



Ambedkar Times

Weekly

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EDUCATION, SELF-RESPECT AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Prem K. Chumber
Editor-In-Chief:

Ambedkar Times & Desh Doaba Weeklies

Babasaheb Dr. B.R Ambedkar used to lay special emphasis on the agency of education for the emancipation and empowerment of downtrodden. So much so that he coined a emancipatory slogan with education at the beginning of the Bhim mantra "Educate, Agitate, Organize." What Babasaheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was/continues to be and what he had been able to achieve in his life-long mission of Dalit Empowerment is all due to his world reputed stature based on his brilliant academic achievements which still are hard to match not only in comparison to his own people but also with his counterparts among the so-called upper castes across the length and breadth of the country. Again, it was his world towering record of academic excellence combined with his life long commitment towards the annihilation of caste from the soil of Indian social set-up that brought him in the forefront of the queues of the most celebrated personalities of our time.

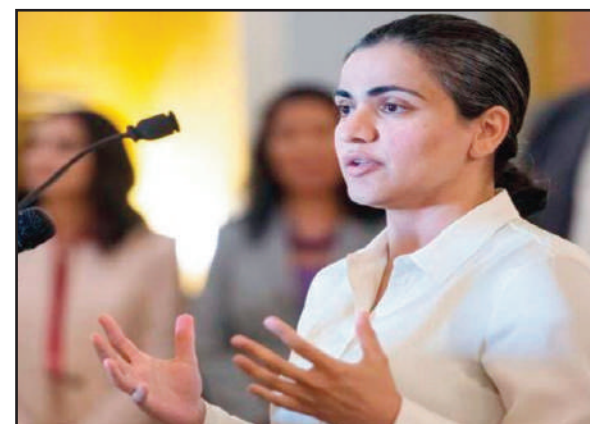
Babasaheb Dr. B.R Ambedkar was of the firm view that the first lesson to march on the road of social transformation could be to learn how to inculcate the quality of self-respect among the socially excluded millions of our countrymen contemptuously called Untouchables. The quality of self-respect in turn relies on the faculty of critical knowledge based on sound education meant for self-illumination and overall awareness of ones surroundings. Education in ancient and medieval Hindu society was restricted to those who were born in the upper three higher Varna. Fourth Varna of Shudras and the fifth/Avarna of Ati-Shudras were denied the facility of education because of their low birth. The denial of education had also led to lack of self-respect among the lower-castes that further transformed them into docile servants of those who monopolized the power structures of the society. Babasaheb Dr. B.R Ambedkar wanted to overcome this vicious circle of degradation based on the shrewdly designed system of denial of education to the downtrodden.

Education leads to self-respect that further in a logical sequence of the emancipatory mantra of "Educate, Agitate, Organize" creates the conditions for the realization of the higher goal of social justice. That is what 'Educate' is meant for in the slogan. It means to be aware of ones life conditions and the overall surrounding social set-up. Such a versatile knowledge will stir self-introspection within and creates an urge for an organization of the like-minded fellow beings to transform the unequal social structure into an egalitarian order.

Courtesy: www.ambedkartimes.com

Anti-Caste Discrimination Bill passed in the California State Assembly

A Momentous Historic event



It is very heartening that the anti-caste discrimination Bill SB 403 has been passed by the California State Assembly with 50 legislators in favor and 3 against the Bill on 28th August 2023. It is a red letter day in the history of Civil Rights of the State. The historic event has sent a loud message across the world that the monstrous caste system of the Hindus society is on its last breath. All the brave commanders and soldiers who fought with back to the wall to see the Bill through at all stages deserve rich compliments and kudos. It goes without saying that the bold initiative and steel resolve of the Senator Aisha Wahab who initiated, moved and pursued the Bill to its logical conclusion and made the momentous event possible, deserves the crown. I have been closely watching the progress and I have found that she moved ahead with rock determination to see that the caste discrimination was given a deep burial as it had no place in the developed society of the United States firmly based on true democratic principles and values. Though the orthodox supporter of the evil of caste system tried their best to oppose it but they had no legs to stand in the face of the followers of truth and flag bearers of civil rights and human values.

Though all the supporters of the Bill equally deserve the credit for the historic achievement, certain individuals and social organization that played a key role in pursuing the Bill to see the light of the day, deserve special mention. It is Thenmozhi Soundarajan, Executive Director of 'Equality Labs' and author of 'The Trauma of Caste' who led the supporters from the front and strongly testified in favor of the Bill. Raj Cal, State University Professor and California Faculty Association Member, Maya Kamble, Amazon Tech Worker, Buddhist and Member of Ambedkar Association of North America, Shahira Bhangar, Dalit Sikh Tech Worker, Pawan Raj, Environmental Cleaning and Medical Transport Worker, N.Singh, Uber Driver and Tanuja Gupta are some of the other warriors who gave convincing testimony in support of the Bill, who deserve a big pat on the back.

Apart from the Dalits and other victims of caste prejudices, the Bill has also been backed by Hindu groups such as Hindus for Human Rights and Hindus for Caste Equity. The Bill followed the resolutions to designate caste as a protected category passed by institutions like the California Democratic Party, the California State University system, the

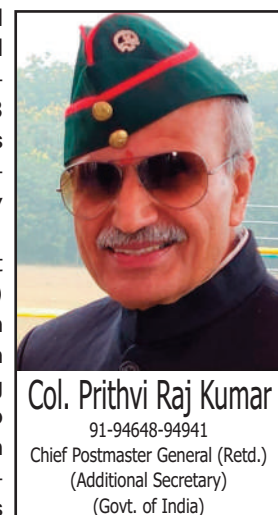
Alphabet Workers Union and corporations like Apple and Cisco. The Senate and Assembly's vote on SB 403 show that California leads the world towards a more equitable society internationally.

America Against Caste Discrimination (AACD) which represents the Indian Diaspora's true diversity in the US continued mobilizing constituent communities to ensure the Bill passed both Houses of the California legislature. Thousands of emails and phone calls from community groups or caste-oppressed people supported the Bill, including mass mobilization by California's Sri Guru Ravidass community, which played a central role in its passage in the Senate and the Assembly.

The Bill was supported by a wide variety of interfaith organizations, Workers' organizations like Socialist Alternative, California Labor Federation and Civil Rights groups like the American Civil Liberties Union et al.

