

## Seattle ban on caste discrimination

### Why in news?

*The Seattle city council has recently passed a resolution adding caste to its anti-discrimination policies.*

### What does the resolution say?

- The legislation recognises caste as a unique basis of discrimination, similar to race or gender.
- It prohibits businesses from discriminating based on caste with respect to hiring, tenure, promotion, or wages.
- It will ban discrimination in places of public accommodation, such as hotels, public transportation, public restrooms.
- The move addresses an issue important to the area's South Asian diaspora, particularly the Indian and Hindu communities.

*Seattle is likely to be just the first city in the US to recognise and ban caste-based discrimination.*

### What is the history of caste system?

- The caste system in India dates back over 3,000 years and divides Hindu society into rigid hierarchical groups.
- The caste system allows many privileges to upper castes but represses lower castes.
- The Dalit community is on the lowest rung of the Indian Hindu caste system and have been treated as untouchables.
- Caste discrimination was outlawed in India over 70 years ago, yet it persists in many form till date.
- Debate over the caste system's hierarchy is contentious in India and abroad, with the issue intertwined with religion.
- Indian government policies reserving seats for lower-caste students at top Indian universities have helped many land tech jobs in the West in recent years.

### What it was opposed?

- **Polarization** - Though it set a precedent for other cities to follow such laws in the future, it also polarised the Indian-American population.
- Hindu organisations in the US criticize the legislation, as it will further lead to anti-Hindu discrimination.
- **Job losses** - The move could dissuade employers from hiring South Asians.

*The US is the 2<sup>nd</sup> most popular destination for Indians living abroad, according to the Migration Policy Institute.*

## **References**

1. [The Indian Express | Seattle bans caste discrimination](#)
2. [Reuters | Seattle, first U.S. city to outlaw caste discrimination](#)
3. [BBC | Seattle becomes first US city to ban caste discrimination](#)

