

CISCO SYSTEMS INC.: CASTE CONUNDRUM REGARDING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION¹

Pardeep Singh Attri, Chetan Joshi, and Hari Bapuji, wrote this case solely to provide material for class discussion. The authors do not intend to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a managerial situation. The authors may have disguised certain names and other identifying information to protect confidentiality.

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Version: 2021-08-19

The caste problem is a vast one, both theoretically and practically. Practically, it is an institution that portends tremendous consequences. It is a local problem, but one 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.

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, 1916²

On June 30, 2020, the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH) in the United States filed a legal claim against Cisco Systems Inc. (Cisco) that alleged workplace discrimination, harassment, and retaliation against an unnamed employee (named Avji Hural in this case study),³ a Dalit⁴ who worked at Cisco's corporate headquarters in San Jose, California. The claim alleged that Hural's supervisors and co-workers—both from upper castes in India—expected Hural to accept a caste hierarchy at the workplace. According to the claim, Hural

received less pay, fewer opportunities, and other inferior terms and conditions of employment because of his religion, ancestry, national origin/ethnicity, and race/color. . . . Worse yet, Cisco failed to even acknowledge the unlawful nature of the conduct, nor did it take any steps necessary to prevent such discrimination, harassment, and retaliation from continuing in its workplace.⁵

According to the claim, Hural had brought his plight to Cisco's notice in 2016 and 2017; however, Cisco had apparently failed to recognize and remedy the unfair treatment that Hural received due to his caste.

A substantial portion of Cisco's workforce traced its roots to the Indian subcontinent, where the caste system was prevalent. Many other leading companies in Silicon Valley and in the developed West also employed people of South Asian origin. This legal claim highlighted a type of potential discrimination that managers may not have been aware of before. What could managers learn from what happened at Cisco? How did caste and caste discrimination manifest in workplaces, and how could organizations address the bias and outcomes that stemmed from casteism? Were there other lessons for firms related to the inclusion of individuals from diverse ethnic, racial, and national backgrounds?

CISCO SYSTEMS INC.

Founding and History

Headquartered in San Jose, California, Cisco was a high-tech conglomerate and worldwide leader in providing communications and networking devices. It was founded in 1984 by two computer scientists from Stanford University, Sandy Lerner and Len Bosack, who aspired to connect different types of computer systems.⁶ The company shipped its first product in 1986,⁷ and in 1990, it was listed on NASDAQ with a valuation of US\$224 million.⁸ Cisco had secured 10,000 patents by 2013,⁹ and it claimed that 85 per cent of Internet traffic travelled through its system.¹⁰

In March 2020, Cisco was valued at over \$500 billion. As of May 26, 2020, it had a market capitalization of \$189 billion.¹¹ Its worldwide revenue in fiscal year (FY) 2020 was around \$49.3 billion, with 51 per cent of revenue coming from software and services.¹² Its net income that same year was \$11.2 billion.¹³ In recent years, reflecting the trends in information technology, Cisco's focus had been on artificial intelligence, 5G wireless, data centre infrastructure, and cybersecurity. In the 2020 ranking of most valued brands of telecom infrastructure companies, Cisco ranked second, after Huawei Technologies Co. Ltd., with a brand value of \$23.32 billion.¹⁴

In 2020, Cisco was operating in approximately 100 countries and had over 450 offices worldwide. It had 77,500 employees around the globe, 38,900 of which were based in the United States.¹⁵ Of the 38,600 people employed outside the United States, about 11,000 were employed in India. Growth at Cisco India was "faster than the market," with "19% year-on-year growth in FY [20]19, highest in the Asia Pacific–Japan and China (APJC) region."¹⁶ Worldwide, most of the employees (25,800) at Cisco were engaged in sales and marketing activities, with 22,200 employees in research and development. Within California, Cisco employed almost 18,000 employees.¹⁷

Employment at Cisco

Over the years, Cisco had hired a significant number of Indian employees at its US offices by using the H-1B visa program, which allowed US companies to employ foreign workers in certain specialty occupations.¹⁸ In fact, Cisco was among the top five H-1B visa users in the United States.¹⁹ Many other US companies also hired Indian employees as a major portion of the company's staff, using the H-1B visa. For example, in FY 2019, over 70 per cent of the H-1B visas issued (278,491 of the 388,403 visas) were awarded to individuals who were born in India.²⁰ Competition for H-1B visas was so intense that with the high number of eligible applicants and the limited number of available visas, the application process usually closed on the day it opened.²¹

As a federal contractor, Cisco was obliged to abide by US regulations related to equal opportunities and fair employment practices.²² Nonetheless, Cisco had faced criticism for its employment and business practices. In 2007, the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) accused Cisco of practising discrimination against minority job applicants. After reviewing complaints from five separate job applicants—four complaints from African Americans and one from a South Asian American—EEOC reported that Cisco "demonstrated an ongoing pattern and practice of not hiring qualified, minority candidates based on their race, color and national origin."²³ In 2008, Cisco was criticized for enabling censorship and surveillance and helping authoritarian regimes in human rights violations.²⁴

Inclusion and Diversity at Cisco

Cisco will be a critical voice advocating for fairness and equality—we're committed to driving long-term solutions that build fairness into policies, practices, and laws that break down barriers.