The Print and Electronic media particularly of the caste oppressed sections played a very crucial role in sensitizing the people of all shades particularly those mattered about the draconian evil effects of the immoral, anti-human and pernicious caste system on the people and society in general and its victims in particular.

All these organizations and individuals deserve heartfelt and commendations.



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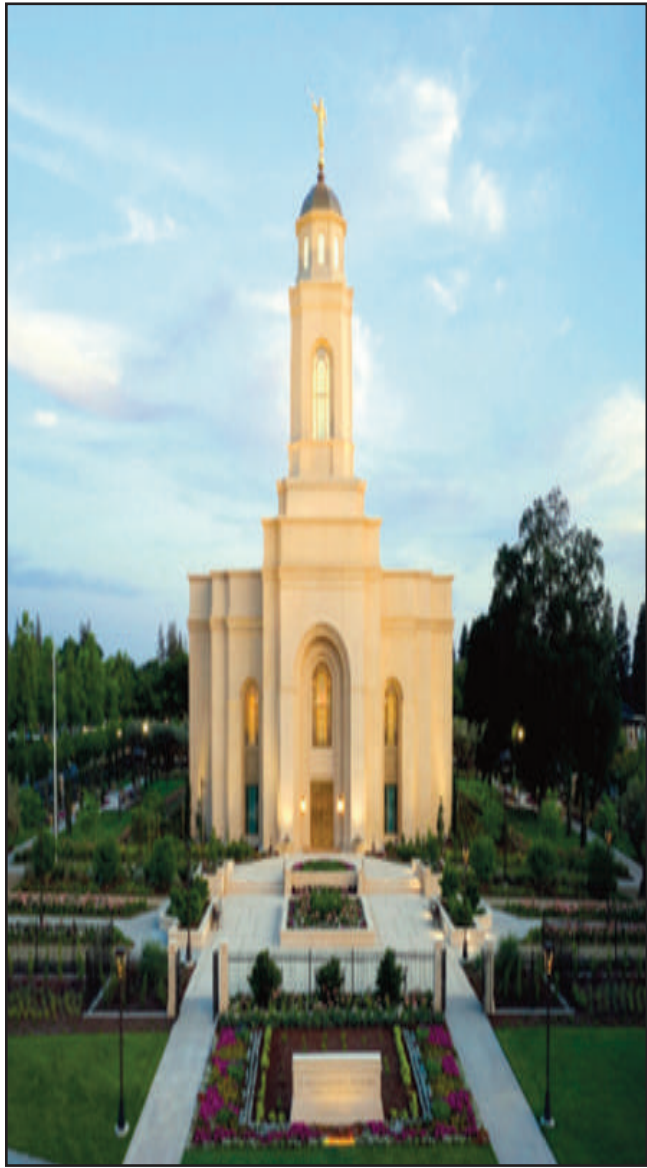
Senate Third Reading
SB 403 Wahab

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VOTE:Majority

HISTORIC VISIT TO THE FEATHER RIVER CALIFORNIA TEMPLE YUBA CITY



It was a thrilling experience to have visited the "Feather River California Temple", also known as "The Church Of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints," located at 1470 Butte House Road, Yuba City, on August 26th, 2023 (Saturday). We went there as a team including Mr. O.P. Balley, Mr. Dharampal Chonkria from Pittsburg, Mr. Prem Kumar Chumber from the "Ambedkar Times" and "Desh Doaba" (Weeklies), Mr. Parshotam Sood and Mr. Jeevan Kumar from Yuba City. The exquisite look offlowers corresponding to the agricultural background of the area displayed at the entrance gate carpet and other places in the temple was an inviting spectacle of this magnificent temple.

Volunteer services, courtesy, and politeness were evident everywhere around the premises. The access to the temple was like an open house to the public. There were hundreds of visitors who were divided into different groups and were helped by volunteer guides well versed with the history, mission, and the activities of the temple. Mrs. Takahashi, a

prominent activist and volunteer introduced us to Mr. TineshKalra and Mrs. ArchnaKalra, volunteer guides who, assisted by Miss DamanpreetThiara, another volunteer, took us around the different parts of the building and explained to us very politely in detail about the temple and its activities as a sanctuary of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They also showed us around while explaining the sanctity of Instruction Rooms and Sealing Rooms and the strict process of baptism and performance of other religious ceremonies.

They also explained the teachings of the religious leader Joseph Smith Jr. who was the founder of Mormonism and the Latter-day Saints Movement. He

translated the Book of Mormon, which is another testament comparable to the Bible of Jesus Christ of the Christian faith.

We express our appreciation to Mr. and Mrs. TineshKalra and Miss Thiara for their help and patience in answering our questions and helping in making our tour very pleasant, knowledgeable and comfortable.

We are also very thankful to Mr. Pamas Bhatti, a verydedicated member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, for inspiring us to visit this holy temple. It was a wonderful and a very innovative experience for us.

O.P. Balley

Founder member

**Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha
Pittsburg (CA)**



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Ambedkar Times

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Dr. Paramjit S Takhar, MD



Goodie Takhar, PhD



D. C. Ahir

When in 1915 Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was giving final touches to his Ph.D. thesis at Columbia University in New York, a Punjabi youth, who had gone to America a few years earlier, was involved in a dangerous mission of smuggling guns from California to the Punjab for inciting mutiny in India. This Punjabi youth later became famous as Babu Mangu Ram, the founder of the Ad Dharm Movement. Mangu Ram was born in a small village Mugowal in district Hoshiarpur, Punjab on 14 January, 1886 in an untouchable family; his father was a leather merchant. As by then the doors of education had been opened to all by the British rulers, Mangu Ram was sent to the school in the nearby village, Mahilpur, but the treatment meted out to him by the Hindu teacher was far from human. Like Bhim Rao in Satara, Mangu Ram too was made to sit outside the classroom. Not only that, even the teacher would not teach him directly; he was invariably given lesson through a Muslim student. Somehow, Mangu Ram passed his middle examination and joined high school at Bajwara, a nearby town. Here too. He was subjected to the same humiliation, and was made to sit outside the classroom. One day, it rained so heavily that in spite of taking shelter under a tree, Mangu Ram was completely drenched. And when the snow-balls, accompanied by high velocity winds, fell like missiles on him, he was unable to bear it any longer. So, he ran to take shelter inside the classroom. As soon as he had entered the room, the teacher saw him, and instead of showing any sympathy, he started beating him with a stick for having come inside. Weeping and crying, Mangoo Ram went out, and somehow reached his home.

