Examining Anti-Hindu Bias in American Public Education: The Endogenous Cycle of Hinduphobia

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Abstract: This paper introduces the "Endogenous Cycle of Hinduphobia," a theoretical construct explaining the perpetuation of stereotypical depictions and systematic omissions of Hinduism and Hindus in scholarship and media, which seed a biased master narrative about Hinduism in the public imagination. It highlights the role played by epistemic injustice in undermining Hindu testimony and scholarly contributions, sustaining a cycle of prejudice that entrenches this master narrative. Historical ties of American public education to colonial and missionary objectives are explored, illustrating how curricula have historically undermined Hindu religious and cultural identity by favouring narratives marked by violence, superstition, and moral degradation. The paper scrutinizes incidences where scholars and journalists trigger the endogenous cycle of Hinduphobia, arguing for an interrogation of the foundational premises upon which current representations are built. It also recounts the experiences of Hindu Americans who, as students, addressed the California Department of Education in 2016, highlighting the detrimental effects of such educational biases on their individual and collective identities. Ultimately, the paper aims to initiate steps toward dismantling the endogenous cycle of Hinduphobia, advocating for an educational paradigm that truly aligns with the tenets of democracy and pluralism.

Keywords: Hinduphobia, Public Education, Epistemic Injustice, Democracy, Pluralism

A high school student, Chandini,[1] testified before the California Department of Education in 2016 as part of a group of Hindu Americans addressing representations of Hindus and Hinduism in school textbooks:

> I think it was years of frustration and misrepresentation that culminated [in] us finally being in the driver's seat and wanting to do something about it. I think Indian Americans, or Indians in general, they often do what they're told. Honestly. They will just continue to do things as they are because they don't want to resist or stand out in ways that aren't favorable. But this was one of those times where we finally found it within us to be like, this is not what we want. This is not how we want to be represented. This is not what we want our kids to learn. And I think that was also a big component. What does this mean for future generations? Because the parents that were advocating, the adults that were in this, it doesn't matter to them all that much. They're not the ones that are impacted by this issue on a day-to-day basis. But this issue will plague their kids. And this issue will set the foundation of how their kids are interpreted and how our group is interpreted in American society.[2]

It was the largest group testimony in the Department's history. This paper aims to establish the broader context of that event by critically examining the patterns and habits of academic, journalistic, and social discourse about Hindus and Hinduism.

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1. All interviewees are referred to using pseudonyms.
2. Chandini, interview with Indu Viswanathan, August 10, 2023.

Introduction

Public education, in concert with the media, has long been the engine of the American assimilation project. Historically, teachers were responsible for assimilating the children of Native Americans,[3] formerly enslaved peoples,[4] and immigrants[5] into dominant American culture. Popkewitz[6] suggests that the early twentieth-century school curriculum was less invested in learning as inquiry and more concerned with *Americanizing* the children of immigrants away from the habits and norms their parents imported with them. "Through the school curriculum, civility was to be brought to those who came from foreign lands. Students would learn to work in an urban environment and ameliorate their immediate surroundings by adopting the values of the democratic, corporate and Protestant nation."[7]

Assimilation through school was entangled in this idea of the American citizen rooted in the language and frameworks of Protestant ideals.[8] With the growth of common public schools in the mid-nineteenth century, education directed towards the ideal American citizen was contextualized within a global view. American textbooks (specifically, geography books) were concerned with identifying and locating the young American citizen in relationship to the *other*. Oftentimes, this *other* existed in far-off lands; notably, the *other* was specifically identified in American school textbooks as the exotic, often forsaken, *Hindoo* child in India.[9] "By the middle third of the century, after decades of missionary activity, India held a special place in the American imagination and so, too, in American schoolbooks. India served as a foil against which authors could identify what counted as American. Authors created American identity through difference with Indian *Hindoos*."[10] In its effort to shape students' ideals of citizenship, American public education created an imagining of the alternative – the *Hindoo* – as savage, superstitious, bloodthirsty, immoral, and particularly vicious to women and children:

> For schoolbook authors, Hindoo religion required violence. Violence served as more evidence for the degraded and pagan nature of Hindoo religion, further solidifying its place at the bottom of the religion hierarchy and further distancing Hindoos from the Christian child-reader. In addition to violence, schoolbook writers emphasized polytheistic and "idolatrous" themes in Hindoo religion—two themes that writers believed proved the falsity and moral degradation of Hindoo religion.[11]

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3. David Wallace Adams, "Fundamental Considerations: The Deep Meaning of Native American Schooling, 1880–1900," *Harvard Educational Review* 58, no. 1 (April 1, 1988): 1–29, https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.58.1.h5715211051 7nm65; J. Davis, "American Indian Boarding School Experiences: Recent Studies from Native Perspectives," *OAH Magazine of History* 15, no. 2 (January 1, 2001): 20–22, https://doi.org/10.1093/maghis/15.2.20; John R. Gram, "Acting out Assimilation: Playing Indian and Becoming American in the Federal Indian Boarding Schools," *The American Indian Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (2016): 251–273, https://doi.org/10.1353/aiq.2016.a633377.

4. James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

5. Thomas S. Popkewitz, *The Formation of School Subjects: The Struggle for Creating an American Institution* (New York: The Falmer Press, 1987).

6. Popkewitz, *The Formation of School Subjects*.

7. Popkewitz, *The Formation of School Subjects*, 6.

8. Daniel Trohler, *Languages of Education: Protestant Legacies, National Identities, and Global Aspirations* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

9. Michael J. Altman, *Heathen, Hindoo, Hindu: American Representations of India, 1721–1893* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

10. Altman, *Heathen, Hindoo, Hindu*, 51.

11. Altman, *Heathen, Hindoo, Hindu*, 59.

It is important to any examination of Hinduphobia to tease this out further. American schoolbooks suggested a hierarchy of religions, elevating the Abrahamic traditions above the heathen ones, clearly indicating that "Hindoo" did not reference all Indians (based on race or nationality), but those practicing the Hindu religion.[12] This distinction would continue not only in textbooks but also in popular literature. In 1986, historian David Kopf noted an expressed kinship with the Indian Muslim in contrast to an overt Hinduphobic bias in early twentieth century English literature[13] set in India:

> By Indianization, the British seem to mean Hinduization. It is the Hindus who have been exposed as the carriers of the deadly metaphysical disease known as life negation. Forster himself accepted Indian Muslims as being closer to the Western ideal. Nirad Chaudhuri believes that all the Hindus are presented in *Passage to India* "either as perverted, clownish, or queer characters." Even Dr. Godbole, Forster's chief Hindu character, and the novel's mouthpiece of Hinduism, is, in Chaudhuri's view, "not an exponent of Hinduism but a clown." On the other hand, the book's most rational Indian and chief Indian character, Aziz, is a Muslim.

> Lawrence Brander, who has also written on Forster, made the following comparison about Hindus and Muslims in *Passage*: "The first two parts of the novel are Muslim and Forster gets inside his Muslim characters with ease, for the Muslim is completely our brother, an exaggeration of our best selves. The difficulty comes in the third part when he deals with the Hindus." Hinduphobia was, of course, a more characteristic response of the British who from the time James Mill published his *History of British India* in 1819, were continually articulating their ambivalence about their Indian connection.[14]

Of course, it was easy to make claims about the exotic practices of people living very far away, about communities and practices that the average American child would likely never encounter or would only encounter through colonial and missionary reports. This convenience would not continue. After the first half of the twentieth century, the first large wave of Hindus immigrated to the United States, following Indian independence from the Raj and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965,[15] bringing Hindu immigrants from Africa, the West Indies, the United Kingdom, and in highest proportion, from India.[16] Hindu children and their families entered the American public school system in historically large numbers. In the decades since then, representations of Hindus and Hinduism in American public-school textbooks have continued to reflect reductive stereotypes that define Hindus and Hinduism through the extended colonial and missionary lenses of moral superiority and progress. "In American textbooks, Hinduism is referred to as one of the world's 'five great religions' and yet paradoxically, Hindu beliefs and traditions