Francine Katsoudas, chief people officer, Cisco²⁵

Cisco was committed to creating a diverse, inclusive, and conscious culture—"a culture built on fairness, dignity and respect, free from bias, discrimination and negative behavior."²⁶ Inclusivity was one of Cisco's core values;²⁷ the company's mission was "to shape the future of the Internet by creating unprecedented value and opportunity for our customers, employees, investors, and ecosystem partners."²⁸ In 2018, along with Google LLC, Nike Inc., and others, Cisco signed a joint business statement to support transgender equality.²⁹ In the 2019 *Code of Business Conduct* report, Cisco's chairman and chief executive officer, Chuck Robbins, wrote in his welcome message, "Cisco does not tolerate harassment or discrimination of any kind. It is important that you feel confident and safe in sharing any concerns and that Cisco will address the concerns in an appropriate manner."³⁰

To build a diverse workforce and connect with communities, Cisco worked with employee resource organizations: Back to Business Network, Cisco Asian Affinity Network, Connected Disability Awareness Network, Connected Black Professionals, Conexión, Early Career Network, Indians Connecting People, Interfaith Network, Men for Inclusion, PRIDE, Veterans Enablement and Troop Support, Women of Cisco, Women in Finance, and Women in Science and Engineering.³¹ According to Cisco's 2019 annual report, 46 per cent of Cisco's executive leadership team were women. Cisco had won multiple awards for diversity and inclusion. It was listed first on *Fortune's* 2020 list of the "World's 25 Best Workplaces" and 16th on Fairygodboss's 2020 list of "Best Technology Companies" for women. In 2019, Cisco was named by *DIVERSEability Magazine* as a "Best of the Best" top disability-friendly company.³² In 2019, Cisco ranked second on *Fortune's* list of the "100 Best Workplaces for Diversity"³³ and first on *Fortune's* "World's 25 Best Workplaces."³⁴

CASTE SYSTEM: IMPLICATIONS IN INDIA

The caste system was one of the longest-surviving systems of socio-economic hierarchy, going back at least 2,500 years. Caste, although predominantly associated with Hinduism, existed in all the major religions in India, including Islam, Sikhism, and Christianity. According to some of the religious scriptures of Hinduism, humankind was divided into four hierarchical *varnas* (groups or categories).³⁵ The system placed *Brahmins* (scholars, priests, advisers to kings) at the top, followed by *Kshatriyas* (warriors, kings, administrators), *Vaishyas* (traders, businesspeople), and, at the bottom, *Shudras* (peasants, artisans, labourers).³⁶

Another group of people, identified as *Untouchables*, were outside the varna system and were considered "impure," "unclean," and "inferior."³⁷ In recent decades, this group—*outcastes*, officially known as *Scheduled Castes* (SCs)—identified themselves as *Dalits* (oppressed). Another group that did not fall under the caste system were the *Adivasis* (tribal and indigenous groups), officially known as *Scheduled Tribes* (STs).³⁸ The STs consisted of many distinct groups of people who were indigenous to the subcontinent and lived in settlements away from the villages and administrative centres. The villages and administrative centres were organized based largely on the caste system. As such, the STs were outside the purview of the caste system.³⁹

The top three *varnas* formed the upper castes, whereas *Shudras*, *Dalits*, and *Adivasis* were considered lower castes. Within each varna existed thousands of castes and sub-castes, with the status of different castes and sub-castes differing depending on the region, making it an extraordinarily complex system. Although the exact

population data on different caste groups in India was not available apart from the population percentages of SCs and STs, rough estimates put the population of Brahmins at 6–7 per cent, Kshatriyas at 5–6 per cent, and Vaishyas at 3–4 per cent. Shudras, specifically those castes who remained socio-economically underdeveloped, were officially known as *Other Backward Classes* (OBCs) and were estimated to make up 41–52 per cent of the population; SCs were estimated to make up 17 per cent, and STs, 9 per cent.⁴⁰

