



Anti-Hindu Sentiment in America

Karthik Vishnubhotla

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Colonial narratives have long shaped the commonly accepted views on different religions. One major problem arising from colonial narratives of India is Hinduphobia, which has seen an unprecedented rise over the past couple decades. This brief will go over the harms of anti-Hindu biases in our society and how they have been pushed into even the educational systems, leading to the vandalization of religious spaces and prejudice against Hindus in the classroom and society at large.

II. OVERVIEW

Colonial ideas of the innate inferiority of those from colonized nations greatly influenced the perception of those areas' cultures and traditions in the broad world. The first Indian immigrants to America in the late 1800s were marked as "heathens" and "idol worshippers", and were viewed as "heretics belonging to pagan cults". This has largely carried over to the present day as well. By the time there was a second influx of Indian immigrants in the second half of the twentieth century and early 2000s, the public perception of Hindus had already largely deteriorated. Public schooling textbooks had adopted the Aryan Invasion Theory bringing the Vedas to India to be true, which was later disproved, and mainly taught only the rigid caste

system imposed under the British in reference to Hinduism. Following the events of September 11th, 2001, many Hindu temples were targeted and desecrated due to the rising anti-brown skinned hate in the United States. Racial as well as religious motives contributed to this. Radicals of Abrahamic religions saw Hindu temples as "Satanic places" and sought to target them as well. Despite efforts to combat the anti-Hindu sentiment in the United States, the only action taken by governments has been the recognition and condemnation of Hinduphobia, primarily in California.

A. Relevance

The issues of Anti-Hindu action in the United States have not only persisted to date, but have become much more common. With the rise of terror groups like Khalistan over the course of the 21st century, the vandalism and desecration of Hindu temples and homes has gotten much more intense. Despite this, there has been a lack of action from the government. One incident in Ashland, Massachusetts saw perpetrators being charged with "random vandalism" despite having thrown devices similar to Molotov cocktails into temple premises. The BAPS Swaminarayan Temple in Louisville, Kentucky, a prominent Hindu temple in the United States, was desecrated as well, with the statue of the resident deity spray painted black and a knife stabbed into a chair in the main hall, an obvious provocation

and threat. In regards to the classroom, textbooks today still contain claims of the many time disproved Aryan Invasion Theory, claiming that Vedic scriptures had been brought to India from Central Asia, without going into detail on the Rig Vedic and Dravidian roots of the religion, whose cultures syncretized to form Sanatana Dharmam (Hinduism). Textbooks also commonly trivialize to date Hindu traditions and taunt traditional dietary customs.

III. HISTORY

A. Current Stances

Colonial ideas of the innate inferiority of those from colonized nations greatly influenced the perception of those areas' cultures and traditions in the broad world. The first Indian immigrants to America in the late 1800s were marked as "heathens" and "idol worshippers", and were viewed as heretics belonging to pagan cults. This sentiment has largely carried over to the present day as well. By the time there was a second influx of Indian immigrants in the second half of the twentieth century and early 2000s, the public perception of Hindus had already largely deteriorated. The ISKCON movement in the 1960s sought to combat these stereotypes, but in some ways contributed to it. Many reduced ISKCON's efforts for educating on Hinduism to nothing more than "guru cults", and thought of it more as superstition and satanic practices rather than a religion and way of life. This translated over the years to hate crimes against temples and religious spaces, with anti-Hindu hate statements spray painted and the statues of deities desecrated. With the rise of the separatist militant "Khalistan" group, these became much more common and a prevalent problem in America. From 2023 to

2025, multiple BAPS Swaminarayan temples were defaced with pro-Khalistan slogans and were threatened with violence. In the classroom, textbooks reduced Hinduism to nothing more than two or three paragraphs, with a majority focusing on the caste system as observed during British rule, and reducing philosophical concepts such as karma to mere jokes, even calling it more of a "backward" religion and labeling traditionalist movements in its history like the Bhakti movement as political. Over the 2000s and 2010s, Hindu activist groups throughout America fought for more accurate representations in public education, with limited success in California and Texas while no policy or action was taken on a national level.

I. POLICY PROBLEM

A. Stakeholders

The primary stakeholders of policy to address anti-Hindu sentiment are followers of Hinduism themselves. Among them, it mainly affects practitioners in more rural areas rather than in urban environments, due to the higher prevalence of discriminatory practices in such areas, and would allow Hindu followers in both rural and urban areas to openly observe their own religious customs. Ideally, the Hindu practitioners in rural areas should be the ones who have the largest say in legislation affecting the acceptance of Hindus, as they are the most marginalized among those affected by this policy and have the most at stake.

Additionally, it not only affects those who practice Hinduism, but those of other religions as well. It would provide a platform for those marginalized groups to speak up as well and would serve to extend the rights and protections

offered by the government to religions in America. This would include followers of other Dharmic religions such as Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism, who have even less of a voice and face similar discrimination, often even grouped together with Hinduism. Acts of terror such as the defacing of temples and deities on Dharmic religion creates an overall unsafe environment that discourages the practice of these religions and endangers members of their communities. Outside of Dharmic religions with Indian roots, it would also provide a precedent for other religions with less representation to be protected by the government and be represented in the education system as well.

