

Ambedkar King Study Circle



5th General Body Report

Sat. Oct 28, 2023 - San Jose, California

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Introduction

The Ambedkar King Study Circle's General Body convened annually from 2017 to 2020. Unfortunately, the General Body could not be held in 2021 and 2022 due to the COVID-19. Our last General Body meeting, the 4th, took place virtually in October 2020. It comprehensively covered our activities up to September 2020. The current GB stands as our 5th GB.

The period 2022-23 is very significant. AKSC took up a remarkable campaign in 2020 followed by the caste discrimination case in Cisco and labor and caste exploitation case in the New Jersey BAPS temple. During 2022-23, AKSC was involved in getting legal protection for the caste oppressed in the USA.

It's important to note that since our 4th GB, our strategy, planning and execution have seen tremendous improvement. This positive transformation can be attributed to AKSC's increased engagement with committed members, democratic decision-making processes, which involve extensive discussions, and the collective implementation of our decisions. Also during this period many volunteers who are yet to be members involved themselves enthusiastically in anti-caste activities.

AKSC Conferences

AKSC 2022 Conference

We organized our [3rd conference on 27th Aug 2022 in Cupertino](#), with the theme of '[Resist Brahminism/ Hindutva in the USA](#).' This theme was chosen to shed light on the presence of Hindutva ideology in the USA and the efforts by certain groups to spread hate and casteism, using their Hindu religious minority status as a shield. In the context of the Cisco caste discrimination case, it has been observed that Hindutva organizations attempt to mislead the public by framing actions against caste discrimination as an attack on Hinduism. The conference served as a crucial platform to address and challenge such misleading statements. By doing so, it aimed to prevent the vulnerable and oppressed communities from being further gaslit and marginalized by caste practitioners.

Our distinguished speakers were Ms. Crystal Calhoun, Dr. Gajendran Ayyathurai, Dr. Balmurli Natrajan, Dr. Samina Salim, Ms. Peggy Elwell, and Ms. Grace Dheel. This conference drew a diverse audience of 100 attendees from across the USA.

AKSC 2023 Conference

We organized the 4th conference on 19th Aug 2023 in Cupertino, and the theme was 'Building a Caste Free Equitable Society from the Grassroots.' This selection was informed by our extensive experiences in advocating for SB 403, a critical piece of legislation aimed at explicitly addressing caste-based discrimination in California law. Preventing the dilution of SB 403 in the state assembly between May and July 2023 and its final demise at the hands of Gov Newsom was entirely within our reach had the legislative efforts been co-led by the collective voice of oppressed caste workers alongside their anti-caste allies from diverse backgrounds, instead of it being lead by one organization that claimed to be the face of the Dalit movement, while actively preventing a whole range of Dalit-led organizations from gaining access to any relevant or timely information about the bill. It remains essential for the oppressed caste workers to assume leadership roles within the anti-caste movement, thus ensuring that the helm of this historic struggle remains firmly in the hands of those most affected by caste-related injustices, rather than being entrusted to for-profit or non-profit enterprises.

Distinguished scholars and advocates, including Professor Ajantha Subramaninan, Professor Thomas Blom Hansen, Dr. Murali Shanmugavelan, and Professor William T. Armaline, graced our conference as keynote speakers. This event attracted a diverse and engaged audience of 130 attendees from various regions across the United States.

Campaigns

SB 403: California Ban on Discrimination Based on Caste

The Ambedkar King Study Circle embarked on a sustained campaign to rally support for California Senate Bill (SB) 403 introduced by Senator Ms. Aisha Wahab. This tireless effort spanned a significant 9-month period from February 2023 to October 2023. The bill encountered robust opposition from pro-caste groups, spearheaded by the forces of Hindutva. SB 403 sharpened the contradiction between the anti-caste and casteist factions.

AKSC's fact sheet about SB 403 was crafted to debunk Hindutva's arguments, revealing their striking resemblance to the arguments employed by white supremacists who oppose legal protections for the Blacks. AKSC played a pivotal role in uniting a diverse coalition, bringing together more than 23 organizations, ultimately leading to the formation of "America Against Caste Discrimination" (AACD).