As one went down the hierarchy of the varna system, one's privileges declined, and disadvantages increased. Sometimes, different punishments were assigned for the same crimes depending on which caste the offender came from. Even a Dalit's shadow was considered impure. Specific occupations were assigned to each caste, with Dalits being assigned work such as carrying and skinning dead animals, cleaning streets, manual scavenging, and other menial tasks. Dalits were forced to live outside the villages and were prohibited from getting an education and accessing public spaces, such as temples and lakes. In addition to assigning occupations, caste also influenced an individual's social life, prescribed endogamy, and placed restrictions on social intercourse, limiting the interaction among various castes. About 90 per cent of marriages in India still took place within the caste boundaries; the system was still so ingrained that going outside the norms sometimes led to "honour killings."⁴¹

The Constitution of India, adopted in 1950, abolished untouchability and criminalized discrimination based on caste. Yet, untouchability and caste discrimination continued to affect millions of lives in practice. Caste remained an integral part of Indian society and was sometimes called "hidden apartheid."⁴² Newspapers offered examples of persistent practices: Dalits were forced to drink tea from cups reserved especially for them;⁴³ Dalits were forbidden to wear footwear and ride bicycles or motorcycles;⁴⁴ a Dalit groom was pulled from a horse he was riding in his wedding procession and subjected to casteist slurs;⁴⁵ a wall was erected dividing two sub-castes of Dalits, denying one group access to the temple and another group access to their residential street;⁴⁶ and during a drought, Dalits were denied access to local hand wells and to the water trucked in by tanker.⁴⁷ Dalits were also sometimes denied access to a temple.⁴⁸ The caste system still pervaded higher education institutes, where caste discrimination was cited as the cause of multiple suicides.⁴⁹

India's constitution provided several safeguards to the marginalized groups. For example, article 15 prohibited discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth; article 16 enshrined equal opportunities; article 17 abolished untouchability; and article 46 protected not only SCs and STs but also all marginalized groups from social injustice and all forms of exploitation. To address the historical injustices and caste discrimination, and to ensure equal access for those in lower castes, a portion of seats in higher education, civil service, and legislative bodies were reserved for those from SCs (15 per cent of the total seats) and STs (7.5 per cent of the total seats).⁵⁰ Later, according to the guidelines of the Mandal Commission, 27 per cent of the total seats were reserved for OBCs (or Shudras, but excluding those groups considered socio-economically advanced). In 2019, the government of India added a reservation of 10 per cent for the "Economically Weaker Section" among those who were not subject to the above affirmative action.⁵¹ Apart from these, certain seats were reserved for persons with disabilities.⁵²

The reservations allowed individuals from the historically marginalized castes, particularly Dalits and Adivasis, to receive education and secure employment in the government and public sector. As a result, literacy rates among STs and SCs increased dramatically (see Exhibit 1). However, people from those castes were largely employed in lower levels of the government hierarchy; their share of lower positions was much larger, and their share of higher positions was much smaller, than their population share (see Exhibit 2).⁵³

Although individuals from lower castes received the benefit of affirmative action (i.e., reservations and quotas), they faced discrimination in public institutions. According to a 2019 report, 2,400 students dropped out of Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) in two years; almost half of those students belonged to SCs,

STs, or OBCs, and caste discrimination was mentioned as one of the reasons for dropping out.⁵⁴ Also, while affirmative action was applicable in the public sector, the private sector was not required to implement reservation policies. Thus, the Indian corporate sector had not implemented affirmative action with respect to caste; it saw reservations as compromising decision-making based on merit and therefore had avoided any consideration of caste.⁵⁵ Although reservation policies were enshrined in the constitution and had been implemented for nearly seven decades, attitudes toward the policies continued to be unfavourable (see Exhibit 3). Researchers found that managers in India were less favourable than their counterparts in the United States to affirmative action. Generally, individuals who used caste-based reservations were deemed incompetent and unworthy of the affirmative action benefits they received.⁵⁶

Due to centuries of accumulated inequalities, caste still influenced control over resources and economic activities (see Exhibit 4).⁵⁷ The inequality was reflected in income among castes, with those in the upper castes having a higher income than those in the lower castes.⁵⁸ This situation was also reflected in the professional and corporate sectors (see Exhibit 5). For example, over 90 per cent of Indian corporate board members belonged to the upper castes,⁵⁹ and more than 90 per cent of leadership positions in media were held by upper castes.⁶⁰

Caste also affected the actions of individuals within organizations. Researchers found that most mergers and acquisitions took place between organizations whose directors belonged to the same castes.⁶¹ Caste discrimination was also found in hiring, with individuals from lower castes, all other things being equal, receiving fewer invitations than those from higher castes to interview and, if hired, receiving lower wages and poorer job assignments.⁶² Several other negative implications had also been attributed to caste, including a lack of innovation in India.⁶³

