



**The Issue H. 234 Addresses:**

- ✓ **Discrimination that occurs to people from Southeastern Asia (In particular, India, Pakistan, and Nepal) when they are in the United States.**
- **Asian Americans are now the fastest-growing major racial or ethnic group in the United States, according to the [Pew Research Center](#):**
  - ***By region of birth, immigrants from South and East Asia combined accounted for 27% of all immigrants.***
  - ***The population of Asian American Immigrants in the US grew 72% between 2000 and 2015. Its population jumped from 11.9 million to 20.4 million. This is the fastest growth rate of any major racial or ethnic group.***

- While there isn't one single Asian-origin group that dominates the Asian population in the US and the numbers are shared by people from different countries in Asia, the biggest percentage of the population are those of Chinese origin accounting for around 24% (4.9 million). **They are followed by those of Indian origins who make up around 20% (4 million) of the total Asian population. If the rate of population growth and influx of new immigrants from the region continues in the next couple of years, Asians will be the largest immigrant group by 2055 according to the Center.**
  - **The South Asian American population was the fastest-growing major ethnic group in the US between 2000 and 2010.**
  - Now, **India alone routinely attracts the majority of skilled worker visas the US allots to foreign nationals, and accounts for the highest number of undocumented Asians, and is one of the top countries where new immigrants are arriving from.**
  - Nearly half or around 45% of all Asian immigrants or those of Asian origins live in the West. The rest of the Asian immigrant population is scattered throughout other parts of the US—23% live in the South, **20% Northeast**, and 12% in the Midwest.
  - **Today, there are around 4 million Indian Americans who form the second-largest Asian-origin community in the country. In 2016 they became the top recipients of high-skilled H1B temporary visas and the second-largest group of international students in US universities.**
- States with the highest population of people from India, Pakistan, and Nepal. **Note that two of the ten states border Vermont:**
    1. [California](#) (6,551,730)
    2. [New York](#) (1,839,680)
    3. [Texas](#) (1,565,750)
    4. [New Jersey](#) (923,811)
    5. [Washington](#) (812,035)
    6. [Illinois](#) (808,038)
    7. [Hawaii](#) (802,551)
    8. [Florida](#) (734,880)
    9. [Virginia](#) (664,348)
    10. [Massachusetts](#) (516,599)

- **Vermont 2021 data:**

- Population of Vermont that is Asian. Note: we do not have a breakdown from where in Asia:

**Asian (Total):** 14,503

**Asian (%):** 2.33%

State	White	Black	Native	Asian	Islander	Other	Multiple
<a href="#">Vermont</a>	94.16%	1.36%	0.34%	1.68%	0.05%	0.39%	2.02%
<a href="#">Vermont</a>	624,313	587,883	8,502	2,132	10,461	325 2,410	12,600

### Castes:

At over three thousand years old, caste hierarchy is one of the oldest forms of social stratification in the world. The community in India, Pakistan and Nepal, the community someone is born into has lifelong repercussions that designate where someone can work, who they can marry, and what their reputation is in life. Even today in South Asia, caste conflict and discrimination remain a potent force in everyday life.

- In the United States, though, caste tends to be a relatively muted topic.
- A new survey, "**Caste in the United States,**" finds that **caste discrimination is playing out in the United States.**
- The survey, which is the first of its kind, was commissioned by Equality Labs, a South Asian American human rights startup, and includes the experiences of about 1200 people who volunteered their answers.
  - The report on the survey's results said **that two-thirds of members of the lowest caste, called Dalits, said they have faced workplace discrimination due to their caste. Forty-one percent have experienced discrimination in education because of it. And a quarter of Dalits say they've faced physical assault — all in the United States.**