B. Risks of Indifference

The risk of indifference to rising anti-Hindu sentiment is in its potential to ostracize marginalized religions rather than allow them to thrive, facilitating more discrimination and misrepresentation in both the educational system and society itself. This would serve to ostracize entire communities and religions and extend to those other than just Hinduism. All Dharmic religions, labeled under the umbrella of Hinduism, would be discriminated against all the same, along with more marginalized religions such as Zoroastrianism. Ignoring the plight of one religion would only serve to cause the marginalization of even more, not to mention greatly suppress the protections of speech and religion guaranteed from the First Amendment of our Bill of Rights. It could also lead to greater discrimination in society reminiscent of the segregation of non-whites in the early 1900s. Due to these reasons, it would be extremely dangerous to be indifferent to this rising problem, and we

can only take action against the rising hatred towards Hinduism.

C. Nonpartisan Reasoning

Since practitioners of Hinduism aren't the only stakeholders in this case, it is necessary that nonpartisan reasoning is used to come to a proper solution. The benefits of intervening in this scenario include:

- 1) Greater representation of marginalized communities in government: Allowing Hinduism to thrive through policy protecting religious rights of Hindus and acting against discriminatory practices rather than not addressing the problem of discrimination would be a step towards ensuring that marginalized groups receive the same voice in society and government that majority groups enjoy. This serves to allow all people the right to advocate for themselves in their government and would provide a path for people from other marginalized communities to do the same, strengthening our government in the process. This means that although they would still be facing issues, marginalized communities would have the opportunity to advocate for themselves and create policy that best affects America as a whole.
- 2) Better integration of all immigrants regardless of original nationality or religion: Acting against discrimination and racism-fueled acts against Hindus would have an effect not only on the Hindu community but rather all immigrant communities. This would allow for the social integration of many of

these “younger” immigrant groups that haven’t had a chance to be socially integrated into society whilst keeping their root beliefs and principles intact. Acting against racism towards one specific group would allow the government to form a “sanctuary” that would make those groups more open to integration and create a more diverse American culture, as immigrants have over the years.

- 3) The continuation of rights guaranteed under the Bill of Rights: As it’s been made clear, through acts against specific religions, the right to practice your religion under the First Amendment is diminished. We can see that this is indeed the case with Hindus, as there have been threats made that have made it truly unsafe to be a practicing Hindu in some places. Policy action against this would reinforce the protections guaranteed by the Bill of Rights to those of all religions, and would serve to continue those rights for other struggling religions as well.

II. TRIED POLICY

There has, as of yet, been no policy made in regards to anti-Hindu sentiment or Hinduphobia in the United States. Although there have been movements from various organizations and many colleges and institutions recognize Hinduphobia to exist, the United States has not enacted a law or policy in any way to combat this. There have been limited reforms made to textbooks and the education system in regards to Hinduism through working with California and Texas’s state boards of education, but there have not been any

national policies set in place that address the problems outlined.

III. POLICY OPTIONS

Expansion of DOJ and FBI Civil Rights Divisions to protect Hinduism

The current problem largely arises from the lack of recognition in government of the issues faced by Hindus in America. This leads to biases formed by everyday people that are in no way discouraged or combatted by the government. This has an effect on their ability to peacefully follow their own religion in this country without being hampered by prejudices, as seen already. It may also affect their hiring in jobs and social lives due to following a “pagan” religion.

To overcome this, I propose a division in the FBI and DOJ dedicated to combating anti-Hindu and anti-Dharmic movements and acts, similar to that which exists to combat antisemitism and the FBI’s Civil Rights stance. This would increase protections offered to religions overall and change it to focusing on specific issues as well, also prompting them to properly report the data, as underreporting hate crimes on the FBI’s Hate Crime Statistics Report has been a large issue.

Raising Education Standards for non-Abrahamic Religions

A large aspect of the anti-Hindu sentiment in America is due to the lack of proper education and misinformation in textbooks throughout America. In California and Texas, the two states with the largest Hindu population, it is taught as more of a backward religion, only focusing on the colonially influenced caste system that became deeply rooted in the culture and calling spiritual and religious movements such as the Bhakti

movement largely political in nature. The lack of proper education is not only limited to Hinduism, but is prevalent among many non-Abrahamic religions, as textbooks entirely misrepresent Buddhism, Sikhism, and Taoism as well.

I propose that religious education standards for public schools be reviewed nationwide to properly assess the validity of claims made in those textbooks. The expansion of education standards on these religions would serve to combat prejudices against them at a young age, and would properly teach children core values of religious freedom as is outlined in the First Amendment. Changes made in states such as California and Texas should be applied on a national level through the federal Department of Education and set a higher bar for religious instruction on non-Abrahamic religions. Although the federal Department of Education has at the moment been halted due to recent executive orders from the President, judges have ruled against it, and such standards that act against discrimination should be applied prior to the dissolution of the department.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, I have explored multiple issues regarding anti-Hindu sentiment in America, citing issues and conflicts that have emerged over the past decade. To combat such discriminatory actions, I provided policy options to address the outlined issues. However, out of these options, the one that is the most implementable and effective in its scope is an expansion of the protections offered by the Civil Rights Divisions of the Department of Justice and Federal Bureau

of Investigation on a national scale, which would directly address the large scale problems currently taking place.

Though we have much work to do to achieve absolute equality of religions and religious freedoms in the United States, it can be achieved by focusing on a national level campaign to promote religious freedom starting with policy such as those brought up in this brief. I believe the discriminatory practices and widespread prejudice against Hinduism and other non-Abrahamic religions can be overcome if we follow through with our founding principles and properly address religious discriminatory practices as they come up.

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