Unlike gender and ethnicity, which could often be inferred by a person's physical appearance, caste could not be inferred easily. To identify a person's caste, one needed to use a range of factors, such as the person's last name, the last name of the person's parents or grandparents, skin colour (lower castes generally tended to have darker skin), locality of residence, dietary practices (upper castes, particularly most Brahmins and Vaishyas, tended to follow a vegetarian diet), cultural and religious practices, and so on. Given this, some Dalits did not reveal their caste identity (or even hid it by adopting one or more markers that prevented questions about their caste) to avoid socio-economic discrimination.⁶⁴

CASTE: MANIFESTATIONS OUTSIDE INDIA

According to 2020 research from the Pew Research Center, immigrants accounted for 13.7 per cent of the US population, with approximately more than a million immigrants arriving in the United States each year. In 2016, almost 2.4 million immigrants living in the United States had been born in India. In 2018, India was the second most common country of origin, after China, for new immigrants to the United States. As of 2020, three states hosted almost half (45 per cent) of the immigrants living in the United States: California (24 per cent), Texas (11 per cent), and Florida (10 per cent).⁶⁵ Over 90 per cent of migrants from India to the United States were upper castes; Dalits were estimated to make up about 1.5 per cent (or lower) of Indian immigrants in the United States, while the rest belonged to the intermediate castes.⁶⁶

In the first report of its kind, Equality Labs took stock of the role of caste in the United States. Over 1,500 people responded to Equality Labs' survey, with around 50 per cent of respondents coming from the upper castes. Among various other statistics, the report highlighted that 25 per cent of Dalits faced verbal or physical assault; approximately 67 per cent of Dalits were treated unfairly at their workplaces; 60 per cent of Dalits reported being subject to caste-based derogatory comments; and 40 per cent were made to feel unwelcome at their place of worship because of their caste. Approximately 33 per cent of Dalit students faced discrimination in schools, and over 40 per cent of Dalits reported being rejected in a romantic partnership based on caste.⁶⁷

The presence of caste discrimination was reported in other parts of the world as well. For example, in its 2014 report, the UK Equality and Human Rights Commission recommended that caste be included in the Equality Act 2010 as a basis for discrimination.⁶⁸ In the 2015 general elections to the UK House of Commons, both Hindu and Sikh organizations, mostly led by upper castes, appealed to their followers to vote against those political parties that supported the inclusion of caste in the Equality Act.⁶⁹ Perhaps as a result of the political pressure, caste was never included in the Equality Act, making it difficult for Dalits and other lower castes to pursue caste discrimination cases. In 2015, the United Kingdom's employment tribunal acknowledged that caste should be an aspect of race and that caste discrimination could constitute race discrimination. Further, in the first caste discrimination case that was brought to the tribunal, the tribunal awarded almost £200,000⁷⁰ to a victim of caste discrimination.⁷¹

In February 2020, Shaadi.com, one of United Kingdom's largest Indian matrimonial websites, was accused of reinforcing social divisions and prejudices with its algorithm discriminating against Dalits. An investigation by the *Sunday Times* found that the profiles set up by Brahmins were not offered potential matches with Dalits unless the Brahmins specifically changed their settings to include all castes. Shaadi.com denied these allegations, and the question of whether the website's algorithm met the equality laws in the United Kingdom remained unanswered.⁷²

Recognizing the potential for discrimination based on caste, some organizations set out to understand caste, while others took steps and recognized caste as a category of discrimination. For example, in December 2019, Brandeis University, Massachusetts, became the first American university to include caste in a non-discrimination and harassment policy, stating that "caste identity is so intertwined with many of the legally recognized and protected characteristics, discrimination based on a person's caste is effectively the same."⁷³

Cisco employed many workers from India and in India, but caste did not appear in the company's anti-discriminatory and diversity policies, either in the US or Indian divisions. Diversity initiatives at Cisco were primarily focused on Black Americans and women. Cisco's 2020 report on social justice in the company also did not mention caste.⁷⁴

ALLEGED CASTEISM AT CISCO⁷⁵

On June 30, 2020, DFEH filed a claim against Cisco alleging caste-based discrimination, harassment, and retaliation against Hural, a Dalit from India who worked at Cisco's corporate headquarters in San Jose, California.

Hural had over 20 years of experience in software development life cycle processes at start-ups and established companies. In September 2015, Sundar Iyer recruited and hired Hural as a principal engineer for Cisco "because of his expertise and experience." While at Cisco's San Jose headquarters, Hural worked on teams that mainly consisted of Indian employees with upper caste background. Iyer, who was Hural's supervisor and controlled day-to-day activities, and Ramana Kompella, a co-worker, were upper caste Brahmins; both knew that Hural belonged to the Dalit community. Iyer was aware of Hural's caste because both had attended an IIT at the same time.⁷⁶

In October 2016, two colleagues disclosed to Hural that Iyer had revealed Hural's identity as Dalit by informing them that Hural had attended IIT through the reservation policy. When Hural confronted Iyer for disclosing his identity to others (making him a potential target for caste discrimination), Iyer denied the allegation and said Hural's colleagues were lying.