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12. Altman, *Heathen, Hindoo, Hindu*, 53.
13. David Kopf, "A Macrohistoriographical Essay on the Idea of East and West from Herodotus to Edward Said," *Comparative Civilizations Review* 15, no. 15 (1986): 22–42.
14. Kopf, "A Macrohistoriographical Essay," 29.
15. Chad Bauman and Jennifer B. Saunders, "Out of India: Immigrant Hindus and South Asian Hinduism in the USA," *Religion Compass* 3, no. 1 (January 2009): 116–135, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8171.2008.00121.x.
16. "[The 1965 Immigration Act] led to a sharp increase in the number of South Asian immigrants. Whereas between 1820 and 1960 there had been roughly 13,600 immigrants from India (some of whom undoubtedly returned), by 1980, the U.S. Census registered 387,223 Americans of Indian descent. By 2007, the number was closer to 1.7 million" (Bauman and Saunders, "Out of India," 117).

are often represented as a superstitious localized collection of archaic cults."[17] Hindu American teachers who were born and raised in the United States report that their own K-12 American public school educations were filled with experiences of countering stereotypes and disinformation about Hinduism that emerged from textbooks, teachers, and peers.[18] Hindu American students report that this pedagogy of disinformation about Hinduism has a negative impact on their Hindu identity.[19] In the midst of widespread acceptance of multicultural education,[20] culturally relevant pedagogy[21] and, more recently, culturally sustaining pedagogy,[22] representations of Hinduism in schools continue to be anchored in the colonial era of scholarship that renders Hinduism as the opposite of the American ideal, often incorporating updated humanitarian frameworks and language. There is a distinctly negative narrative scarcity[23] in these representations. When Hindu Americans advocate for their heritage education in public schools, not unlike other minority communities, their advocacy and viewpoints are represented by members of the academic community and the press through stereotypes, erasures, and attacks on their credibility.

The California textbook controversy[24] is a powerful illustrative example of this phenomenon. In 2004, and then again in 2016, Hindu American families and community organizations in California presented concerns about representations of Hinduism in textbooks, including critiques of suggested revisions by South Asian studies scholars, to the California Department of Education. These encounters between the mostly-immigrant Hindu American community, American public school teachers, university and college professors of South Asian studies and Indology, and state educational administrators, centred on representations of Hinduism in public school textbooks, offering a rich site to study Hinduphobia and how it has continued unabated for centuries, not only with impunity, but with an active endorsement from the same chambers that lay claim to progressive campaigns of just representation, such as diversity and inclusion. Understanding why this was possible requires a complex understanding of the history of Hinduism and Hindus in American education. This allows the reader to situate the experiences of Hindu Americans who testified before the California Department of Education in 2016. The purpose of this paper is to offer that history, interrogate the logic that perpetuates Hinduphobia in contemporary society, and surface the underlying mechanisms that animate it.

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17. Yvette C. Rosser, "Stereotypes in Schooling: Negative Pressures in the American Education System on Hindu Identity Formation (Part I)," in *Hindu Diaspora: Global Perspectives*, 213–236, edited by T. S. Rukmani (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2001).
18. Indu Viswanathan, "Sākshi: The Transnational Consciousness of Second-Generation Indian American Teachers," EdD diss. (Columbia University ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2021).
19. Rosser, "Stereotypes in Schooling."
20. James A. Banks, "African American Scholarship and the Evolution of Multicultural Education," *The Journal of Negro Education* 61, no. 3 (1992): 273, https://doi.org/10.2307/2295248.
21. Gloria Ladson-Billings, "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy," *American Educational Research Journal* 32, no. 3 (September 1995): 465–491, https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312032003465.
22. Django Paris, "Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy," *Educational Researcher* 41, no. 3 (April 2012): 93–97, https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189x12441244.
23. Jennifer Lee and Karthick Ramakrishnan, "From Narrative Scarcity to Research Plenitude for Asian Americans," *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 7, no. 2 (2021): 1, https://doi.org/10.7758/rsf.2021.7.2.01.
24. Jennifer Medina, "Debate Erupts in California over Curriculum on India's History," *The New York Times*, May 4, 2016.

