Seattle ban on caste discrimination

Why in news?

The Seattle city council has recently passed a resolution adding caste to its anti-discrimination policies.

What does the resolution say?

- The legislation recognises caste as a unique basis of discrimination, similar to race or gender.
- It prohibits businesses from discriminating based on caste with respect to hiring, tenure, promotion, or wages.
- It will ban discrimination in places of public accommodation, such as hotels, public transportation, public restrooms.
- The move addresses an issue important to the area's South Asian diaspora, particularly the Indian and Hindu communities.

Seattle is likely to be just the first city in the US to recognise and ban caste-based discrimination.

What is the history of caste system?

- The caste system in India dates back over 3,000 years and divides Hindu society into rigid hierarchical groups.
- The caste system allows many privileges to upper castes but represses lower castes.
- The Dalit community is on the lowest rung of the Indian Hindu caste system and have been treated as untouchables.
- Caste discrimination was outlawed in India over 70 years ago, yet it persists in many form till date.
- Debate over the caste system's hierarchy is contentious in India and abroad, with the issue intertwined with religion.
- Indian government policies reserving seats for lower-caste students at top Indian universities have helped many land tech jobs in the West in recent years.

What it was opposed?

- **Polarization** - Though it set a precedent for other cities to follow such laws in the future, it also polarised the Indian-American population.
- Hindu organisations in the US criticize the legislation, as it will further lead to anti-Hindu discrimination.
- **Job loses** - The move could dissuade employers from hiring South Asians.

The US is the 2nd most popular destination for Indians living abroad, according to the Migration Policy Institute.

References

1. The Indian Express | Seattle bans caste discrimination
2. Reuters | Seattle, first U.S. city to outlaw caste discrimination
3. BBC | Seattle becomes first US city to ban caste discrimination

