today is at odds with core Hindu principles and values. Hindu scriptures propagate ideals of unity, divine interconnectedness and oneness of all souls. The very essence of Hindu faith and practices, as elucidated in its foundational texts, emphasise inherent divinity and equality of all beings irrespective of their caste, creed, sex, region and religion. Bhagavad Gita, one of the most revered texts in Hindu dharma discusses commonality in all souls, asserting that they are part of the same universal spirit. It places duty, righteousness, and dharma above artificially constructed social divisions.

Furthermore, Vedic principle of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam," which translates to "The world is one family," underlines the importance of universal brotherhood and interconnectedness. This teaching is starkly contrary to divisive nature of the caste system which imposes hierarchies and barriers among people. The caste system, in its rigid oppressive form, is believed by many scholars to be a later-day distortion, a result of socio-political influences and not an intrinsic tenet of Sanatan Dharma.

Original Varna system that was fluid and based on one's nature and occupation became rigid over centuries due to various socio-political and economic reasons. Prominent Hindu leaders and reformers, from Swami Vivekananda to Mahatma Gandhi, have voiced their concerns about caste discrimination, emphasizing its inconsistency with core Hindu values. They have stressed that true Hindu fold promotes spiritual equality where every individual regardless of their birth or background has the potential to realise ultimate truth.

Therefore, many within the American Hindu community and Indian diaspora were deeply troubled by the bill's recognition of caste within state law, fearing that such a move would paradoxically propel caste-based identities in United States. They argued that California's existing civil rights law already catered to all forms of discrimination. Hence, addition of caste, they felt, was an overt attempt to stereotype not just Hindus but also Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Muslims and other South Asian communities.

The fight was both broad and intense. A staggering 1400 individuals formally recorded their opposition to the bill. A plethora of organizations stood united against its enactment. These organizations spanned diverse interests and affiliations including the Ambedkar - Phule Network of American Dalits and Bahujans, American Hindu Federation, American Hindus Against Defamation, American Muslim and Multifaith Women's Empowerment Coalition, Americans for Equality, Americans4Hindus, Annapoorna USA Foundation, Bangladeshi Minorities in USA, Bay Area Youth

Vaishnav Parivar, Bharati Tamil Sangam, Coalition of Hindus of North America, Dalit-Bahujan Solidarity Network, Federation of Indo-Americans of Northern California, Foundation for India and Indian Diaspora Studies, Fremont Hindu Temple, Hindu American Foundation, Hindu American Political Action Committee, Hindu Community Institute, Hindu Cultural Center, Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference, Hindu Speakers Bureau, HinduACTion, HinduPact, Hindus Not Caste-Opressors, HSS-USA, India Heritage Foundation, Indian Americans of Irvine and Orange County, Indo-American Community Federation, InterfaithShaadi, Mandir, My Temple, Sewa International, Inc., Shiva Murgan Temple, Silicon Valley Chinese Association, Silicon Valley Interreligious Council, The Khalsa Today, Vedic Dharma Samaj/Fremont Hindu Temple, Vietnamese American Conservative Association, Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America – Los Angeles, Yoga Bharati and others.



A long hard-fought battle against the divisive SB-403 bill by Hindu Americans

American Hindu community and Indian diaspora's resistance to SB - 403 were nothing short of profound. Entities across spectrum coupled with advocacy of hundreds of thousands of Hindus, painted a vivid picture of the community deeply attuned to its values, principles and concerns. These concerted efforts underscored the gravity with which the American Hindu community viewed the challenges posed by forces they perceived as biased and prejudicial. Their united opposition to SB - 403 was not just reaction to a legislative measure; it was a formidable expression of their collective will and resilience. It was a clear signal that they would not stand idly by when their identity and values, cultivated over millennia, were under threat. This collective stance served as a reminder of the community's unwavering commitment to safeguard its ethos and beliefs, particularly in the face of Anti-Hindu and Anti-India forces rallying behind the bill.

US Entities that opposed Senate Bill 403



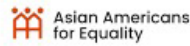
Ambedkar-Phule Network
of American Dalits and
Bahujans



American Hindus Against
Defamation



American Muslim and
Multifaith Women's
Empowerment Coalition



Americans for Equality



Americans4Hindus

Annapoorna USA
Foundation

Bangladeshi Minorities
in USA

Bay Area Youth
Vaishnav Parivar



Bharati Tamil Sangam



Coalition of Hindus of
North America

Dalit-Bahujan Solidarity
Network



Federation of Indo-Americans
of Northern California



Foundation for India and
Indian Diaspora Studies

Fremont Hindu Temple



Hindu American Foundation



Hindu American Political
Action Committee



Hindu Community
Institute



Hindu Mandir
Executives' Conference



Hindu Speakers
Bureau

US Entities that opposed Senate Bill 403



HinduACTION



HinduPact

Hindus Not
Caste-Opressors



HSS-USA



India Heritage Foundation

Interfaith Shaadi
InterfaithShaadi



Indian Americans of
Irvine and Orange
County



Indo-American
Community Federation

Mandir



My Temple



Sewa International, Inc.