Hinduphobia

This paper will engage with the "Working Definition of Hinduphobia," which was developed by Hindu scholars in North America prior to the first Understanding Hinduphobia[25] conference at Rutgers University in April 2021. The conference was co-hosted by the Rutgers University Hindu Students Council (a Hindu student organization), and a resolution recognizing the definition was passed unanimously by the Rutgers University Student Assembly. The definition has also been endorsed by the Hindu American community organizations with the largest memberships, several American cities, and at least one more university in the United States. As such, it is the most widely recognized and supported definition of Hinduphobia, at least in North America.

Since the conference, Understanding Hinduphobia has continued as an ongoing initiative to raise awareness about and bring rigorous scholarly study to the phenomenon of Hinduphobia. The main part of the working definition is presented below; several examples are available on the website.

> Hinduphobia is a set of antagonistic, destructive, and derogatory attitudes and behaviors towards Sanatana Dharma (Hinduism) and Hindus that may manifest as prejudice, fear, or hatred.
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> Hinduphobic rhetoric reduces the entirety of Sanatana Dharma to a rigid, oppressive, and regressive tradition. Prosocial and reflexive aspects of Hindu traditions are ignored or attributed to outside, non-Hindu influences. This discourse actively erases and denies the persecution of Hindus while disproportionately painting Hindus as violent. These stereotypes are used to justify the dissolution, external reformation, and demonization of the range of indigenous Indic knowledge traditions known as Sanatana Dharma.
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> The complete range of Hinduphobic acts extends from microaggressions to genocide. Hinduphobic projects include the destruction and desecration of Hindu sacred spaces; aggressive and forced proselytization of Hindu populations; targeted violence towards Hindu people, community institutions, and organizations; and ethnic cleansing and genocide.[26]

The Endogenous Cycle of Hinduphobia

In the summer of 2021, Parth Parihar[27] and I noted a circular logic deployed in academic and media circles to justify anti-Hindu ideas and to cast doubt on those of us who were raising awareness about and studying Hinduphobia. Parth introduced me to the term *endogenous cycle,* and we began referring to the endogenous cycle of Hinduphobia. We describe it as a dominant set of narratives, scholarship, and theories about Hinduism, Hindus, and Hindu society that is grounded in cherry-picked data lacking critical rigour and openness to generative, scholarly dissent. The outcome of this set is a permission structure that makes it 1) appear reasonable to be fearful of Hinduism and Hindus; 2) appear justifiable to want to redress Hinduism at its source for its allegedly oppressive construction; 3) appear that any counternarratives or critiques are unreasonable, unjustifiable, and/or uninformed; and d) appear that even the stewardship of Hinduism is inherently oppressive. The endogenous cycle of Hinduphobia has sustained the master

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25. I am one of the co-founders of Understanding Hinduphobia and its current director.
26. Indu Viswanathan, Parth Parihar, Arvind Sharma, and Jeffrey Long, "Working Definition of Hinduphobia," Understanding Hinduphobia website, updated June 21, 2021, https://understandinghinduphobia.org/working-definition.
27. My partner in founding Understanding Hinduphobia.