Unmindful of the insult and beating, Mangu Ram again went to the school next day. As soon as he reached there, he was surprised to see the teacher in the process of purifying the classroom by sprinkling water on the wooden table, chair and the tats on which the students used to sit. On seeing him, Brahmin teacher cried out, "Oh Chandal, you have come again".

Fearing another beating, Mangoo Ram hastened back, never to go again to the school. And that was the end of his education.

With his education coming to an abrupt end, Mangu Ram became unemployed, and bit frustrated too. In 1909, he, along with some other young men from the village, went to California, U.S.A. in order to earn some money by working in the Peach Orchards of Fresno and elsewhere in the San Joaquin valley of central California. Instead of earning money, he,

however, became involved in the activities of the Ghadar Party, an international network of militant Punjabi nationalists led by Lala Hardayal. By his sheer devotion and sincerity to the cause of India's freedom, he came to be regarded as the most dependable and reliable member of the organization. In 1915, Mangu Ram volunteered to be one of the five Ghadarites accompanying a shipload of guns and propaganda material headed for India. This ship was unfortunately intercepted by the British as Batavia, and was sealed. It remained sealed for nearly a year, with the five Ghadarites as prisoners inside. In the meanwhile, they were prosecuted in absentia, and sentenced to death for



taking out the weapons illegally on the ship. On hearing the capital punishment, some patriot Indians in Germany decided to help the imprisoned Ghadarites. Somehow, they managed to smuggle the prisoners out from the sealed ship, and sent them in different directions. Mangu Ram was put in a ship going to Manila. By mistake, however, the ship reached Singapore. Unfortunately for Mangu Ram, here he was recognized by some traitor Indians who had earlier worked for the Ghadar Party. They informed the Police. By now, for running away from Batavia, death warrants had been issued by the British Government to be executed wherever any one of them was found. Accordingly, the Singapore Police began preparing for his execution. Then a miracle happened. Just half an hour before his execution, a gentleman named Barde, whom Mangu Ram had never seen or met, came, caught him by the arm, took him out of the Thana, and putting him on the same ship in which Mangu Ram had come, he asked the Captain of the ship to sail for Manila. By the time the Police swung into action, the ship had crossed the Singapore Port Limits. Having failed to intercept the ship, the police caught hold of some drunkard; executed him to cover up their lapse, and announced that Mangu Ram had been executed. This news was later published in the Indian Newspapers.

For the next 7-8 years, Mangu Ram hid in the Philippines, and during this period he had no contact with his

family as no letters could be written for fear of being intercepted. Taking him, therefore, as dead, his wife married Mangu Ram's elder brother, who was a widower.

The validity of the death warrant issued by the British Government lapsed in 1924. Then Mangu Ram thought of returning to India. Accordingly, he came back to Punjab in 1925. Soon thereafter, Mangoo Ram became involved in another kind of freedom struggle, the liberation of the untouchables, the people among whom he was born, and the people who were meekly suffering the atrocities of the Hindus. Babu Mangu Ram's association with the Ghadar Party had broadened his outlook, and



sharpened his skills as an organizer. Soon he found a band of like-minded young men involved in the social work, and began organizing them in order to liberate the downtrodden from the clutches of the Hindu social slavery.

Encouraged by the response to his ideas, Babu Mangu Ram convened a Conference at his village Mugowal in district Hoshiarpur on 11-12 June, 1926. Addressing the largely attended Conference, Babu Mangu Ram proclaimed that the Untouchables constituted a separate Qaum, a religious community like the Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus, and those they were the original inhabitants of this country. Hence, the movement was named as Ad Dharm; and its leaders devised distinctive costume, bright red turbans and shashes; coined a new sacred mantra or symbol, "So-hang" and exhorted the people to call themselves as Ad Dharmis.

The primary object of the Ad Dharm was to give the untouchables an alternative religion. Its another object was to reform the society from within. As social movement, the Ad Dharm exhorted the people to abstain from immoral practices; to lead a life of purity and piety; to discard the use of alcohol, drugs, give education to boys and girls, and to treat all men and women equal in the society. On the whole, the movement was aimed at giving the untouchables a sense of pride and dignity as members of the Ad Dharm.

The headquarters of Ad

Dharm Mandal were established in Jalandhar city from where the movement was organized in a systematic manner, and the devoted missionaries spread the message far and wide in the Punjab, and even beyond. Since the Mandal had accepted Sahib Shri Guru Ravidass Ji as its spiritual leader, the movement became primarily popular amongst the Chamars, and they readily adopted the nomenclature of Ad Dharmi.

At the time, Babu Mangu Ram was organizing the untouchables of the Punjab under the banner of Ad Dharm; Dr. Ambedkar was fighting a similar battle in another part of the country. Though they were thousands of miles apart, yet their ideas and methods of struggle were almost identical. Both believed that the present day Scheduled Castes are not Hindus, and that their salvation lies only in being independent of the Hindu religion.

Both believed in self-help and advocated peaceful means to achieve their goal. Both laid the greatest emphasis on 'education'. Babasaheb considered "education" the key to all progress, and Mangu Ram says that only "education can lead us to Sachkhand (the realm of truth)." Again, Babasaheb exhorted the people to follow the Three Commandments of 'Education, Agitation and Organization' to gain power. According to Mangu Ram, the poor have three kinds of power: "Qaumiat (collective solidarity), Mazhab (spirituality) and Majlis (organization)".

Within a year of its founding, the Ad Dharm movement created quite a stir in the Punjab by constant rallies and conferences, if forced the Government of the day to take notice of the problems of the untouchables. One of the reasons of the poverty and exploitation of the untouchables was the pernicious system of beggar, the system under which they were forced to live at the beck and call of others and were obliged to do a great deal of work without any remuneration whatsoever.

The Ad Dharm Mandal agitated against the system of beggar, and demanded its abolition. The Mandal also agitated for repealing the Punjab Land Alienation Act which prohibited the untouchables from buying even a small piece of land. The Ad Dharm movement reached its peak at the time of 1931 Census. As a result of their sustained propaganda, more than half a million untouchables declared themselves as Ad Dharmis.