- Thenmozhi Soundararajan, executive director of Equality Labs and co-author of the report states that increased immigration from South Asia — including more and more people from lower castes — fuel this discrimination.
- This survey provides data for what many in the community already know: “Any time there's a dominant population of South Asians — whether they're living in Silicon Valley or New Jersey or working at an office or a restaurant — caste biases emerge. It could be anything from refusing to date or marry someone from a lower caste, to being on the receiving end of a casteist slur, to being made to sit separately because of your perceived ‘untouchability’. We have people who responded who were in the assembly lines for a Campbell soup factory in Central Valley, as well as people who work for Google, Facebook and the other big tech companies,” Soundararajan said, naming workplaces that employ large numbers of South Asians.
- **Because most Americans don't understand caste dynamics, it's hard for people to speak up about it, or bring discrimination cases to court**, according to the article in Yes Magazine.  
<https://www.yesmagazine.org/opinion/2020/09/01/caste-race-united-states/estry> as well.
- Anupama Rao is a historian and anthropologist at Barnard College who studies caste. She said for years, many of the so-called "model minority" of South Asians, who have earned the status of being "good immigrants" in the U.S., came from upper-caste families. "Many of them, once they are upwardly mobile in the United States, tend to be extremely cagey sometimes, but most often I think embarrassed, to think of themselves as the beneficiaries of caste privilege," she said. And when being from a privileged caste obscures what this discrimination looks like — because it isn't a part of you or your family's experience — caste itself can become invisible. This is especially true in a new country like the U.S., where immigrant groups of all kinds must navigate their place in an American racial and class hierarchy.
- What makes caste discrimination even harder to combat in this new context is that some lower caste people hide their identity as well.
  - 52 percent of Dalits surveyed worry about being "outed" as lower caste.
- Suhag Shukla is the executive director of the advocacy group the Hindu American Foundation. She said it's important to get rid of caste prejudice, but that this new survey unfairly essentializes and villainizes Hinduism. It's one of the most complex arguments surrounding caste; as the survey notes, caste first appeared in Hindu scriptures. It now pervades all religions of South Asia. "The single most problematic issue with this survey is that it traffics in the most dangerous and false tropes about Hinduism," she said. "So instead of demanding an honest conversation about caste and privilege, or its contested relevance among South Asian kids of the third and fourth generation who are now coming of age that are all brown regardless of caste, this report kind of alienates Hindus by scapegoating them," Shukla said. Caste discrimination isn't on the radar for many South Asian kids of later generations, she added. What they're worried about is the discrimination they face for being brown in America.

- Hate crimes against Muslims and South Asians are at their highest levels since the year after 9/11. Yet others — both Hindu and non-Hindu — see this defense as helping to preserve the caste system itself. It may not be exactly the same as it functions in South Asia, but a denial of accountability, they say, maintains a hierarchy of privilege.

Yashica Dutt is an Indian journalist and the author of the memoir, “Coming Out as a Dalit” and this is part of an Opinion piece she did for the NY Times:

- On June 30, 2020 California’s Department of Fair Employment and Housing regulators sued Cisco Systems Inc., for discrimination. The cause was not, like most workplace discrimination lawsuits, based on race, gender, age or sexual orientation. It was based on caste. **The lawsuit accuses Cisco, a multibillion-dollar tech conglomerate based in San Jose, Calif., of denying an engineer, who immigrated from India to the United States, professional opportunities, a raise and promotions because he was from a low caste, or Dalit, background.** The lawsuit states that his Indian American managers, who are described as high-caste Brahmins, harassed the engineer because of their sense of superiority rooted in the Hindu caste system. Many Indian Americans reacted with disbelief that a giant corporation in Silicon Valley could be mired in caste discrimination.

Caste prejudice and discrimination is rife within the Indian communities in the United States and other countries. Its chains are even turning the work culture within multibillion-dollar American tech companies, and beyond. The Cisco engineer, whose complaint led to the lawsuit and who identifies himself as a Dalit, has not been named in the lawsuit. A Dalit information technology professional spoke about moving to the United States in 2000 and working at Cisco between 2007 and 2013. “A large percentage of the work force was already Indian,” he told us. “They openly discussed their caste and would ask questions to figure out my caste background.” Higher caste Indians use the knowledge of a person’s caste to place him or her on the social hierarchy despite professional qualifications. “I usually ignored these conversations,” the Dalit worker added. “If they knew I was Dalit, it could ruin my career.” According to [the lawsuit](#), Mr. Iyer, one of the Brahmin engineers at Cisco, revealed to his other higher-caste colleagues that the complainant had joined a top engineering school in India through affirmative action. When the Dalit engineer, the lawsuit says, confronted Mr. Iyer and contacted Cisco’s human resources to file a complaint, Mr. Iyer retaliated by taking away the Dalit engineer’s role as lead on two technologies. For two years, the lawsuit says, Mr. Iyer isolated the Dalit engineer, denied him bonuses and raises and stonewalled his promotions. Cisco’s human resources department responded by telling the Dalit engineer that “caste discrimination was not unlawful” and took no immediate corrective action. Mr. Kompella, the other Brahmin manager named in the lawsuit, replaced Mr. Iyer as the Dalit engineer’s manager, and according to the suit, “continued to discriminate, harass, and retaliate against” him. In 2019, Cisco was [ranked No. 2](#) on Fortune’s 100 Best Workplaces for Diversity. The technology giant got away with ignoring the persistent caste discrimination because American laws don’t yet recognize Hindu caste discrimination as a valid form of exclusion. Caste does not feature in Cisco’s diversity practices in its operations in India either. It reveals how the Indian information technology sector often operates in willful ignorance of the terrifying realities of caste. In the backdrop of caste supremacy in the Indian diaspora in the United States, when higher-caste Hindus often describe and demonize **Dalits as “inherently lazy/ opportunistic/ not talented,” even apparently innocuous practices like peer reviews for promotions (Cisco and several other tech companies operate on this model), can turn into minefields, ending in job losses and visa rejections for Dalits.** Almost every Dalit person I spoke to in the United States, after California filed the lawsuit against Cisco, requested to remain anonymous and feared that revealing their identity as a Dalit working in the American tech industry filled with higher-caste Indians would