In November 2016, Hural approached Cisco's human resources (HR) department and filed a discrimination complaint against Iyer. A few days later, Iyer took away Hural's "role as lead on two technologies." In the same month, Iyer promoted Kompella to the position of head of southbound engineering. With this promotion, Kompella gained control over "day-to-day assignments and [the power to] recommend employment actions for those on his team, including Hural." Also in November, Hural's "role was reduced to that of a system architect as an independent contributor, and he was isolated from all his colleagues."

In December 2016, Hural filed a written complaint, mentioning Iyer's disclosure of Hural's caste and sudden changes in his job roles. Hural also complained that Iyer made discriminatory comments against a colleague and a Muslim job applicant. Cisco's employee relations manager, Brenda Davis, conducted the investigation in which Iyer admitted that he had told colleagues that Hural was not on the "main list"⁷⁷ for admission to IIT, which gave away Hural's caste. Iyer also accepted that he had joked about the religion of one of Hural's colleagues and talked about a job applicant's Muslim-looking appearance. Davis did not contact Hural or others who might have been relevant to the case and did not recommend any corrective actions against Iyer. Davis and other Cisco employee relations staff mentioned that "caste discrimination was not unlawful," and, thus, no further actions were required. In February 2017, Davis closed the case, noting that Hural's complaints were unsubstantiated.

According to DFEH, retaliation against Hural continued. He was further sidelined, and Iyer informed other team members that Hural did not perform his duties well and that they should avoid working with him. In March 2017, Hural asked for a review of Davis's findings. After repeated appeals by Hural, in April 2017, HR official Tara Powell reopened the investigation. Powell interviewed one of the employees to whom Iyer had revealed Hural's caste. This employee, a good friend of Iyer, accepted that he knew Hural's caste but refused to tell how he knew. He also told Powell that Hural was competent, unfairly treated, and excluded at work. Powell did not approach the other employee to whom Iyer had disclosed Hural's caste, but two other witnesses told Powell that "they feared losing their jobs or otherwise being retaliated against for speaking out against Iyer. One of those employees also told Powell that he thought Hural was very competent and asked appropriate questions, but that Iyer was setting Hural up to push him out of the company." Powell's investigation also revealed that Iyer had promised Hural raises, bonuses, and restricted stock unit awards, but that these benefits never materialized for Hural, although they did for four other employees.

In August 2017, Powell finished her investigation and concluded that "she could not substantiate any caste-based or related discrimination or retaliation against Hural." In the same investigation, Powell determined that Iyer had mocked an employee's religion, a violation of Cisco's code of conduct, but she did not recommend any corrective measures.

In February 2018, Iyer stepped down, and Kompella became the interim head of engineering for Cisco, becoming Hural's direct supervisor. Discrimination, harassment, and retaliation against Hural continued, with Hural being assigned jobs that were impossible to complete. Kompella ordered Hural to submit weekly status reports to him and a senior vice-president. In May 2018, Rajeev Gupta took over from Kompella and became the director of engineering and, thus, Hural's supervisor.

In July 2018, Hural applied to Gupta for the position of director of research and development operations. According to Gupta's interview notes, Hural was ranked "meeting requirements" only in two out of eight categories and "below average" in the remaining six. To justify this ranking, Gupta referenced in his assessment notes that a lead role had been taken away from Hural and that the job had been reduced to that of an independent contractor. His notes broadly reflected Iyer's retaliatory criticisms about Hural's "work product, social skills, and insubordination." Hural was not offered the position (see Exhibit 6).