narrative about Hinduism and Hindus for centuries. It engages three foundational premises: 1) Hinduism is inherently oppressive, regressive, and irredeemable; 2) calling for the external reformation or destruction of Hinduism is a moral imperative; 3) anyone who disagrees with a or b seeks to uphold and camouflage the allegedly inherent oppressive, regressive, and irredeemable machinations of Hinduism.
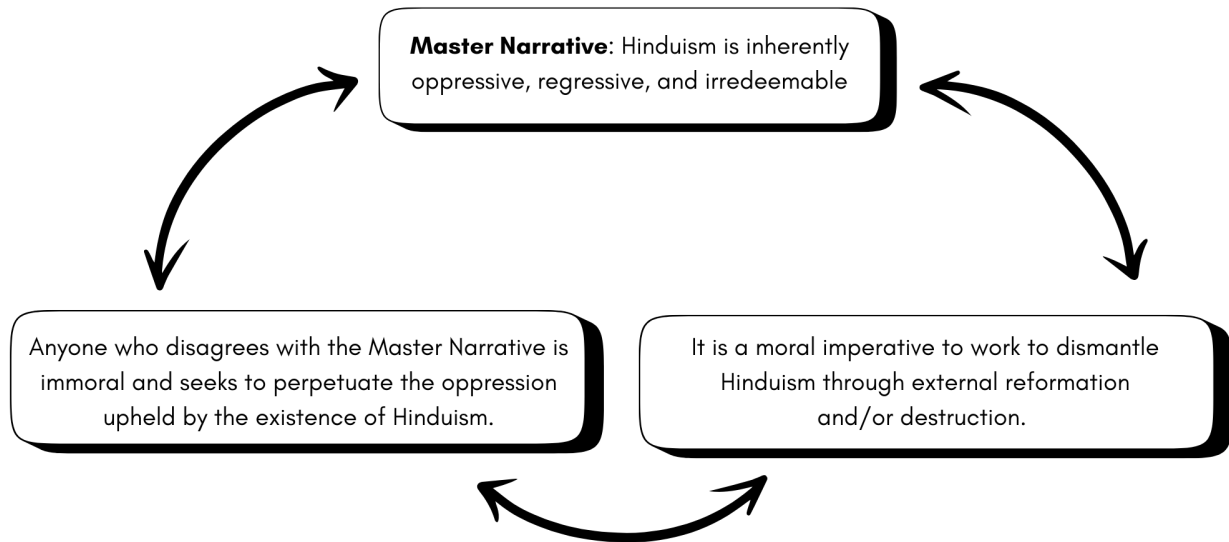

Master Narrative: Hinduism is inherently oppressive, regressive, and irredeemable

Anyone who disagrees with the Master Narrative is immoral and seeks to perpetuate the oppression upheld by the existence of Hinduism.

It is a moral imperative to work to dismantle Hinduism through external reformation and/or destruction.

Figure 1. The Endogenous Cycle of Hinduphobia[28]

The extension of the master narrative of Hinduism and Hindus, then, is that it is morally good to be distrustful of Hinduism and Hindu people who do not overarchingly disavow Hinduism. This is the lynchpin in the struggle to recognize and redress Hinduphobia. At first, this may seem like an attack on any critical analysis of Hinduism and Hindus. However, it is recognized that critical analysis is a cornerstone of good academic work. And it is not being suggested that Hinduism is a perfect system or that Hindus are infallible; rather, it is a call for a large-scale critical analysis of the master narrative about both, a narrative which we argue is dominantly anti-Hindu.[29] Unfortunately, it seems that both ends of the Western political spectrum have justified an open distaste for Hinduism and Hindus. The common understanding – in left-wing academic-activist circles and in openly right-wing, Christian supremacist circles – is that Hinduism is fundamentally morally diseased and is in dire need of a (Western) cure. That moral disease has been amplified and repeated so relentlessly that it has become synonymous with Hinduism itself. Anecdotal experience suggests that, in order to be a "good, progressive Hindu (American)," particularly in progressive academia, one must stand for all minority groups at the same time that one openly critiques the allegedly structural disease of Hinduism. Broad, unspecific cries of "Hindu nationalism," "Hindu fascism," and "Hindutva" are deployed as contemporary virtue signalling that is emblematic of this phenomenon.[30] Even

