

CASTEGATE

THE UNTOLD STORY

Documentary Film Press Kit



The Untold Story

A Public Interest Documentary

Ficus Communication & The Big Film Company

Present

A story buried under lies, hate and hypocrisy
finally crumbles and the truth prevails.

Director: Vikram Mishra

Executive producer: Ravi Rajan

Film Overview

CasteGate: The Untold Story is a documentary examining the 2020 civil-rights lawsuit involving Cisco Systems executives Sundar Iyer and Ramana Kompella, the California Civil Rights Department, and the wider public debate surrounding caste discrimination, advocacy, media narratives, institutional power, and civil liberties.

Title	<i>CasteGate: The Untold Story</i>
Genre	Documentary
Runtime	90 minutes
Language	English
Country of Origin	United States
North American Premiere	Indic Film Utsav — November 8, 2025

Logline

An investigation into a landmark California caste-discrimination case and the competing narratives surrounding it, exploring questions of justice, accountability, civil liberties, institutional power, and the consequences of advocacy and public policy.

Short Synopsis

CasteGate: The Untold Story is an investigative documentary examining California’s caste-discrimination case involving Cisco Systems and Indian American engineers Sundar Iyer and Ramana Kompella. Drawing on interviews, legal records and documentary evidence, the film follows the controversy from the workplace and courtroom into advocacy, media, academia and California politics. It also examines the campaign that culminated in SB 403, a California bill seeking explicitly to include caste within the state’s civil-rights protections under ancestry. The filmmakers condemn caste discrimination while asking whether the allegations, the wider public narrative and the policy responses they helped generate received adequate evidentiary scrutiny, procedural fairness and institutional accountability.

Long Synopsis

In 2020, California’s Civil Rights Department brought a case against Cisco Systems and two Indian American engineers, Sundar Iyer and Ramana Kompella, alleging workplace discrimination against a Dalit employee. Widely reported as a landmark caste case, it soon became part of a national conversation about prejudice, identity and civil rights in America. Iyer and Kompella denied the allegations. In April 2023, the CRD voluntarily dismissed its claims against them while continuing its litigation against Cisco. By then, however, the controversy had moved well beyond the original workplace dispute. Caste was increasingly

being discussed in universities, corporations, advocacy organisations, the media and public policy. CasteGate follows that widening debate. Drawing on more than 200 hours of interviews and research, together with court records, archival material and personal testimony, the documentary revisits the Cisco controversy and the evidence surrounding it. It explores the role of advocacy groups, academics, journalists and public institutions in shaping American perceptions of caste and its relationship to Hindu and Indian American life. As the campaign against caste discrimination expanded, some Hindu Americans became concerned that attention was shifting from specific instances of prejudice towards broader assumptions about their religion and community. Were such concerns justified? Did the available evidence support the emerging public narrative? Could efforts to protect one group from discrimination contribute, even inadvertently, to stereotypes about another? CasteGate examines these questions through testimony, documentary records and competing interpretations of the events. The debate eventually reached the California Legislature through SB 403. The bill sought to define caste as a dimension of ancestry under several state civil-rights laws. Supporters argued that explicit recognition would better protect people facing caste discrimination. Opponents questioned whether a separate reference was necessary and raised concerns about its implications for South Asian communities. The Legislature passed the measure in 2023. Governor Gavin Newsom vetoed it on 7 October, stating that existing California law already prohibited discrimination based on caste. CasteGate traces the path from a workplace complaint to a much wider controversy. It asks when allegations become accepted public narratives, what happens as those accounts move through advocacy, academia, journalism and government, and whether the underlying evidence receives sufficient scrutiny along the way. It also considers the consequences for individuals and communities when contested claims acquire institutional authority. The filmmakers unequivocally condemn caste discrimination and believe that anyone who experiences it deserves protection. The film, however, grew out of a concern that the American conversation about caste was moving ahead without sufficient attention to the evidence, the people at the centre of the allegations and the consequences for a wider community. Its inquiry therefore considers two related civil-rights concerns: protecting people from caste discrimination and guarding against collective assumptions about Hindu and Indian Americans based on religion, ethnicity or national origin. CasteGate ultimately reaches beyond one lawsuit or one piece of legislation. It investigates the relationship between evidence and advocacy, identity and stereotype, civil rights and civil liberties. At its heart is a critical question: how should democratic institutions confront discrimination while preserving due process, examining evidence carefully and remaining accountable for the consequences of their actions?