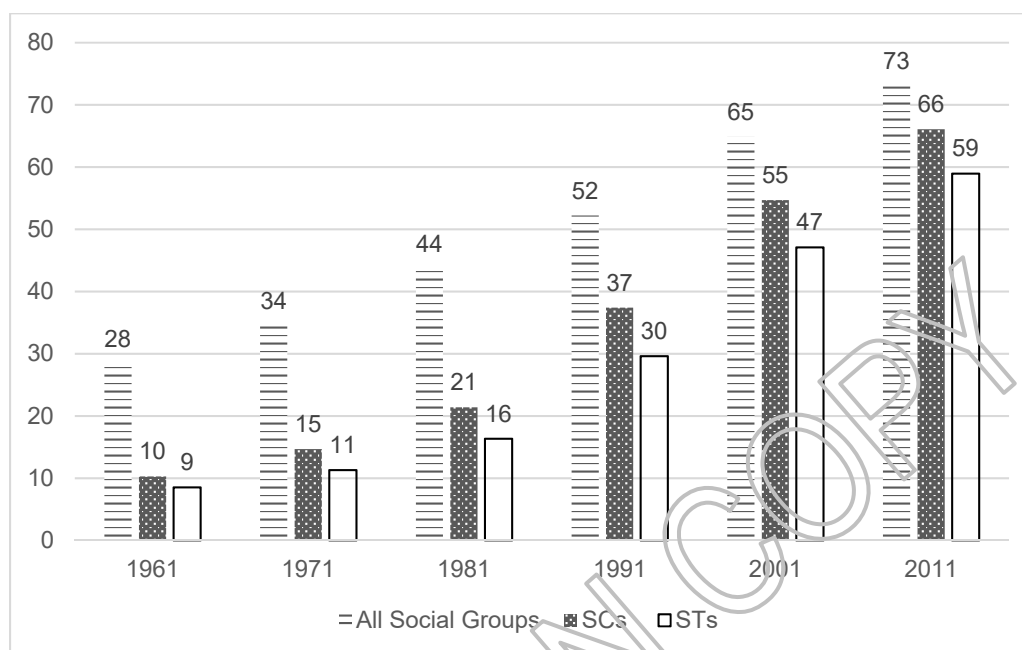
Later, Hural went to DFEH and filed a complaint. On June 30, 2020, DFEH filed a claim under the California Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA) alleging that Cisco “engaged in unlawful employment practices on the basis of religion, ancestry, national origin/ethnicity, and race/color” against the Dalit engineer, Hural. DFEH further claimed that when Hural opposed such unlawful practices, “Cisco retaliated against him. Cisco also failed to take all reasonable steps to prevent such unlawful practices in its workplace, as required under FEHA.” Moreover, the claim stated, despite having a predominantly South Asian workforce at Cisco, the company’s training was not sufficient to train managerial employees on workplace discrimination, and the company had failed to prevent or monitor casteism in its workforce.

REMEDATING CASTEISM: THE ROAD AHEAD

The alleged casteism at Cisco put the spotlight on possible unlawful workplace practices where an individual’s religion, caste, ancestry, national origin or ethnicity, and race or colour became a reason for discrimination, harassment, and retaliation. As organizations around the globe charted steps toward encouraging heterogeneity, what lessons could they learn from the sequence of events that had led to this legal claim?

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EXHIBIT 1: LITERACY RATES OF ALL SOCIAL GROUPS AND BY POPULATION OF SCs AND STs, 1961–2011 (%)



Note: SCs = Scheduled Castes; STs = Scheduled Tribes. Percentages have been rounded off.
 Source: Government of India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Statistics Division, *Statistical Profile of Scheduled Tribes in India 2013*, 164, <https://tribal.nic.in/ST/StatisticalProfileofSTs2013.pdf>.

EXHIBIT 2: REPRESENTATION OF SCs, OBCs, AND OTHERS IN GROUPS A, B, AND C OF CENTRAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES IN INDIA, AS OF JANUARY 1, 2013

Group ¹	SCs (Dalits)		STs (Adivasis)		OBCs		Others ²		Total No.
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
A	7,890	12.06	3,324	3.08	5,477	8.37	48,723	74.48	65,414
B	22,233	15.73	8,475	5.93	14,156	10.01	96,441	68.25	141,305
C	424,949	17.53	187,898	7.75	435,704	17.98	1,374,643	56.73	2,423,194
Total	455,072	17.30	139,697	7.59	455,337	17.31	1,519,807	57.79	2,629,913