This showed the organizational skill of its leaders. "The massive support", as says Mark Jueregensmeyer, "created political capital, and Mangu Ram used that capital in political ways. Ad Dharmi candidates stood for public offices and an alliance was created with the Unionist Party. In both instances, scheduled caste leaders supported by the Ad Dharm organization achieved public positions".

Courtesy: Dr. Ambedkar and Punjab by D. C. Ahir

Bill against Caste Discrimination in California (USA) – History in the Making

State Senator Aisha Wahab, the first Muslim and Afghan American elected to the State Legislature of California State introduced a Senate Bill (SB) No. 403 on February 09, 2023 in the Legislature seeking to amend concerned sections of the State Civil Code, Education Code and Government Code relating to discrimination. This Bill proposes to add Caste – a division of people related to birth or descent as an additional protected category in the State's anti-discrimination laws and the State policy on discrimination. Wahab says that those at the lowest strata of the caste system known as Dalits, have been increasingly calling for such legislation, for they have been facing this kind of discrimination growing up in the United States, particularly in Fremont, California and in the San Francisco Bay Area. To her, caste discrimination is a social justice and civil rights issue and the Bill is about protecting people who are vulnerable. Seattle became the first U.S. city and the first jurisdiction outside South Asia to add caste to its anti-discrimination laws. California may become the first State in the United States of America to out-law caste-based bias, a safeguard people of South Asia descent say is necessary to protect them from discrimination in housing, education and the tech sector where they hold the key roles.

There have been instances galore of caste-based discrimination in the democratic land of United States of America which impelled the humane and compassionate Aisha Wahab to take up the cause of caste-oppressed victims to its logical conclusion. The tell-tale of instances of discrimination narrated by some of the victims during their testimony was shockingly revealing. Thenmozhi Soundarajan, Executive Director of Equality Labs and author of 'The Trauma of Caste', says: "The caste-oppressed Californians require workplaces and educational institutions free from discrimination and violence. The need for this bill is urgent. For since the time I came out as Dalit I have faced extreme violence. For over 15 years I have endured rape and death threats, intimidation, gaslighting, boycotts and worse. There is sheer level of grit and persistence that requires being out as a Dalit leader and someone who advocates for the civil rights and freedom of caste-oppressed people. To this date I cannot speak publicly without armed security for many of the venues that I have spoken at have been met with dominant caste extremists who have called in physical threats to the venue, violent hecklers who use slurs to interrupt and intimidate my talks, and online disinformation and harassment. These attacks are similar to what black scholars face for speaking frankly about race, and it is unfortunately one of the consequences of being a woman of color in power. These attacks are compounded in the constant assault dominant caste bigots inflict on my team at Equality Labs. Our team is Dalit feminist-led and is interfaith, intercaste, and multiracial and the courage my staff exhibits in the face of ongoing violence is super-human. Despite this we are flanked by

so many loving partner organizations that see this bigotry and support us through the violence. But it still does not take away how lawless and disturbing caste bigotry has grown in the state. The most frightening experience I had in recent memory was in the wake of the Google experience that Tanuja Gupta and I shared. It shocked me how violent dominant caste bigots were in the company. They placed my identity as Dalit in air quotes and try to shame me because I was part Christian. Even more horrific was what happened when Tanuja and I went public. I was assaulted with thousands of violent tweets and face book posts as technologists in India and the US tried to doxx or weaponize my personal information in order to find out where I and my elderly parents lived in order to



plan campaigns to harm us. After several credible threats of assault on my father and myself our family lived in a safe house for two months working with racial justice trained security teams to help us prepare for physical assault on my residence and work place. All this violence occurred because I was supposed to give a Dalit history month talk and help a company DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) work related to caste. Imagine, if this is the level of violence that erupts for a caste equity training what are Dalit workers enduring? I can tell you as I have supported workers in every industry and it is heart wrenching what our community is dealing with. And that is why I am committed to passing SB 403 as this is a Bill whose time has come, and caste-oppressed people can no longer wait for remedy."

Raj Cal, State University Professor and California Faculty Association Member, testifies: "I am a distinguished professor in STEM and have experienced extensive caste discrimination in my department during my tenure at CSU for nearly ten years, despite my long standing and consistent record of accomplishments in research and recognition beyond academia. I have faced continued harassment, abuse, and even entrapment by my dominant caste supervisor. The work environment became so hostile that I stopped coming to the campus, attending conferences, and started looking for a job outside CSU. I never had an issue until I had dominant caste managers. From then on, my life has

been hell. This experience has significantly impacted me, my career and my family. Persistent abuse at the workplace led me to seek counseling for my mental agony as the casteist hostile place was too much. I have now reported to my California Faculty Association union rep and will explore my options. But imagine if this can happen to someone as senior as me; what about the workers all over California that lack protection? I am using my alias for testimony to explore all my option for justice."

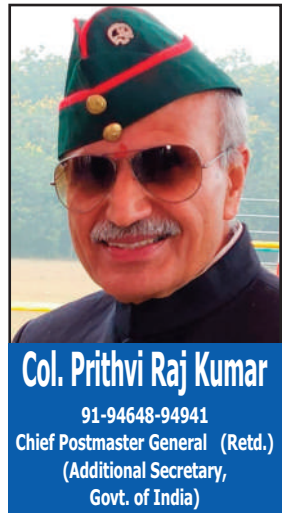
Maya Kamble, Amazon Tech Worker, Buddhist and Member of Ambedkar Association of North America, states: "As a caste-oppressed Buddhist feminist, I know how rare it is to hear a voice like mine in a public forum. But I believe it is important to

hear my voice as a mother and a tech worker. As a parent it is a big struggle to raise Dalit children in casteist parent networks. Once people find out you are Dalit they exclude you and your children. In some schools the parents organize themselves on the basis of caste with different Whatsapp groups for different castes. It is awful and I don't like to see my child exposed to this bigotry. It is harmful and terrifying to see caste reassert itself in schools which should be safe for all children and their families. The caste has affected my life in all of the tech jobs I have had, including now at Amazon. It is a common pattern that once people find out I am caste-oppressed they begin to systematically discriminate and isolate me until I am forced to leave. Once, at another tech company, my Indian manager pointedly ignored my suggestions in meeting and behaved as if I had never spoken. After many unsuccessful attempts to be heard, my non-Indian colleagues started to notice my exclusion and began to back me up. My manager grew increasingly frustrated and warned me not to touch one of the tools we were working on because I was "ill-fated" caste-oppressed. I flinched because this was a direct reference to my being a woman from a Dalit caste. I didn't approach HR at that time as I an H1B worker and reporting this incident could have put my visa in jeopardy. This is the double bind many Dalit tech workers face because it is not about losing a job; it's about losing your status if you speak up. And

many of us are the first generation in our families to be educated and earn to support the rest of our family so the stakes are very high. I left to find another job and have enjoyed a successful career - as long as I avoid working under a dominant caste Indian manager and continue to hide my caste identity. Caste protection would help ensure that the caste-oppressed are not subjected to caste discrimination, harassment or violence based on their caste. Additionally, recognizing caste as a protected category would create more job security to Dalit women by making it illegal to terminate, refuse to hire, or deny a promotion to someone based on their caste. Finally, it would create a more inclusive and equitable workplace culture which would help caste-oppressed women and other members of the lowest castes feel safe in the workplace."