Despite SB 403 gaining resounding approval within the California Senate, with caste recognized as a distinct category, and then within the Assembly, albeit with amendments that

somewhat diluted its impact, the bill faced a regrettable veto from Governor Newsom. His veto statement, suggesting that caste discrimination was already adequately addressed within existing California law, reflects his inability to grasp the unique plight of caste-oppressed individuals. The caste oppressed constitute a minority even within the larger Indian minority whereas the latter wields substantial economic and political influence.

This campaign succeeded in sparking extensive discussions on the issue of caste discrimination in the United States. This campaign represents a novel experience for us, as it drew the active involvement of numerous individuals who were not AKSC members. Even in the face of the bill's veto, the dedicated individuals who worked tirelessly for SB 403 have not wavered in their commitment to the anti-caste cause. On the contrary, they have grown more resolute and recognized the need for fresh strategies to secure legal protection for the oppressed.

We extend heartfelt gratitude to all those who played a role in supporting SB 403. A special commendation goes to the Ravidassia community, who mobilized a significant number of people to counteract Hindutva's influence.

AKSC looks forward to a comprehensive discussion on SB 403, scheduled for Saturday, October 28th, 2023. This event promises to shed further light on this important issue.

Campaign against the violence against the Kuki-Zomi people

Starting May 3, 2023, there was sustained violence against the hill tribes of Manipur. AKSC played an important role in organizing and mobilizing for [protests across the bay area](#) against this unfolding massacre under the leadership of NAMTA (North American Manipur Tribal Association).

Seattle Ban on Discrimination Based on Caste

On Feb 21 2023, the Seattle City made history by outlawing caste discrimination in the city of Seattle through an ordinance. AKSC supported the campaign led by the Seattle city council member Ms. Kshama Sawant. AKSC was involved in reaching like minded organizations to garner the support and mobilized the individuals to support the ordinance through in-person participation, email and social media campaigns.

Cisco Caste Discrimination - Cont.

Since the alleged caste discrimination case against Cisco was filed in June 2020, the Ambedkar King Study Circle (AKSC) has been actively engaged in a comprehensive range of

campaigns aimed at educating the American public about the existence of caste in the USA and the various ways it manifests as exclusion and discrimination.

In April 2023, a development unfolded as the Department of Civil Rights dismissed two engineers from the complaint while continuing with litigation against Cisco. Followed by that the Hindutva groups launched an extensive social media campaign to sway public opinion in their favor. It's evident that falsehoods, misinformation, misinterpretation, and deceptive propaganda are the tools wielded by casteist forces to further their agenda. Notably, Hindutva organizations, with their substantial cash reserves of two million dollars, have used these resources to amplify their misleading narrative

The forthcoming hearing in the Cisco case is scheduled for November 2nd and 6th, 2023. This legal battle remains a critical juncture in the ongoing struggle against caste-based discrimination, and AKSC remains resolute in its mission to confront this issue and advocate for justice.

With the Cisco case under litigation, On September 20th, 2022, the Hindu American Foundation (HAF) filed a lawsuit against the California Department of Civil Rights (DCR) in response to DCR lodging a complaint against Cisco for alleged caste-based discrimination. HAF alleged that DCR's actions violated the religious freedom of Hindus and denied them equal treatment compared to non-Hindu Americans since CDR linked caste with Hinduism. In their court argument, HAF further contended that such cases might lead to situations where employees from different castes could not collaborate effectively as a team and might refuse to work under supervisors or with reportees from a different caste. However, on August 30th, 2023, the US federal court dismissed all of HAF's allegations. The court characterized HAF's argument about whether employees from different castes could work together as "hypothetical" and ruled against their claims.

AKSC is committed to shedding light on the manipulative tactics employed by Hindutva organizations, which involve exploiting religion to oppose legal protections for the oppressed.

BAPS: Exploitation based on labor and caste.