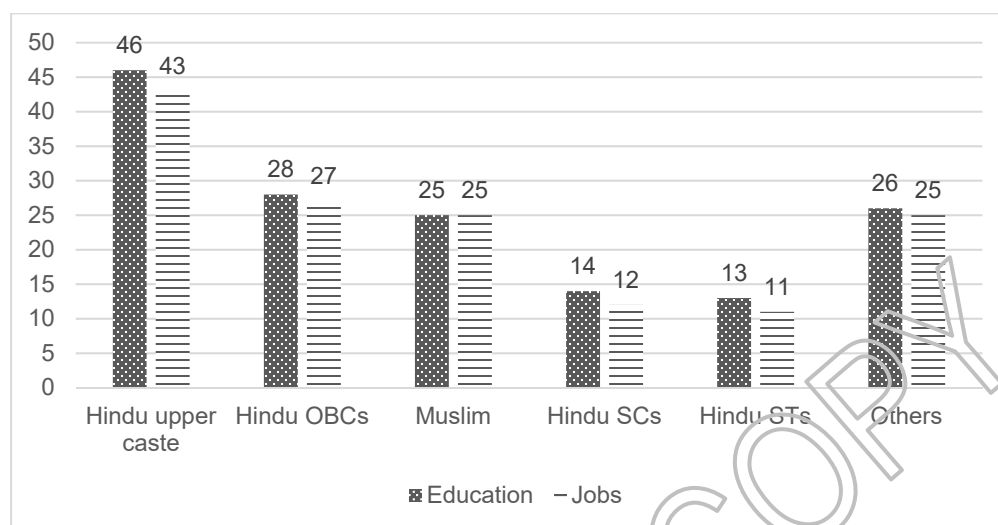
Note: SCs = Scheduled Castes; OBCs = Other Backward Classes; STs = Scheduled Tribes. Quotas (reservations in jobs) for these groups are as follows: OBCs, 27%; SCs, 15%; and STs, 7.5%.

¹ Employees of the government of India were divided into four broad categories or groups. Group A ranked the highest, with the best benefits, followed by groups B, C, and D. Group D included the lowest classified jobs, such as sweeper, and received the lowest benefits. Comparable data for Group D positions was not available, but studies had shown that they were filled with lower caste individuals, particularly SCs and STs.

² Others included general categories (Brahmin, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and other castes/communities considered socio-economically advanced and thus outside the purview of affirmative action quotas).

Source: Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, *Annual Report, 2013–14*, 53, https://dopt.gov.in/sites/default/files/AR2013_2014%28Eng%29.pdf; Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, *Handbook on Social Welfare Statistics*, 349, January 2016, <http://socialjustice.nic.in/writereaddata/UploadFile/HANDBOOK%20Social%20Welfare%20Statistic%202016.pdf>.

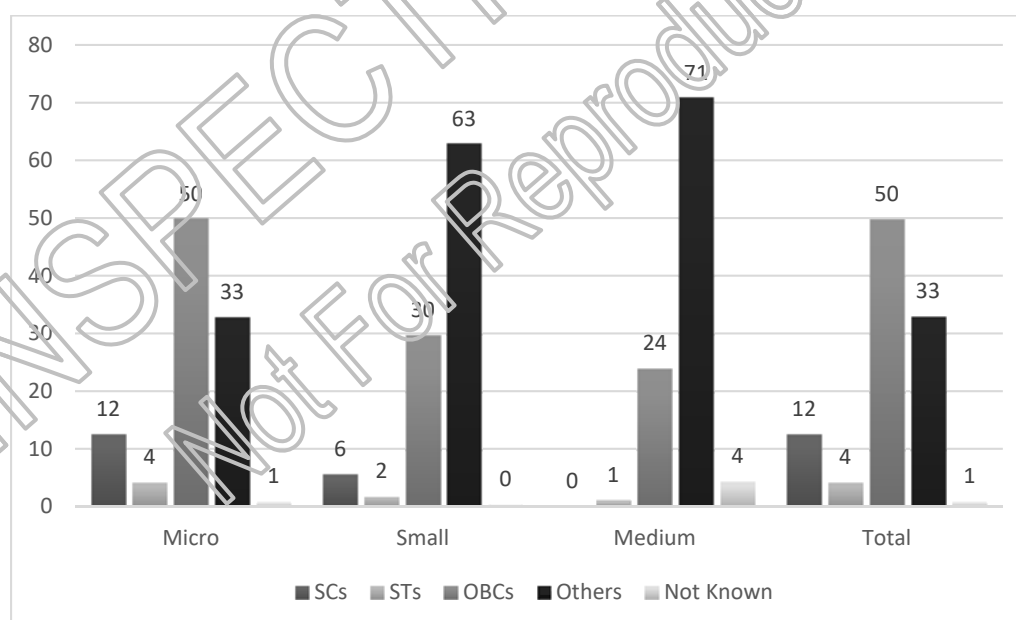
EXHIBIT 3: OPPOSITION AMONG YOUNG ADULTS ACROSS INDIA TOWARD RESERVATION FOR SCs AND STs IN EDUCATION AND JOBS, BY RELIGION, 2016 (%)



Note: SCs = Scheduled Castes; STs = Scheduled Tribes; OBCs = Other Backward Castes.

Source: "Opposition Towards Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Reservations in Education Among Young Adults Across India in 2016, by Religion," Statista, April 2017, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/734010/young-adults-against-sc-st-reservations-in-education-by-religion-india>; and "Opposition to SC/ST Reservations in Education Among Young Adults in India 2016," Statista, October 16, 2020, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/734004/young-adults-against-sc-st-reservations-in-jobs-by-religion-india>.