Shahira Bhangar, Dalit Sikh Tech Worker says: "I am a Dalit Sikh woman who was born and raised in California. I was harmed by caste at a young age. I was just in High School in Fremont when my dominant caste best friend at the time found out that I was not from the dominant caste. As soon as she discovered my secret, she told other kids at school, and I was bullied by them for the rest of the school year with people taunting me by turning my Dalit caste name into a slur. To this day, I am still haunted by this bullying and suffer from nightmares from the violence I endured. As a result throughout college, I hid my caste identity in fear of being subjected to more bullying. After I graduated, I landed my first full time job working in tech in the heart of Silicon Valley, where I was especially afraid of being marginalized or harassed due to my caste as I heard many stories from other caste-oppressed people about the casteism in the sector. My worst nightmare came true when my supervisor at this tech startup started to interrogate my caste background and asked me what my "real last name" was...I felt helpless, feared losing my job, and was never protected. The first step for remedy is acknowledging the harm caste causes, and to protect caste-oppressed students and workers everywhere through caste equity protections. My family and I endure constant pain from caste violence..."

Pawan Raj, Environmental Cleaning and Medical Transport Worker, Sacramento, brings out: "I worked during covid as a cleaner in the medical wards. Every day I worked back breaking dangerous labor to make sure hospitals could stay clean. This time was hell for not only did I have to work to ensure we were all safe from covid but I was also bullied by



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Bill against Caste Discrimination in California (USA) – History in the Making

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dominant caste managers. They would harass me and give me the most dangerous assignments while they themselves did not work. When I finished they would load me with even more work. When I complained about the harassment nothing happened and I faced even more retaliation. I got depressed and saw that very few things could help me at that job but I had to keep food on the table for my family. I want folks to know people like me helped save lives by ensuring covid wards were safe. And yet no one cared about my safety. I left this job for medical transport and I finally have relief. But I should not have to leave my job just to be able to make a living. Every Californian deserves a workplace free from discrimination. Why is that being denied to caste –oppressed workers like me?"

N.Singh, Uber Driver and a Father, says: "I am a Ravidassia Sikh who lives in the Central Valley. I work in the Central Valley and travel to the Bay Area to drive Uber and work in Santa Clara, Alameda and San Francisco counties. It is hard job but I am proud of being able to support my growing family. I faced significant caste discrimination in my apartment building where dominant caste neighbors found out my caste identity and began bombarding me with caste slurs and threats. They would knock on my door or flood my phones with insulting messages like, "F...K you blackie, what do you think you are doing here. Back at home you would be cleaning our toilets or working in our fields, and how dare you come here. We will kill you." My whole family was terrified. I tried to call the police and it took them much time to understand as to what was wrong because for them it looks like brown people arguing with other brown people. They did not understand that a hate crime was happening. Eventually I was able to file a restraining order but that whole process scarred my family. And even now I think a lot about it as many of my South Asian clientele say casteist things to me and in the confines of my car say cast prejudice things not knowing my identity of a Dalit. I remember even this one customer how yelled at me from the curb as I picked him up and he said "I am a Brahmin. It is not my job to put the suitcase in the car. It is yours. We do not touch luggage and will never touch. So you do your job." His arrogance was shocking and I wondered how this type of caste-prejudice could travel so far. Also did not know if I could report such casteist encounters to Uber as caste is not a protected category. This is why this bill matters and it's why I want to add my voice to the many Dalits that are coming forward. If we do not speak now what will happen then?"

Tanuja Gupta, Former Google Manager, narrates: "I worked for Google for eleven years. As I grew from an individual contributor to a senior people manager, I also advocated for workers' rights in the form of leading a global walkout against sexual harassment and successfully lobbying for Google to end its policy of forced arbi-

tration – a policy change now codified in federal law. In September 2021, two Google employees approached me confidentially about the caste discrimination they had witnessed at the company. They shared the struggles they faced simply having a talk at Google about caste discrimination. I agreed to host this talk with guest speaker Themozhi Soundararajan in the following Spring as part of a Diversity and Inclusion discussion series within my own team. This talk would have educated my former colleagues about how caste-based discrimination is a form of workplace discrimination, how this hierarchical system excludes people from public and private spaces based on a combination of endogamy, ancestry and class.... and how it permeates multiple sectors of labor in America. However, Google cancelled the talk. When I challenged the decision citing the disproportionate reaction to fear of a heckler's veto, Google retaliated against me for "disturbing the workplace." The company automatically lowered my performance rating for the next cycle, affecting my compensation, and deemed me ineligible for promotion for an unknown period of time. When I left Google, email threads that denied caste discrimination, continued to spread throughout the company unchecked. Caste-privileged workers labeled caste-oppressed workers as less educated and unable to grasp the historical roots of the caste system. Conflating this civil rights issue with one of religious freedom, some employees deemed any mention of caste discrimination as Hindu-phobic and a form of reverse discrimination. I filed a counter complaint and asked parent company Alphabet for an investigation into Google leadership, citing several instances where Google VPs and Executive Officers violated conduct policies and Google's own workplace commitments. Four months later, Alphabet concluded Google did nothing wrong. Alphabet issued no written report or response to the thirteen page complaint I filed which contained screenshots and emails of several VPs and Directors breaking HR protocols."

