

Dalit Solidarity Forum USA

For reasons of security and to safeguard the individuals, organizations, and communities I was honored to work alongside, I will not disclose names of people, groups, or specific projects in this report. This is both a protective measure and an ethical stance. Much of the work I engaged in touched on deeply sensitive matters of caste discrimination, labor exploitation, and diaspora politics. To make these issues public prematurely, or without care for those most vulnerable to retaliation, would not only jeopardize ongoing advocacy but also reproduce some of the risks I was trying to study in the first place. Instead, in this written report I will speak generally about the organization's framing of "hate," the tensions I encountered in that framing, and the broader contexts in which my internship unfolded.

This summer, I interned with Dalit Solidarity Forum USA (DSF), an advocacy organization dedicated to raising awareness about caste discrimination and building solidarities across communities in the Indian diaspora and beyond. DSF's work addresses caste not only as a social hierarchy that originates in South Asia, but as a system of hate that travels, mutates, and embeds itself into institutional and everyday life across the world. As Dr. B.R. Ambedkar wrote, caste is "a state of the mind." It does not require visible walls or fences to enforce exclusion; instead, it is sustained through ideas, practices, and logics that normalize inequality. For DSF, challenging hate means making these invisible structures legible. The organization approaches caste-based discrimination as a form of systemic hate, akin to racism or xenophobia, that fundamentally reshapes social, political, and economic realities.

DSF is committed to fighting caste discrimination and advancing solidarity across communities. In its public framing, “hate” is often the category used to describe the systemic exclusion, exploitation, and violence faced by oppressed caste communities. This makes sense: in the United States, conversations around race, ethnicity, and religion are already filtered through the language of “hate crimes,” “hate speech,” and “hate groups.” To speak about caste in the idiom of “hate” allows caste to be legible within a broader American civil rights discourse. It connects the struggles of Dalit communities with other struggles against anti-Black racism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, antisemitism, etc.

Yet, this framing also has its limits. “Hate” suggests an individual affect, but what we are working with is much more structural. Caste is not merely a sentiment, it is an ordering system, a set of codes that organizes labor, property, mobility, and intimacy. To only label caste as “hate” risks flattening it into the realm of personal prejudice, when in fact it is a machinery of power. For example, when U.S. universities add caste as a protected category in anti-discrimination policies, they are taking an important step, but it is one step within a larger terrain. Structural inequities — who gets to lead community organizations or who is represented in diasporic politics — are not fully captured by the legal language of “hate.” The terminology struggles to name the sedimented logics that make exploitation appear natural, or even sacred. Therefore, one of the central tensions of my internship was learning how to navigate the uses of the “hate” framework while also interrogating its limits, being aware of its capacity to both illuminate and obscure.

A central principle of DSF’s work is that caste discrimination is not confined to the Indian subcontinent — it persists in the diaspora, affecting workplaces, religious

institutions, and community organizations. Caste hierarchies are often reproduced through ordinary practices: who is invited to cook in a kitchen, who is relegated to manual labor, whose names are included in donor lists, and whose are left out. These are not always acts of hatred, but acts of normalization. They are not necessarily driven by malice, but by entrenched codes of “purity” and “pollution.” For those who migrate with the hope of finding safety or economic mobility, caste prejudice can continue to dictate access to dignity and recognition.

In the United States, the movement for caste equity has gained visibility over the last decade. The addition of caste as a protected category in anti-discrimination policies by institutions like the California State University system and the City of Seattle reflects this growing recognition. DSF treats caste hate as a structural problem that requires structural solutions — legal recognition, institutional accountability, and grassroots mobilization. At the same time, DSF’s work insists on centering the voices of those most impacted. Their strategy reflects a commitment to solidarity: amplifying Dalit voices while building alliances with other communities struggling against different forms of discrimination. Their approach emphasizes that caste is not an isolated issue.

During my internship, I had the opportunity to contribute to ongoing research projects and to collaborate with community organizers, scholars, and legal advocates. My tasks involved synthesizing complex materials into accessible formats for broader publics, an important step in ensuring that knowledge about caste-based hate circulates beyond academic or policy spaces. This required learning how to balance rigor with accessibility,

and how to present sensitive material in a way that protects communities while still illuminating systemic patterns.

The internship deepened my understanding of how research can support advocacy. I witnessed how data, when contextualized historically and politically, can help shift public perception and policy conversations. For example, situating present-day accounts of caste discrimination within longer histories of oppression allows us to see that what might seem like isolated incidents are in fact part of systemic patterns. This approach transforms individual grievances into collective claims for justice.

What I valued most was the opportunity to learn from the DSF's sensitive approach. The organization models a way of thinking about hate that is not abstract, but rooted in people's lived experiences and struggles for justice. Their work reminds us that dismantling hate requires both confronting the ideas that normalize hierarchy and addressing the material structures that sustain it. To truly dismantle caste-based oppression requires moving towards a framework that recognizes caste as a systemic, transnational, and deeply entrenched order of power. My internship allowed me to wrestle with these questions in practice, to learn from those who live with the daily realities of caste discrimination, and to contribute, however modestly, to ongoing struggles for dignity and justice. The experience reinforced my belief that the study of hate must move beyond description, towards solidarity and accountability. I am grateful to the Bard College Center for the Study of Hate for supporting this opportunity, and to DSF for welcoming me into their work with such generosity and care.