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# RNA2024

## COVERING CASTE IN AMERICA: TOOLS FOR JOURNALISTS

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Founder and President

International Commission for Dalit Rights (ICDR)

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## My Background

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Thank you, Sonia! Let me begin by saying -Thank you, RNA Committee, and Deepa.

It is a huge pleasure and an honor to be here with y'all.

This month is a [Dalit History Month](#) and a month of [Dr. Ambedkar Jayanti](#). So, **Jai Bhim** everybody!

My name is D.B. Sagar. I was born and raised in Nepal. **I am a proud Dalit.** I have firsthand experience of caste-based discrimination, exclusion and inequality.

I have been serving as the Founder and President of *International Commission for Dalit Rights (ICDR)*.

Most of my life, I have been working with Dalits, Civil Rights, interracial and interfaith groups to combat caste discrimination and defend the Dalit Rights from local to global levels. **Dalit Lives Matter!**



## How I involved in this discussion about caste in the U.S.

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I started **Caste Debate in America and globally** by establishing the **ICDR** as a global advocacy platform in 2008.

In 2014, we organized **Global March against Caste Discrimination** from the White House to the Capitol Hill in D.C. and around the world. Our objective was to call the **US Congress** to pass a **Binding Resolution against Caste -based Discrimination** and the **White House** to endorse “**UN Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination based on Caste [Work and Descent]**” established by the UN Human Rights Council **A/HRC/11/CRP.3**).

Then in 2015, we organized a **Global Conference Defending Dalit Rights** in Washington, D.C, where we engaged US policymakers and civil rights advocates. We developed “***Dalit Rights Global Declaration 2015***”, a global advocacy framework, and asked **Congress to pass a binding resolution against Caste Discrimination both in America** and South Asia.

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## How I involved in this discussion about caste in the U.S.

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In 2017, we started **litigation side of activity by filing a complaint** with the New York State Division of Human Rights (NYSDHR) against **caste-based discrimination at workplace**. Likewise, in 2018, the **ICDR filed lawsuit with Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)** of New York field office asking to investigate against Caste -based discrimination and unfair treatment at the workplace in New York.

In 2021, ICDR established a **National Coalition against Caste Discrimination in America**. We submitted a policy motion and legal arguments to **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)**, the **Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department Justice**, U.S. Department of State and U.S. Department of Labor to **recognize and enforce Caste -based discrimination, arguing that caste discrimination is already prohibited by Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Law and the U.S. Constitution**.

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## How I involved in this discussion about caste in the U.S.

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Now, we can see the emerging impact of Caste Debate in America. Lawmakers in Seattle have already banned caste discrimination and California's lawmakers **passed SB403 to ban caste discrimination**. Unfortunately, the Governor vetoed it; but the **Governor recognized that caste is already prohibited under the existing categories.** ” This means the Governor accepted that the Caste discrimination exists in America.

There are many brave policy -makers, who are in the process of introducing new bills to ban oppressive caste discrimination across in America.

The ICDR has developed **Caste Freedom Index** that provides leading data source, trends and status of caste discrimination and exclusion against Dalits or caste oppressed people globally.

If you look at our own society and communities, many people may have faced caste-based discrimination and harassment frequently.



**Discuss your perspective coming from Nepal and seeing much of these arguments play out among Indian communities, and the hurdles you've seen people face in trying to come forward with claims of discrimination**

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There are **different approaches dealing and understanding about Caste**, even in South Asian countries. I see Nepali-American Communities are more acceptance and flexible about caste dynamics and many of them have banned caste discrimination in America.

Obviously, Indian-American Communities have more complexity and hesitance about accepting facts that Indian-American Communities have been affected negatively by the caste discrimination.

I see a problem of misconception about caste. I see there are **two extreme perspectives** – For and Against of Caste within the Indian-American Communities in America. These extreme perspectives collide and divide the Indian-American Communities often time; I think.

Let's me make clear that “the caste” is NOT just an Indian or South Asian issue. It is an American, African, European and a global issue.

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## Caste is a Global Inter-Racial and Interfaith Issue.

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A quarter of global populations have been directly impacted by the caste-based discrimination around the world . From South Asia to America, Africa to Japan or Europe to Middle East and South America .

Yes, this is a fact that global policy-makers left “Caste” as a local or national issue, while formulating International Convention against Racism and All Other Forms of Discrimination . And this is another problem.