At least three federal agencies, the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Labor are reported to be involved in the investigation of the BAPS temple in Robbinsville, NJ. The charges include multiple violations of immigration and labor laws. The workers were paid hourly wages of about \$1.20 in clear violation of both state and federal minimum wage regulations. (The minimum hourly wage in the state of New Jersey is \$12, while the hourly mean wage in New Jersey for stonemasons is \$26).

AKSC has taken the initiative to create a comprehensive [FAQ](#) addressing the BAPS case. This resource has been instrumental in providing essential information and educating the American public about the significance of this important case.

Campaign for Prop-16

AKSC was part of the state level campaign team and involved in the campaign by placing lawn signs around the bay area, organized online campaigns and a couple of webinars on the same. The voters of California rejected prop-16 by 57.2% to 42.8%. Prop 16 aimed to reintroduce affirmative action in education, employment and public contracts . Of the 58 counties only 6 voted 'yes' of which 5 counties are in the San Francisco bay area.

One of the major challenges of the campaign was to explain to the people that Prop-16 is NOT to introduce a quota system. The biggest loser as a single social group of Prop-16 is the women of California. If Prop-16 had been voted 'yes' women as well minority-owned businesses would have availed close to USD 1 billion of public contracts.

The AKSC campaign team should have reached beyond its echo chambers. Also we should have explained how social justice is typically undermined with pseudo-merit. AKSC will continue to educate the masses on the issues of pseudo-merit, state's role in social justice, the importance of a free college education, etc.

Campaign for Prop-22

In the November 2020 ballot, gig economy companies introduced Proposition 22 (Prop-22), a measure aimed at classifying their workers as independent contractors. However, many of these workers believed that this classification stripped them of essential rights and benefits typically granted to employees. In response, they launched a campaign to reject Prop-22, advocating for the protection of their rights.

The Ambedkar King Study Circle (AKSC) stood in solidarity with these workers and supported their campaign to vote "NO" on Prop-22. This support demonstrated AKSC's commitment to workers' rights and its dedication to ensuring a fair and equitable labor environment, particularly for those in the gig economy.

Money spent on Prop-22 by the corporate is the highest amount spent for any proposition in American electoral campaign history. \$200 million spent by Uber, Lyft and other gig companies saw immediate results after the election night. When a majority of California voters voted yes on Prop-22, Uber and Lyft gained \$13 billion in combined market value. Uber shares rose as much as 18% and Lyft shares jumped as much as 22% on Nov 4th Wednesday. The gig companies spent \$200m in a month for a campaign and reaped \$13,000 million in a day. 58.6% (9,874,555) voted Yes and 41.4% (6,979,133) voted 'No'.

Support for Indian Farmers protest to withdraw Farm Laws

Starting November 2020, Indian farmers from Punjab and from other states, protested against the new 'farming bills' passed by Government of India and asked the Government to completely rescind those three laws. They occupied the streets of Delhi in bitter cold, and hundreds sacrificed their lives. Farmers from all walks of life, from small 2 acre landowners to 10s of acres protested, This one protest that caught the attention of the whole world, many leaders of worlds are with farmers.

The Ambedkar King Study Circle (AKSC) recognized this importance and took the initiative to organize a lecture series. We have organized an 8 lecture series between Dec 2020 and Feb 2021. These lectures were presented by real activists, leaders of farming groups, and academics, shedding light on the multifaceted aspects of this critical issue. AKSC's efforts have contributed to spreading awareness and fostering a better understanding of the farmers' plight and their struggle for their rights and livelihoods.

AKSC organized a final talk on this issue on 23rd Nov 2021 after the Indian government withdrew the Bill. The lecture series was well received by the IT workers whose families are involved in farming back in India.