Themes

- Justice and accountability
- Civil liberties and due process
- Caste and the Indian/South Asian diaspora
- Institutional power and public policy
- Media narratives and advocacy
- The consequences of contested allegations

Trailer Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yQgmSTa_d_8

Technical Specifications

Title: CasteGate: The Untold Story

Director: Vikram Mishra

Executive Producer: Ravi Rajan

Country: United States

Language: English

Year: 2025

Running time: 90 minutes

Genre: Documentary

Production: Ficus Media / The Big Film Company

Filmmakers & Key Crew

Vikram Mishra — Director

Director and co-researcher of CasteGate: The Untold Story. Mishra leads the film's investigation into the case and its wider social and legal implications.

Ravi Rajan — Executive Producer / Research & Interviews

Executive producer and member of the film's research and interview team. Rajan has also participated in post-screening discussions, including the Q&A following the film's North American premiere.

Key Crew

- Research & Interviews — Vikram Mishra, Ravi Rajan
- Cinematography — V. Singh
- Additional Cinematography — Vijay Chaudhary
- Editor — Sanjiv “Goose” Monga
- Color Grading — Sudhanshu Saini
- VFX — Saurabh Sharma
- Sound — Asia Dubralinka

Director's Biography

Vikram Mishra is an award winning documentary filmmaker based in New Delhi. He is acclaimed for directing the documentary, “Love In the Time of Hate,” which was broadcast on Korean Broadcasting Service, Taiwan broadcasting service, NHK Japan, and is currently streaming on Netflix India; and the documentary, “Living for the Dead” for MediaCorp, which aired on NHK Japan, TBS Taiwan, KBS Korea. Mishra has also won two Asia Pitch awards, and a United Kingdom Film Fellowship resulting in “The Final Tide”—a climate change-focused documentary, which was honored at the 5th CMS Vatavaran Film Festival. Mishra is also CEO of The Big Film Company, which produces commercials and music videos for major bands, corporations, and NGOs. Moreover, he has 25 years of experience as a live sound engineer collaborating with top Indian and Bollywood performers. In addition to his work in media, he is a tech entrepreneur, and is founder and director of an emerging electric motorcycle company that has produced two prototypes. Vikram Mishra has a BA (Hons) in Economics from Delhi University and an MBA in Marketing, further complemented by diplomas in international trade and information management.

Executive Producer's Biography

Ravi Rajan is Executive Producer of CasteGate: The Untold Story and conducted research and interviews for the film with director Vikram Mishra. He is a professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz, where his work has focused on environmental studies, public policy, justice, and institutional accountability. For CasteGate, Rajan conceived the film and helped develop the film's research framework and verify its documentary record.

Ficus Media

Ficus Media is an independent production company dedicated to developing and supporting documentary films that explore significant social, cultural, and public policy issues. Through thoughtful storytelling and evidence-based filmmaking, the company collaborates with filmmakers to bring important and often underrepresented perspectives to audiences worldwide. As the production company behind CasteGate: The Untold Story, Ficus Media helped bring together extensive research, firsthand interviews, and documentary evidence to present a compelling examination of one of the most debated civil rights issues affecting the Hindu American community.

Credits

Role	Name
Executive Producer	Ravi Rajan
Director	Vikram Mishra
Producer	Ravi Madhabhushi
Executive Director of Outreach, Engagement & Social Media	Rama Sardar
Research & Interviews	Vikram Mishra, Ravi Rajan
Director of Photography	V. Singh
Camera Operator	Vijay Chaudhary
Camera	Ad Media
Editor	Sanjiv Monga
Post-Production Supervisor	Vikram Mishra
Colorist	Sudhanshu Saini
Graphic Design & VFX	Saurabh Sharma
Sound Design	Vipin Mishra
Sound Department	Asia Dubralinka