EXHIBIT 4: OWNERSHIP OF MICRO, SMALL, AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES ACROSS INDIA IN FINANCIAL YEAR 2019, BY SOCIAL GROUP (%)



Note: SCs = Scheduled Castes; STs = Scheduled Tribes; OBCs = Other Backward Classes. Percentages have been rounded off.

Source: Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, *Annual Report 2018-19*, 31, <https://msme.gov.in/sites/default/files/Annualrprt.pdf>.

EXHIBIT 5: DISTRIBUTION OF VARIOUS CASTE GROUPS IN SOME OF THE ELITE PROFESSIONS (%)

Caste Group	Population	Board of Directors	Judges of the Supreme Court of India (1950–1989)	Lok Sabha* Member of Parliament, 2019	Leadership Positions in English Media
Brahmin	5.70	55.13	42.9	42.8	89.3
Kshatriyas	4.60	4.15	49.4	(Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas)	(Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas)
Vaishyas	2.20	34.8	(Kshatriyas and Vaishyas)		
Shudra (OBCs)	41.00	1.75	5.2	22.8	...
SCs	16.6	0.01	2.6	16.2	...
STs	8.6	(SCs/STs)	0	9.9	...

Note: OBCs = Other Backward Classes; SCs = Scheduled Castes; STs = Scheduled Tribes. Percentages in the table do not add up to 100 because data for some religions is not included and some data is not available.

*Lok Sabha is the lower house of India's parliament. Its present strength is 543, and members are elected for five years. Under the reservation rules, 15.5% of seats are reserved for SCs and 8.6% for STs. SC and ST members of parliament have rarely been selected from non-reserved seats.

Source: Thomas Piketty, "Ternary Societies and Colonialism: The Case of India," chap. 8 in *Capital and Ideology* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020), 304–361. Data for Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas is their share in India's Hindu population, which is about 80% of the Indian population, for 2014. Vaishyas data includes two groups—Baniyas and Kayasths. Local high castes such as Marathas (about 2%) are not added in Piketty's data. Given the lack of consensus around which castes are considered higher castes, Piketty argues that the high-caste population is about 15–20% of the Hindu population, depending on the definition used. Data on OBCs represents their share in India's total population. National Sample Survey Organisation, Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation, Government of India, "Employment and Unemployment Situation Among Social Groups in India 2004–05," October 2006, http://mospi.nic.in/sites/default/files/national_data_bank/pdf/516_final.pdf; Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, "A-5 Union Primary Census Abstract," 2011 Census Data, https://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/hlo/pca/pca_pdf/PCA-CRC-0000.pdf; Ajit Dayanandan, Han Donker, and John Nofsinger, "The Role of Caste for Board Membership, CEO, and Interlocking," *Pacific Basin Finance Journal* 54 (April 2019): 29–41; George H. Gadbois Jr., *Judges of the Supreme Court of India 1950–1989* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), 344–347; Gilles Verniers and Christophe Jaffrelot, "The Reconfiguration of India's Political Elite: Profiling the 17th Lok Sabha," *Contemporary South Asia* 28, no. 2 (May 18, 2020): 242–254; Oxfam India, *Who Tells Our Stories Matters: Representation of Marginalised Caste Groups in Indian Newsrooms*, 7–36, August 2, 2019, https://www.oxfamindia.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/Oxfam%20NewsLaundry%20Report_For%20Media%20Use.pdf.

EXHIBIT 6: TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Event
September 2015	Hural joined Cisco.
October 2016	Hural came to know that his colleagues knew about his caste; his superior apparently “outed” Hural’s caste.
November 2016	Hural filed a complaint to Cisco’s human resources (HR).
November 2016	Hural’s role was reduced; he was isolated from his colleagues.
December 2016	Hural filed a written complaint, and Cisco’s employee relations manager started an investigation.
February 2017	Cisco’s employee relations manager closed the investigation, stating that “caste discrimination was not unlawful” and that Hural’s complaints were unsubstantiated.
March 2017	Hural asked for a review of the findings of Cisco’s employee relations manager.
April 2017	Cisco’s HR reopened the case.
August 2017	Cisco’s HR official once again closed the complaint, stating that there was no substantive evidence of caste-based discrimination.
July 2018	Hural applied for the position of director of research and development operations but was denied.
June 30, 2020	The California Department of Fair Employment and Housing filed a legal claim against Cisco.

Source: Created by the case authors.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ This case has been written on the basis of published sources only. Consequently, the interpretation and perspectives presented in this case are not necessarily those of Cisco Systems Inc. or any of its employees.
- ² Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Dr. Ambedkar Foundation, 1979), 5-6.
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