Programs Organized

Sl.No	Program Name	Date	Remarks
1	Agrarian Crisis: Discussion Series [Total of 8 talks]	Dec 17 2020 - Feb 25 2020	Online
2	CALIFORNIA'S PROP-16: Using the ballot box to increase access and equity by Dr. Julian Vasquez Heilig, University of Kentucky	Oct 03, 2020	Online
3	WHAT IS CALIFORNIA'S PROP-16 AND WHY IS IT NEEDED? By Ms. Reshma Shamasunder, Campaign Strategist for California PROP-16	Oct, xx, 2020	Online
4	WHY TO VOTE "NO" on CALIFORNIA'S PROP-22? By Prof. BIJU MATHEW	Oct 15, 2020	Online

5	Dr. King Birthday	Jan 15, 2021	Online
5	Race and Caste - Hegemonies in Democracy: Intricacies and Approach by Isabel Wilkerson	May 06, 2021	Online
6	Emancipatory Art in the Era of Social Media: Challenges & Opportunities by Arivu	Apr 24, 2021	Online
7	IP Rights & The Political Economy of india's Vaccine Policy by Prof. R. Ramakumar	May 13, 2021	Online
8	Periyar Birthday Commemoration: Social Justice in the 21st Century by Com. K. Radhakrishnan, Minister for Devaswom (Hindu Temple Trust), Kerala.	Sep 17, 2021	Online
9	Peasant Movement, its Victory & the Tasks Ahead by Com. Raja Ram Singh	Nov 23, 2021	Online
10	Dravidian Model by Dr. A Kalaiyaran	Dec 29, 2021	Online
11	Veeralur, Tamil Nadu: Caste Mob Attack (Will the Indian legal System and Judiciary Uphold Justice) by Dr. P. Venkatesan	Jan 27, 2022	Online
12	Dr. B.R Ambedkar 132nd Birth Anniversary.	Apr 15, 2022	In-Person
13	Meet and Greet with Arivu	Aug 12, 2022	In-Person
14	Inspiring Journey by Kennithraj	Dec 08, 2022	Online
15	Book Introduction of Tamil Translation of Incidents in the life of a slave girl by Harriet Jacobs	Feb 23, 2023	Online
16	Screening of India: The Modi Question (BBC Documentary) and pubic Discussion with Mr. Imran Dawood	Mar 04, 2023	In-Person
17	Dr. B.R Ambedkar 132nd Birth Anniversary	Apr 15, 2023	In-Person
18	America Against Caste Discrimination (AACD) launch	Jun 25, 2023	In-Person

Programs Co-Sponsored

Sl.No	Program Name	Date	Remarks
1	Dismantling Global Hindutva Conference	Dec 17 2020 - Feb 25 2020	Online
2	Dr. King Birthday	Jan 15, 2021	Online
3	Book Introduction: Diary, a Tamil short stories collection written by Arulmozhi	Mar 08, 2023	Online

Book Discussions

1. Republic of Caste by Anand Teltumbde
2. Cultural Revolt in Colonial India by Gail Omvent
3. Myth of Holy Cow by D.N Jha
4. Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl by Harriet Jacobs
5. Pedagogy of the Oppressed by Paulo Freire

Conclusion

We have gained rich experience through organizing campaigns, programs and readings & discussions. These activities deepened our understanding about the practice of caste in the USA and how this is upheld by the Hindutva organizations. These very activities helped us to prioritize and strategize our tasks in the anti-caste struggle.

Even though SB 403 has been vetoed, we've seen caste discriminatory practices being recognized in a few companies, and the inclusion of caste-based discrimination in the Equal Employment Commission (EEC) policy by the Department of Civil Rights in California. These developments provide a glimmer of hope and relief to those who have experienced caste-based discrimination in their workplaces, as it enables them to report such incidents.

AKSC recognizes workers from the so-called higher castes who possess anti-caste awareness as valuable allies in addressing any form of caste discrimination in the workplace. In

our experience, when individuals are subjected to direct or indirect scrutiny regarding their caste, most remain silent and do not challenge these conversations. Legal remedies are only feasible when workers unite against casteist colleagues. We can draw an important lesson from the Cisco caste discrimination case, where two of John's colleagues courageously confirmed to the Cisco HR about John's caste being outed and the subsequent retaliation. AKSC will actively engage and collaborate with anti-caste workers from the so-called upper castes.

The invaluable lesson drawn from our experience with SB 403 is that AKSC must, with unwavering dedication, redouble our efforts to broaden its membership base. Simultaneously, we should focus on the cultivation and education of grassroots working-class individuals, nurturing their ability to lead and spearhead the anti-caste movement across the USA.