

Caste Discrimination - California Lawsuit against Cisco Systems

Why in news?

A lawsuit has been filed in California against Cisco Systems, a tech multinational company, for allowing caste discrimination against a Dalit Indian-origin employee.

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What is the case about?

- The California Department of Fair Employment and Housing filed a lawsuit against Cisco Systems.
- It was filed against Cisco and two “upper-caste” Indian managers.
- It accused Cisco Systems of allowing caste discrimination against a Dalit Indian-origin employee at its San Jose headquarters.
- The department's director said that it was unacceptable for workplace conditions and opportunities to be determined by a hereditary social status determined by birth.
- It was also said that the employers must be prepared to prevent, remedy, and deter unlawful conduct against workers because of caste.

What is the American law in this regard?

- The American law does not recognise caste.
- The lawsuit was filed under the federal Civil Rights Law 1964.
- The Law bars discrimination only on the basis of race, colour, religion, sex and national origin.
- However, in choosing to litigate, the California government is attempting to expand the ambit of discrimination to include caste.
- It is the first civil rights case in the US where a governmental entity is suing an American company for failing to protect caste-oppressed employees.

What is the significance?

- For close to two decades now, attempts have been ongoing at various levels.
- There were efforts to get institutions overseas to recognise the peculiar challenge of caste.

- The caste system of inequality and oppression is unique to the Indian subcontinent.
- It is naturally recognised by the Constitution of India.
- But in California, the Cisco case is a potential game-changer.
- The lack of having caste as an explicit category has made the prosecutors to keep the issue of caste within protections of religion, race, and ancestry.
- So the present case is expected to set a precedent.
- It will open the door for more such civil rights litigation.
- Silicon Valley, California has a global footprint.
- So, whatever is legislated there will have an impact on company workplaces in India and elsewhere too.
- The now widespread #BlackLivesMatter movement is spotlighting all kinds of discrimination.
- Amidst this, the case against Cisco becomes extremely significant.

Source: The Indian Express