Existing law, the Unruh Civil Rights Act, provides that all persons within the jurisdiction of this state (California) are free and equal, and no matter what their sex, race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, disability, medical condition, genetic information, marital status, sexual orientation, citizenship, primary language, or immigration status are entitled to the full and equal accommodations, advantages, facilities, privileges, or services in all business establishments of every kind whatsoever. This Bill would additionally provide that all persons within the jurisdiction of the state are so entitled regardless of their caste, as defined. Existing law states the policy of the State of California to afford all persons in public schools, regardless of their disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, nationality, race or ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or specified other characteristics, equal rights and opportunities in the educational institutions of the state, and states that the purpose of

related existing law is to prohibit acts that are contrary to that policy and to provide remedies therefor. This Bill would additionally include caste as a protected characteristic in that policy statement. Existing law prohibits discrimination in any program or activity that is conducted, operated, or administered by the state, or by any state agency, that is funded directly by the state, or that receives any financial assistance from the state, based upon specified personal characteristics. This Bill would also prohibit discrimination based upon caste. Existing law, the California Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA), declares the public policy of the state that it is necessary to protect and safeguard the right of all persons to seek, obtain, and hold employment without discrimination based on specified characteristics or status, including among others, race, religious creed, color, national origin, ancestry, physical and mental disability, medical condition, genetic information, marital status, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, age, sexual orientation, reproductive health decision making, or military and veteran status. This Bill would revise FEHA to prohibit prescribed discriminatory employment practices on account of caste.

The Bill seeks the people of the State of California to enact that caste is a system of social stratification where each position is characterized by hereditary status, endogamy, and social exclusion. Caste discrimination is present across South Asia and the South Asian Diaspora and is found in all communities of religious practice. California caste-oppressed individuals who originate from South Asia, including India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, are known by the self-chosen identity of "Dalits," which means "those who have been broken but are resilient." Others who are caste-oppressed indigenous people are named "Adivasis" or their tribal names. Caste systems similarly known to discriminate based on descent are found around the world. While caste is strongly associated with South Asia, similar systems exist in South America, Japan, parts of Africa, and elsewhere. Caste discrimination at work, school, and places of worship continues to exist in California. Caste discrimination manifests as workplace discrimination, housing discrimination, gender-based violence, and other physical and psychological forms of violence. Caste discrimination occurs across industries, including technology, construction, restaurants, and domestic work. In these sectors, caste discrimination has included harassment, bias, wage theft, and even human trafficking. Caste is today inextricably intertwined with existing legal protections in state and federal civil rights laws such that discrimination based on one's caste is effectively discrimination based on the intersection of other protected identities. However, because of the grave discrimination caste-oppressed Californians face, these existing protections must be made explicit. The amendments in this act do not constitute a change in, but are declaratory of, existing law. It is

not the intent of the Legislature in amending the sections in this act to affect the protected status of any other classification, whether or not expressed in Section 51 of the Civil Code, Section 200 of the Education Code, or Section 11135 or 12920 of the Government Code. The State of California is committed to recognizing the dignity of all its residents, students, workers, and visitors. This recognition includes the right to reside, work, and travel without suffering prejudice or discrimination.

The Bill has successfully passed three stages with a thumping majority supporting it. The Judiciary Committee of the Senate passed it unanimously. The senate passed it with 34 senators in favor and one against the Bill. The Appropriation Committee of the State Assembly has also passed it on 16th August 2023. Now the Bill is to be debated and voted in the whole Assembly comprising of eighty members.

According to AP News, apart from the Dalits and other victims of caste prejudices, the Bill is being backed by Hindu groups such as Hindus for Human Rights and Hindus for Caste Equity. The Bill follows the resolutions to designate caste as a protected category passed by institutions like the California Democratic Party, the California State University system, the Alphabet Workers Union and corporations like Apple and Cisco. With a 19.25 million workforce and a \$ 3.6 trillion GDP, such legal protections in California will help all its people let go of the fear of discrimination and allow them to explore their full potential, making California safer, more equitable and more prosperous, says America Against Caste Discrimination (AACD). The Senate's vote on SB 403 shows that California leads the world towards a more equitable society internationally. AACD which represents the Indian Diaspora's true diversity in the US, says will continue mobilizing constituent communities to ensure the bill passes both Houses of the California legislature and is signed into law. In a press release AACD said that thousands of emails and phone calls from community groups or caste-oppressed people supported the Bill, including mass mobilization by California's Ravidassia community, which played a central role in its passage in the Senate. The Bill was supported by Dalit Civil rights organization 'Equality Labs', a wide variety of interfaith organizations, Workers' organizations like Socialist Alternative, California Labor Federation and Civil Rights groups like the American Civil Liberties Union et al. Referring to the SB 403, Aisha Wahab told NBC News that "the more diverse California and the United States become we need to protect more people in the way the American dream was originally supposed to be. Our laws need to expand and cover more people and go deeper" (Ambedkar Times, May 17, 2023).

But other pro-caste Hindu groups such as the Hindu American Foundation and the Coalition of Hindus of North America are opposed to the

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Bill, and are making frantic efforts to create stumbling blocks in its passage. Their argument is that these measures as contained in the Bill will hurt a community that already faces hate and discrimination, and will specifically target Hindus and Indian Americans who are commonly associated with the caste system. Such people consider the Bill to be dangerous and misguided as it targets, racially profiles, and institutionalizes bias against all residents of Indian and South Asian origin, as well as few other vulnerable communities of color. According to them the California legislators should be protecting everyone's civil rights, but they are instead trampling the fundamental constitutional rights of specific minority communities.

It appears that the opponents and critics of the Bill need to appreciate the caste system of the Hindu society in its entirety and wide perspective with open mind to arrive at their conclusion. The Caste has been defined by many scholars in their own understanding of the subject. Mr. Senart, a French authority, defines caste as "a close corporation, in theory at any rate rigorously hereditary: equipped with a certain traditional and independent organization, including a chief and a council, bound together by common occupations, which relate more particularly to marriage and to food and to questions of ceremonial pollution, and ruling its members by the exercise of jurisdiction, which succeeds in making the authority of the community more felt by the sanction of certain penalties and, above all, by final irrevocable exclusion from the group". Mr. Nesfield defines a caste as "a class of the community which disowns any connection with any other class and can neither intermarry nor eat nor drink with any but persons of their own community". According to Sir H. Risley, "a caste may be defined as a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name which usually denotes or is associated with specific occupation, claiming common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine, professing to follow the same professional callings and are regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogeneous community". Dr. Ketkar defines caste as "a social group having two characteristics: (i) membership is confined to those who are born of members and includes all persons so born; (ii) the members are forbidden by an inexorable social law to marry outside the group" (BAWS, Vol. 1, pp. 6 and 7).