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28. Indu Viswanathan, "The Endogenous Cycle of Hinduphobia," is a diagram created by the author for this article.
29. Jeffery D. Long, "Reflections on Hinduphobia: A Perspective from a Scholar-Practitioner," *Prabuddha Bharata* 122, no. 12 (2017): 797–804.
30. Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, "Cry Hindutva: How Rhetoric Trumps Intellect in South Asian Studies," Academia.edu, 2019, https://www.academia.edu/40082617/Cry_Hindutva_How_Rhetoric_Trumps_Intellect_in_South_Asian_Studies.

when there is some inclusion of counternarratives, they are often completely drowned out by the overwhelming volume of the master narrative. According to its logic, if one's moral responsibility is to call out this disease, anyone who does not take this stance must be, by extension, morally corrupt or at least morally confused. If someone tries to add something different to the conversation about Hinduism, they are perceived as a threat to morality itself. When framed this way, the colonial messaging is almost impossible to ignore.

Sitting beneath the three foundational premises of the endogenous cycle of Hinduphobia are three powerful mechanisms – stereotypes; erasures; epistemic injustice. These mechanisms will serve as lenses for examining the site of study.

Stereotypes

In the years that I have been speaking about the layers of Hinduphobia, I have developed a deeper appreciation for how these stereotypes work and the central role they play in sustaining anti-Hindu bias through the endogenous cycle. As I describe during my college campus workshops on Hinduphobia, the danger of a stereotype is not that it is entirely untrue. Stereotypes take a small piece of data (in this case, about Hinduism or Hindus), remove it from its context, and center and amplify that decontextualized data as if it were much more representative of reality (past or present) than it actually is. This may be done out of ignorance or intention; in either case, when it is caused and perpetuated by those who have rhetorical, cultural, and institutional power, the stereotypes become so prevalent in the cultural and intellectual imagination that they come to represent the entire truth about Hinduism and Hindus. Over time, with repetition and widespread presence, these stereotypes appear factual, so much so that intellectually honest attempts to discredit or critique them, by providing context for that data (which gives it different significance) or counter-examples that refute the data's importance, are perceived as an attack on truth itself.

Arvind Sharma offers a powerful example of this phenomenon of academic illusion in his examination of how the Raj depicted Hindu women:

> The need to maintain the empire, and the racial distinction on which it came to be based more and more in the post-Mutiny period, meant that the position of Hindu women had to be depicted as negatively as possible. The firm foundations of the empire thus came to rest on hapless Hindu women. This also meant that, if somehow the position of women visibly improved as a result of internal reforms within Hinduism, this fact had to be overlooked, as this would undermine the foundations of the empire. One had to constantly highlight the academic simulacrum of the condition of the Hindus as depicted in the smṛtis and allied texts, because Hindu society was unchanging. The 'illusion of permanence' was based on the permanence of an academic illusion.[31]

Contexts, change, and internal corrections were obscured in order to maintain the illusion that colonial stereotypes represented a permanent reality about how oppressively Hinduism treated its women. These stereotypes were deployed to justify the humanitarian premise of colonization. Sharma incorporates Indrani Chatterjee's critical interrogation of the colonial report about sati[32] – the frequently-referenced practice of

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31. Arvind Sharma, *Ruler's Gaze: A Study of British Rule Over India from a Saidian Perspective* (Noida, India: HarperCollins India, 2017), 98.
32. Sharma, *Ruler's Gaze*, 109–111; see Indrani Chatterjee, "Monastic Governmentality, Colonial Misogyny, and

self-immolation amongst Hindu widows – which was, and remains, a fixation of the Western gaze.[33] Chatterjee notes that prior to British rule, widows were allotted revenue-free land grants by local rulers; when British administrators began cancelling these grants, the widows took up sati as a form of cultural protest. This correlates with the rate of *sati* in Calcutta and British presence there. Most of these Bengali widows were middle-aged, and their husbands had passed away many years before they committed sati. Chatterjee suggests this had more to do with protest and less with religious ritualism. Inconvenient to colonial rule, the British banned the form of protest itself, going on to paint themselves as saviours. "If these facts are kept in mind, then the abolition of Sati, far from being a humanitarian act, begins to look more and more like a cover-up of commercial rapacity."[34]