SHIVA MURUGAN TEMPLE

Shiva Murgan Temple



Silicon Valley Chinese
Association



Silicon Valley
Interreligious Council



The Khalsa Today

Vedic Dharma Samaj/Fremont
Hindu Temple

Vietnamese American
Conservative Association

Vishwa Hindu
Parishad of America
Los Angeles



Yoga Bharati

SB-403 veto

On October 07, 2023 California's Governor Gavin Newsom vetoed Senate Bill 403, a bill aimed at banning caste discrimination. Governor Newsom articulated in a letter that this legislative measure was redundant, as existing laws already address the issue. He emphasised, "In California, everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect, irrespective of their identity, origin, or beliefs." Stressing the state's pre-existing prohibition against discrimination based on several categories including race, religion, and gender identity, he asserted that caste discrimination was inherently encompassed within these protections. Despite the earlier passage of SB-403 by both the state Assembly and Senate, Newsom remained firm in his belief that the bill's definition of caste, which states "an individual's perceived position in a system of social stratification on the basis of inherited status," is already encapsulated in current legislation.



On Saturday, October 7, SB-403 was vetoed by California Governor Gavin Newsom.

The Hindu American community, including significant groups like Hindu Parents of California and prominent Indian-Americans, as well as a Dalit advocacy group, lauded Newsom's veto decision. They perceived the bill's intent as an undue "stereotyping of the community." Samir Kalra, the Managing Director of the Hindu American Foundation (HAF), expressed profound gratitude to Governor Newsom for this significant veto of SB-403. Kalra emphasised the potential ramifications of the bill, suggesting it could have inadvertently targeted Californians based on their ethnicity or faith. Moreover, he highlighted that SB-403 was rooted in misleading narratives and flawed data, referencing a contentious survey by Equality Labs.

HAF Executive Director, Suhag Shukla, reiterated that caste-based discrimination is contrary to Hindu teachings and current legal provisions. She outlined the community's extensive advocacy efforts against SB-403, which galvanised the community, culminating in this victorious moment.

California's Governor has aptly emphasised that the existing civil rights law in the state already addresses all forms of discrimination. It seems that the primary purpose behind this bill was to typecast various communities, including Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Muslims, and other South Asian groups, remarked Vaishali V, the head of Ambedkar-Phule Network of American Dalits and Bahujans.

In summation, Governor Gavin Newsom's decision to veto SB-403 stands not just as a procedural act but as a significant moment for the Hindu American community and other stakeholders in California. This move, seen by many as an affirmation of the state's already comprehensive anti-discrimination framework, also underscores the delicate balance governments must strike when navigating multifaceted sociocultural issues.

Furthermore, the intricate web and interconnected nature of organizations, endorsements, and sponsorships around SB-403, along with a myriad of advocacy and human rights claims, unveils a murky landscape beneath. This landscape exposes a meticulously designed system populated with individuals, funding channels, and entities that appear to be driven by deep-seated anti-Hindu and anti-India sentiments. These bills, including SB-403, seem to be facets of a broader, well-structured campaign aiming to disseminate these biases globally.

By skilfully leveraging the democratic tenets and liberties intrinsic to countries like the United States, this network cunningly utilises principles of free speech, open dialogue, and inclusivity, rendering their operations deceptively subtle. The backgrounds and affiliations of some of its principal advocates highlight the urgent requirement for thorough examination, skepticism, and alertness when attempting to fathom their underlying motives and discern the genuine objectives behind their ostensible front.

Many in the community view this veto as a vital pushback against forces perceived to harbour deep-rooted anti-Hindu and anti-India sentiments. While it is pivotal to address genuine concerns of discrimination, it is equally imperative to ensure that legislation doesn't evolve into an instrument for potential prejudice or misrepresentation. The entire saga underscores the complexities involved in formulating and implementing laws in diverse, pluralistic settings. It accentuates the necessity for profound understanding, engagement, and discernment to avert inadvertently exacerbating societal divisions or alienating any group.

Conclusion

Developments relating California's SB - 403 has not only put a spotlight on dynamics of caste-based discussions in U.S. but exposed the delicate balance of crafting legislation that caters to increasingly diverse demographics. Governor Newsom's decision to veto the bill is emblematic of a broader realisation that while addressing concerns of discrimination is vital, it's equally crucial to ensure that laws don't inadvertently perpetuate stereotypes or lead to deepening societal divisions. Celebration of American Hindu community following the veto demonstrates their resilience and determination to preserve their cultural and religious beliefs amidst perceived challenges.

However, beneath the veneer of this legislative episode lies a more profound issue that relates to American sociopolitical landscape. The intricate web of organizations, affiliations, and seemingly covert motivations highlights a growing concern. How can societies, in their quest for inclusivity and justice, ensure that they are not being manipulated by entities with ulterior motives? The involvement of groups like Equality Labs, Hindus for Human Rights and IAMC in the promotion of SB-403 and subsequent accusations of harbouring anti-Hindu sentiments suggests that the battleground isn't limited to legislative halls but extends to the realm of narratives, perceptions, and biases.

Moreover, American Hindu community's response to SB - 403 underscores a broader need for communities to be proactive, vigilant, and unified. In a world where information can serve as a tool and a weapon, understanding, validating, and contextualising narratives becomes paramount. The propagation of unchecked or biased narratives can have repercussions far beyond policy – leading to potential social exclusion, alienation, and even violence against certain communities.

In conclusion, as US and indeed the world continues to navigate complexities of a multi-cultural era, the SB – 403 episode serves as a poignant reminder. It emphasises the necessity for not just tolerance but genuine understanding and engagement. It underscores the imperative to scrutinise, question and verify motive behind narratives and lobbying to ensure that the objective of a harmonious, integrated society is not compromised by divisive agendas.

California Governor's veto of bills that push for divisive agenda must serve as a template for city councils like Seattle to reconsider their legislations. Other states, legislative bodies and policymakers may have to be more sensitive to communities in America especially the minorities.

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