According to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, M.A. and PhD from Columbia University, New York, M.Sc. and D.Sc. (Economics) from London School of Economics, Bar-at-Law from Grays Inn London, the first Law Minister of Independent India, and father of the Indian Constitution, collectively all of the above definitions are complementary to one another, each one emphasizing what has been obscured in the other. The critical evaluation of the various characteristics of Caste leaves no doubt that absence of intermarriage-

endogamy is the only one that can be called the essence of Caste when rightly understood. Some may deny this on abstract anthropological grounds that there exist endogamous groups (the world over) without giving rise to the problem of Caste. But in India the situation is different. Caste in India means an artificial chopping off of the population into fixed and definite watertight units, each one prevented from fusing into another through the custom of endogamy. Explaining the complex intricacies of the hoary institution like Caste, he says that it is a vast problem, both theoretically and practically. Practically, it is an institution that portends tremendous consequences. It is a local problem, but capable of much wider mischief, for "as long as caste in India does exist, Hindus will hardly intermarry or have any social intercourse with outsiders; and if Hindus migrate to other regions on earth, Indian caste would become a world problem" (BAWS, Vol. 1, pp. 5, 6, 8, 9).

Dr. Ambedkar defines caste as a social group having (a) belief in Hindu Religion and bound by certain regulations as to (b) marriage (c) food and (d) occupation and (e) a common name by which it is recognized. In the matter of marriage the regulation lays down that there can be no intermarriage between members of different castes. This is the first and the most fundamental idea on which the whole fabric of the caste is built up. In the matter of food the rule is that a person cannot take food from and dine with any person who does not belong to his caste. In other words, caste is an endogamous unit and also a communal unit. In the matter of occupation the regulation is that a person must follow the occupation which is the traditional occupation of his caste and if the caste has no occupation then he should follow the occupation of his father. In the matter of status of a person it is fixed and is hereditary. It is fixed because a person's status is determined by the status of the caste to which he belongs. It is hereditary because a Hindu is stamped with the caste to which his parents belonged, a Hindu cannot change his status because he cannot change his caste. A Hindu is born in a caste and he dies a member of the caste in which he is born. Thus, caste is a highly organized involuntary social grouping. There is no Hindu without caste. Being bounded by caste from birth to death he becomes subject to social regulations and traditions of the caste over which he has no control. The significance of a separate name for a caste lies in that it is the name which the caste bears which gives it fixity and continuity and individuality. It is the name which defines as to who are its members and in most cases a person born in a caste carries the name of the caste as a part of his surname. It is the name which makes it easy for the caste to enforce its rules and regulations. The name of the caste of an individual prevents the offender in passing off as a person belonging to another caste and thus escaping the jurisdiction of the caste. It helps to identify the offending individual and

the caste to whose jurisdiction he is subject so that he is easily handed up and punished for any breach of the caste rules. This is what caste means (BAWS, Vol.3, pp.144, 145).

To follow the discussion of the subject of caste it is necessary to familiarize the reader with some basic conceptions which underlie the Hindu Social Organization. The basic conception of social organization which prevails among the Hindus starts with the rise of four watertight compartments or Varnas or classes called Chaturvarnya into which Hindu society is believed to have become stratified. These four classes were named (1) Brahmins, the priestly and the educated class (2) Kshatriyas, the military class (3) Vaishyas, the trading class and (4) Shudras, the servant class. Their origin is traced to the Hindu Scriptures, particularly the Vedas – the ninetieth Hymn of the tenth Mandala of the Rig Veda, which is known by the famous name of Purusha Sukta, according to which the Brahmins sprang from the mouth, Kshatriyas from the arms, Vaishyas from the thighs and the Shudras from the feet of the grand divine Purusha called Brahma. For a time these were merely classes. After a time what were only classes (Varnas) became Castes (Jatis) and the four castes became four thousand. In this way the modern caste system was only the evolution of the ancient Varna system. No doubt the caste system is an evolution of the class-Varna system, and it follows closely the class cleavages of the Varna system. Those within the Chaturvarnya were called Savarna and those outside it were called Avarnas or Panchamas or untouchables or dalits in today's terminology. The Avarnas, thus, are outside the Varna system. They are not only untouchables, some of them are even unseeable (BAWS, Vol.3, pp.141, 142, and 147).

According to Dr. Ambedkar, Chaturvarnya theory with its old labels is utterly repellent. It pre-supposes that people can be classified into four definite classes. It is not possible to pigeon men into holes, according as they belong to one class or the other. It is impossible to accurately classify people into four definite classes is proved by the fact the original four classes have now become four thousand castes. The law of *Chaturvaranya* prohibited the Shudras from pursuing knowledge, engaging in economic enterprises and from bearing arms, with the result that they could never revolt, and became ever reconciled to the position of eternal servitude as an inescapable fate. This stratification of occupations which is the result of the Caste System is positively pernicious. There cannot be a more degrading system of social organization than the *Chaturvarnya* or caste system. It is the system which deadens, paralyzes and cripples the people from helpful activity. The first and foremost thing that must be recognized is that Hindu Society is a myth. The name Hindu itself is a foreign name. It was given by the Mohammedans to the natives for the purpose of distinguishing themselves. It does not occur in any Sanskrit work

prior to the Mohammedan invasion. Hindu Society as such does not exist. It is only a collection of castes. Each caste is conscious of its existence. Each caste not only dines and marries among itself but prescribes its own distinct dress. Indeed the ideal Hindu must be like a rat living in his own hole refusing to have any contact with others. There is utter lack of "consciousness of kind" among the Hindus. In every Hindu the consciousness that exists is the consciousness of his caste. That is the reason why the Hindus cannot be said to form a society or a nation. Men constitute a society because they have things which they possess in common. Making the individual a partner in the associated activity so that he feels its success as his success, its failure as his failure is the real thing that binds men and makes a society of them. The Caste System prevents common activity and by preventing common activity it has prevented the Hindus from becoming a society with a unified life and a consciousness of its own being. Caste is the bane of the Hindus, and cause of their downfall. Owing to caste, the Hindu's life has been a life of continuous defeats. Caste has made the Hindus the sick men of India. It has ruined the Hindu race and has destroyed, demoralized and devitalized Hindu society (BAWS, Vol. 1, pp. 50, 51, 62, 63 and Keer, p. 269, 270).