Studio	Midpen Media Center, Palo Alto, CA · Infinity Studio, New Delhi
Composition	Vipin Mishra
Composition	Vishal Dixit
Composition	Amborish Saikia
Composition	Sukriti Sen

Awards & Festival Recognition

<u>Festival</u>	<u>Recognition</u>	<u>Year</u>
Dallas Film Utsav	Best Documentary Film	2025
Indian Independent Film Festival	Best Documentary Film	2025
Bollywood USA International Film Festival	Award Winner — Documentary	2025
Indian Movie Awards	Honorable Mention — Documentary	2025
Indian Panorama International Film Festival	Award Winner — Social Subject Film	2026
Bharat International Film Festival of India	Award Winner — Documentary	2026
Awareness Festival	Honorable Mention — Documentary	2026

Festival Selections

- London Lift-Off Film Festival — Official Selection (2025)
- Kashi Indian International Film Festival Awards (KIIFFA) — Official Selection (2025)
- Northeast International Documentary & Film Fest (NIDFF) — Official Selection (2025)
- 11th Indian World Film Festival — Official Selection (2026)
- Richmond International Film Festival — Official Selection (2026)
- 14th Noida International Film Festival — Official Selection (2026)
- National Indian Film Festival of Australia — Official Selection (2026)

- South Asian Indian Film Festival of Florida (SAIFFF) — Official Selection (2026)
- Flickers' Rhode Island International Film Festival — Semi-Finalist (2026)

Screenings & Public Engagement

- Vivekananda International Foundation Screening — July 31, 2025
- Dallas Film Utsav — North American Premiere — November 8, 2025
- South Asian International Film Festival Florida — Screened February 2026
- Northeast International Documentary & Film Fest — Screened 2026
- Bharat International Film Festival of India — Screened 2026
- Kashi International Film Festival Awards — Screened 2026
- Noida International Film Festival — Screened 2026
- Indian World Film Festival — Screened March 2026
- National Indian Film Festival of Australia — Screening in Spring/Summer 2026

Community Engagement

Two fundraising events were held in Palo Alto in June and July 2025 in support of the film.

Media Attention

Kirk S. Fernwood — One Film Fan

Ohio-based film critic Kirk S. Fernwood reviewed the film following its appearance at Dallas Film Utsav, noting its examination of the Cisco case, media narratives, state power, and discrimination, and highlighting the depth added by the post-screening Q&A with executive producer Dr. Ravi Rajan.

Link: <https://onefilmfan.com/>

India Today

India Today published an opinion piece on CasteGate in November 2025, discussing the documentary's examination of advocacy and the controversy surrounding the case.

Link:

<https://www.indiatoday.in/opinion/story/castegate-how-a-documentary-dissects-flawed-advocacy-and-misdirected-moral-panic-2825821-2025-11-25>

Vivekananda International Foundation

VIF hosted a special screening of *CasteGate: The Untold Story* on July 31, 2025, followed by a panel discussion with the film's director Vikram Mishra and executive producer Prof. Ravi Rajan. The discussion explored the film's examination of caste-related legal narratives, civil rights frameworks, and the experiences of Indian-origin professionals in the West.

Link: <https://www.vifindia.org/print/13849>

Promotional & Media Partners

- Diya TV — 60-second advertisement promoting tickets for the North American premiere
- FunAsia — Promotional advertising
- Indica Pictures — Social media promotion

Press Quote

"I fully embrace the relevancy of the story, its purpose to showcase such overt discrimination, and the call for change that it represents."

— Kirk S. Fernwood, One Film Fan

Full review: onefilmfan.com — "IFUFF 2025 Day 2: A Showcase of Young Talent, Documentary Shorts and Simply Brilliant, Provocative Filmmaking"

Production Stills & Festival Photography

Downloadable Link:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1UE3eOWbDc-nQNOm1lsgSjppI3glt8ubj?usp=sharing>

Press & Contact

For press inquiries, interviews, screening requests, and additional materials:

Ficus Media

ficusmedia2@gmail.com

IMDb: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt41547019/>

Official Website: castegatethefilm.org

Instagram: @castegatethefilm

X: @castegatefilm

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