ruin their career. Those words also governed my life until 2016, when I decided to publicly reveal my caste identity and “come out” as Dalit. Growing up “passing” as a dominant-caste person in India while hiding my “untouchable,” caste I lived in the same fear that stops most Dalits from articulating their harassment and asserting their identity in India and the United States. The overwhelmingly higher-caste Indian-American community is seen as a “model minority” with more than an average \$100,000 median income and rising cultural and political visibility. But it has engendered a narrative that is as diabolical as it is in India: insisting that they live in a “post-caste world” while simultaneously upholding its hierarchical framework that benefits the higher-caste people.

**Ranging from seemingly harmless calls for “vegetarian-only roommates” (an easy way to assert caste purity),** caste-based temple networks that automatically exclude “impure” Dalits, and the more overt and dangerous arm twisting of American norms — right-wing Hindu activist organizations tried to remove any mention of caste from California’s textbooks in 2018 — caste supremacy is fiercely defended, almost as a core tenet of Indian Hindu culture. Yet after decades of being silenced, Dalit Americans are finally finding a voice that cannot be ignored. I was able to come out as Dalit because after moving to New York and avoiding Indian-only communities, for the first time, I was not scared of someone finding out my caste. Finding comfort and inspiration in movements like Black Lives Matter and Say Her Name and the tragic institutional murder of a Dalit student activist in India, I was able to understand and acknowledge that my history was a tapestry of pride, not shame. Most Dalits in America still live with the fear of being exposed. But the pending California vs. Cisco case is a major step in the right direction.

- In “The Other One Percent: Indians in America,” a 2016 study of people of Indian descent in the United States, the authors Sanjoy Chakravorty, Devesh Kapur and Nirvikar Singh estimated that “**over 90 percent of migrants**” **came from high castes or dominant castes.**
- According to a 2018 survey by Equality Labs, a Dalit-American led civil rights organization, **67 percent of Dalits in the Indian diaspora admitted to facing caste-based harassment at the workplace.**

**Proposal: Prohibit employment discrimination based on an individual’s caste**

## Appendix A: Links to the articles and reports:

<https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/when-caste-follows-you-overseas-ostracism-discrimination-among-south-asians-us-78431>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/14/opinion/caste-cisco-indian-americans-discrimination.html>

[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58347d04bebafeb1e66df84c/t/603ae9f4cfad7f515281e9bf/1614473732034/Caste\\_report\\_2018.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58347d04bebafeb1e66df84c/t/603ae9f4cfad7f515281e9bf/1614473732034/Caste_report_2018.pdf)

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/census-2021-aims-at-near-accurate-enumeration-of-dalits-tribals/articleshow/73509723.cms>

<https://www.equalitylabs.org/castesurvey/#recommendations>

<https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/when-caste-follows-you-overseas-ostracism-discrimination-among-south-asians-us-78431>

<https://www.equalitylabs.org/castesurvey/#key-findings>

<https://www.equalitylabs.org/castesurvey/#what-is-caste>

<https://www.yesmagazine.org/opinion/2020/09/01/caste-race-united-states/>

<https://www.pri.org/stories/2019-03-05/even-harvard-pedigree-caste-follows-shadow>

<https://audioboom.com/channel/caste-in-the-usa>