This is not to say that sati did not exist at all, that all women performed it as an act of cultural protest, or that some women did not benefit from banning it. However, the British administration's abolition of sati in order to camouflage its own unethical policies served to exaggerate the pervasiveness and centrality of sati as a theologically required practice for all Hindu women, erase any internal Hindu criticism and reform of the practice, and divert attention from any external context (as in the case of cultural protest) in order to make a monster out of Hinduism. In this way, the stereotype that Hinduism was theologically cruel to its women sustained the master narrative that Hinduism is inherently immoral, oppressive, and irredeemable, and that it needed a Western correction. Sati was then sensationalized by colonizers, missionaries, and even in textbooks in the West as a central practice of an allegedly misogynistic Hinduism, manifesting in mainstream media and, consequently, in the public imagination. When I visit university campuses to talk to Hindu students about Hinduphobia, an overwhelming majority of the students I work with report that people on campus describe Hinduism as inherently misogynistic.[35] Of course, in order for stereotypes to proliferate without inhibition, other information must actively and continuously be erased.

Erasure

The phenomenon of erasure warrants a comprehensive academic exploration in the study of Hinduphobia and its endogenous cycle. This serves as a humble introduction. While it can be elusive to establish absences, erasure is conspicuously prevalent in contemporary curricula, from primary school through higher education, where there is a notable omission of Hindu philosophical, cultural, scientific, mathematical, and historical narratives and contributions. These omissions are consecrated in the academy. I am frequently invited to conduct Hinduphobia workshops at universities by Hindu-American student organizations. These organizations are composed of undergraduate and graduate students, including Hindu students who grew up in the United States and those who immigrated for their higher studies, mostly from India. Most of the students in these organizations are in STEM-related disciplines. When I ask them if their science and math classes recognize Hindu philosophies and contributions to science and math, an overwhelming majority of them respond that there is no mention. This is true for those educated in India and in the United States. Some students report that even if they noted this erasure during a class, they remained silent, even when it was directly related to the topic. Some of them report deciding it was outside

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Postcolonial Amnesia in South Asia," *History of the Present* 3, no. 1 (April 1, 2013): 57–98, https://doi.org/10.5406/historypresent.3.1.0057.

33. Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2005).

34. Sharma, *Ruler's Gaze*, 111.

35. A parallel interrogation of the stereotypes used to maintain the illusion that caste discrimination is central to Hindu theology is warranted.

the scope of formal academic study of math or science; others reported being concerned about being typecast as Hindu fundamentalists for simply bringing up Hindu contributions. I then ask them if the persecution of Hindus in Pakistan and Bangladesh is recognized by campus or by local activists; the response is unanimously negative, regardless of the region I am visiting. However, when I ask them if people on campus say that the most important thing to discuss about Hinduism is caste discrimination, they almost unanimously report yes. The interplay between erasures and stereotypes is unmistakable. These erasures allow stereotypes to proliferate.

Like stereotypes, erasures permeate beyond classrooms, pervading campus and local activist spaces, media representations and the broader public consciousness, consequently leading to a diminished awareness and acknowledgment of Hindu civilizational contributions, the Hindu community's experiences of persecution, both historically and contemporaneously, and its resilience. One such example, the *Hindutva Harassment Field Manual* website, produced by the South Asian Scholar Activist Collective (SASAC), states on a page entitled *Bad Faith Claims*:

> "Hinduphobia" rests on the false notion that Hindus have faced systematic oppression throughout history and in present times. "Hinduphobia" relies on flawed analogies with anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, though these are very different. The anti-Semitic ideology of Nazism led to the Holocaust. Islamophobic foreign policies over time resulted in the killing of Muslims across the world, including in South Asia, as well as the recent anti-Muslim ban of the Trump administration. Anti-Hindu bias, on the other hand, cannot be easily linked to casualties on such horrific scales.[36]

This group of "scholar activists" reinforces this erasure across its website. Perhaps the repetition of this message is linked, as in the case of colonial discomfort with sati, with the urgent need to erase an uncomfortable context. As recently as October 14, 2022, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution recognizing that "the genocide against ethnic Bengalis and Hindus is one of the forgotten genocides of the twentieth century and its lack of recognition remains an open wound for millions of people who were directly affected by the atrocities."[37] Notably, Hinduphobia-deniers will argue that the genocide did not target Hindus, despite clear evidence to the contrary in the resolution.