What our policy doctors did; they treated our **skin but did not treat our blood** . The Caste is blood of our society. Therefore, we are still suffering.

**As Dr. Ambedkar** said, “Law and order are the medicine of the body politic and when the body politic gets sick, medicine must be administered.” And our society failed to recognize our sickness, denied to accept right medicine and explore right treatment to combat caste discrimination.



## Caste is a Global Inter-Racial and Interfaith Issue.

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Right treatments are to:

- Accept the fact that Caste Discrimination is real and exists in American society. If there were not Caste Discrimination in America, then George Floyd's death would not have caused such upheaval and chaos. Think about **the concept of [White] Supremacy!** Caste is blood of our society, and race is skin.
- Caste Is NOT a Religion. Recognize the fact that **caste is an inter-racial and an interfaith issue**, it is not just an Indian community's problem, rather it is an American problem and a global problem. Look around the world, there are Buddhist Dalits, Muslim Dalits, Christian Dalits and Hindus/Sikh Dalits – all of them have been suffering from one thing – that is caste discrimination regardless of their faith.
- The problem is the Caste, this is the inter-racial and interfaith problem. Think about the **concept of Superior vs Inferior in Europe or Pure vs Impure in South Asia.**
- I believe that Religion has been used as a systematic tool to oppress minorities, Dalits and women. There is no need to connect caste with a certain religion or nation or groups.





## Discuss the benefits and tensions of thinking about caste more conceptually, beyond South Asia.

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I believe fighting against caste discrimination is a **pure social justice and civil rights issue**. We are **not fighting for or against any groups, faiths or communities** – we are fighting against **discrimination and exclusion based on Caste**. So, let's not label caste with certain faith or group only. In any faith system, there should not be a space for caste discrimination or exclusion.

I believe we need to educate every society that eliminating Caste Discrimination is **NOT** fighting against their faith system or community. It is right thing to do. People should come forward and speak up against Caste Discrimination.

The ICDR has been educating Americans, South Asians and global communities that caste is a social issue. Caste Discrimination not only creates individual victims, but it also impacts negatively our entire society, and it challenges our **liberty, prosperity and security**.

We ask people to come forward to speak up and report any forms of caste discrimination.

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Let's not forget the paths of Dr. King Jr. and Dr. Ambedkar

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I think we have forgotten what **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.** said.

**Dr. King** said that he accepted that he is an untouchable and all Blacks are untouchable in America. **Segregation is evil and shameful because it stigmatizes the segregated groups as untouchables in a caste system.**

Dr. King convinced his listeners that we have a moral conviction and mandate to work to get rid of this unjust and evil caste system in America.

**We need to enforce Dr. King's conviction and mandate to work get rid of this evil caste system from, America, Asia and globally.**

I just imagine that if Dr. King and Dr. Ambedkar would have chance to meet and collaborate to get rid of this evil caste system, the Dalit Rights and Civil Rights movements would have been more successful.

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Discuss the benefits and tensions of thinking about caste more conceptually, beyond South Asia

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I do not understand why some faith groups are associating this evil and shameful caste discrimination within their faith systems or societies.

It is not a right thing to defend this shameful and oppressive caste discrimination. I strongly believe that **each faith must disassociate itself from shameful and evil caste discrimination.**

**Faith does not teach discrimination, exclusion or hate.** And I know there is no place for hate crimes, harassment or threats in a faith.

This is not a fight for or against any groups, faiths or communities; rather this is a fight for liberty, freedom, security and prosperity with respect and dignity. **All human beings are born equal.**

All Americans and American residents should not be judged by their caste or race or ancestry and face caste-based discrimination in this multicultural society.

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## Final thoughts, questions, and advice for journalists (1-2 min each)

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I believe that elimination of caste discrimination will **build social and interfaith bonding** no matter who we belong to or believe in. Caste Discrimination affects negatively many racial and religious communities.

- To reject all forms of hatred and supremacist politics; and to educate ourselves about the ideology and global presence of the Dalit and Civil Rights movements;
- To stand in firm solidarity with the global struggle to dismantle Islamophobia and annihilate Caste Discrimination, and in particular to support movements to combat hate and ban caste discrimination in America;
- To stand with activists and organizations working to articulate a diverse, inclusive, and accountable multicultural society in America and globally.

Thank you!

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