Dr. Ambedkar is convinced that the real remedy for the abolition of caste is inter-marriage. Fusion of blood can alone create the feeling of being kith and kin and unless this feeling of kinship, of being kindred, becomes paramount the separatist feeling—the feeling of being aliens—created by Caste will not vanish. Among the Hindus inter-marriage must necessarily be a factor of greater force in social life than it need be in the life of the non-Hindus. Where society is already well-knit by other ties, marriage is an ordinary incident of life. But where society cut asunder, marriage as a binding force becomes a matter of urgent necessity. The real remedy for breaking Caste is inter-marriage. Nothing else will serve as the solvent of Caste. Caste is not a physical object like a wall of bricks or a line of barbed wire which prevents the Hindus from co-mingling and which has, therefore, to be pulled down. Caste is a notion; it is a state of the mind. The destruction of Caste, therefore, means a notional change. The Hindus observe Caste because they are deeply religious. People are not wrong in observing Caste. What is wrong is their religion, which has inculcated this notion of Caste. Therefore, the enemy to grapple with, obviously is not the people who observe Caste, but their Shastras or scriptures which teach them this religion of Caste. The real remedy is to destroy the belief in the sanctity of the *Shastras*. Make every man and woman free from the thralldom of the *Shastras*, cleanse their minds of the pernicious notions founded on the *Shastras*, and he or she will inter-dine and intermarry, without being told to do so. Take the stand that Buddha and

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Guru Nanak took. Not only the *Shastras* be discarded, their authority must be denied as did Buddha and Nanak. The Hindus must be told that what is wrong with them is their religion which has produced in them this notion of the sacredness of Caste. The wall built around Caste is impregnable and the material, of which it is built, contains none of the combustible stuff of reason and morality. Add to this the fact that inside this wall stands the army of Brahmins who form the intellectual class, who are the natural leaders of the Hindus, who are there not as mere mercenary soldiers but as an army fighting for its homeland. It would take ages before a breach is made. But whether the doing of the deed takes time or whether it can be done quickly, the social reformers must not forget that if they wish to bring about a breach in the system then they have got to apply the dynamite to the Vedas and the *Shastras*, which deny any part to reason and morality. They must destroy the Religion of the *Shrutis* (Vedas) and the *Smritis*. Nothing else will avail. To put it simply, the old must cease to be operative before the new can begin to enliven and to pulsate. This is what meant by discarding the authority and destroying the religion of the *Shastras*. Religion must mainly be a matter of principles only. It cannot be a matter of rules. The moment it degenerates into rules it ceases to be Religion, as it kills responsibility

which is the essence of a truly religious act. The Hindu Religion, as contained in the Vedas and the *Smritis*, is nothing but a mass of sacrificial, social, political and sanitary rules and regulations, all mixed up. Religion, in the sense of spiritual principles, truly universal, applicable to all races, to all

the same for all generations. The objectionable part of such a scheme is not that they are made by certain persons called Prophets or Law-givers. The objectionable part is that this code has been invested with the character of finality and fixity. Happiness notoriously varies with the conditions and

struction of such a religion. When people come to know that what is called Religion is really Law, old and archaic, they will be ready for a change, for people know and accept that law can be changed (BAWS, Vol. 1, pp. 67-78).

According to Dr. Ambedkar, his idealsociety would be a society based on Liberty, Equality and Fraternity i.e. democracy. It should be mobile full of channels for conveying a change taking place in one part to other parts. There should be many interests consciously communicated and shared. There should be varied and free points of contacts with other mode of association. There must be social endosmosis. This is fraternity, which is the other name for democracy, which primarily is a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellow men. The liberty is necessary for the material and intellectual growth of an individual in a free social environment.

The equality must be accepted as a governing principle. To get the most out of the people, the social body must make them equal as far as possible at the very start of the race. It is only when social democracy is established in its true sense; the political democracy will thrive making the country 'one nation one people' where there is no question of discrimination on any ground (BAWS, Vol. 1, pp. 57, 58).



countries, to all times, is not to be found in them, and if it is, it does not form the governing part of a Hindu's life. But the worst evil of this code of ordinances is that the laws it contains must be the same yesterday, today and forever. They are iniquitous in that they are not the same for one class as for another. But this iniquity is made perpetual in that they are prescribed to be

circumstances of a person, as well as with the conditions of different people and epochs. That being the case, how can humanity endure this code of eternal laws, without being cramped and without being crippled? Dr. Ambedkar asserts that he has, therefore, no hesitation in saying that such a religion must be destroyed and, there is nothing irreligious in working for the de-



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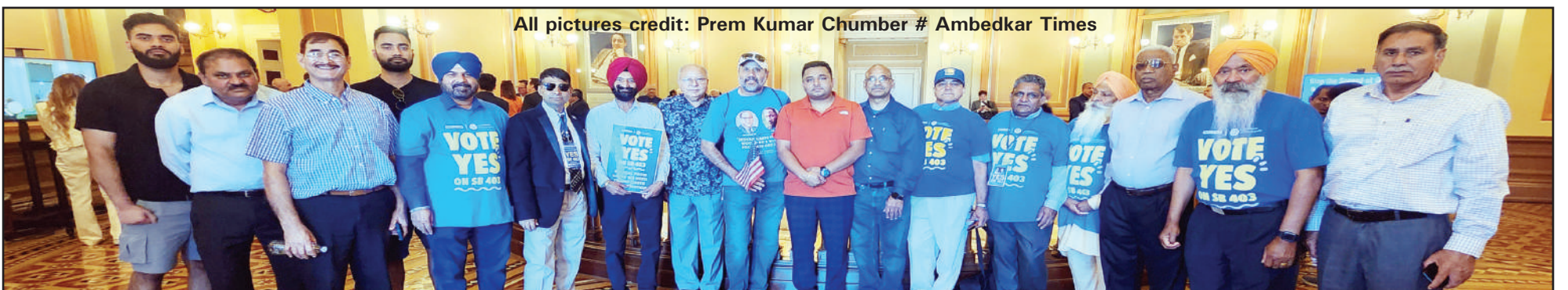
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Anti-Caste Discrimination Bill passed in the California State Assembly



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