> Consul General Blood sent another telegram which states in part "'Genocide' applies fully to [this] naked, calculated and widespread selection of Hindus for special treatment … From [the] outset various members of [the] American community have witnessed either burning down of Hindu villages, Hindu enclaves in Dacca and shooting of Hindus attempting [to] escape carnage, or have witnessed after-effects which [are] visible throughout Dacca today." […]

> Whereas, in a legal study published in 1972 titled "The Events in East Pakistan", the Secretariat of the International Commission of Jurists states "There is overwhelming evidence that Hindus were slaughtered, and their houses and villages destroyed simply because they were Hindus."[38]

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36. South Asia Scholar Activist Collective, "Bad Faith Bias Claims," Hindutva Harassment Field Manual website, accessed April 11, 2024, https://www.hindutvaharassmentfieldmanual.org/badfaith.
37. U.S. Congress, House, *Recognizing the Bangladesh Genocide of 1971*, HR 1430, 117th Cong., 2d session, introduced October 14, 2022, https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-resolution/1430/text.
38. U.S. Congress, House, *Recognizing the Bangladesh Genocide of 1971*.

The resolution includes Senator Edward Kennedy's testimony before the Senate:

> Nothing is more clear, or more easily documented, than the systematic campaign of terror and its genocidal consequences launched by the Pakistan army on the night of March 25th. […] Hardest hit have been members of the Hindu community who have been robbed of their lands and shops, systematically slaughtered, and, in some places, painted with yellow patches marked 'H'.[39]

Genocide scholars and other communities that have experienced genocide will attest to the harm caused by genocide denial. Yet this collective of "scholar activists" continues to erase the documented, recognized persecution of Hindus in Bangladesh with impunity. The same goes for Hindus who were or are persecuted in other regions, such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Kashmir, for being Hindu. Evidently, there is a permission structure within the academy (and, consequently, the public imagination through education and media influence) not only to erase the contributions of Hindus and Hinduism to the world, but also to erase the genocide of Hindus. Within this context, Hindus must navigate significant challenges in articulating and securing recognition of the systemic omission of their historical, cultural, and civilizational narratives. This struggle transcends the simple rectification of historical inaccuracies and erasures; it must overcome a master narrative that justifies these inaccuracies and erasures, marginalizing and invalidating particular Hindu perspectives. The struggle to be heard and believed as legitimate knowledge holders about Hinduism and the Hindu experience is the next phenomenon to be discussed.

Epistemic Injustice

Miranda Fricker's concept of epistemic injustice[40] offers a valuable framework for examining the systematic marginalization of Hindu voices within both academic and public spheres. Two principal mechanisms – testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice – drive this form of injustice, presenting distinct yet interrelated challenges to any group whose epistemic authority is actively undermined, including Hindus.

Testimonial injustice refers to the deflated credibility assigned to a speaker's testimony based on established stereotypes about her community or identity membership. For Hindus, testimonial injustice is pervasive for community members, leaders and scholars, whose testimonies and scholarship are frequently met with skepticism, outright dismissal, or are even misrepresented in order to reinvigorate Hinduphobic stereotypes:

> Crying Hindutva to discipline non-conforming scholars is hardly new. What is more disturbing is that questioning Indologists' criteria, arguments, and application of methods (especially their identification of textual layers) now suffices to be accused of directly or indirectly espousing Hindutva causes.[41]

Ethnographers, anthropologists, and other scholars who formally and informally study and claim to represent Hindus around the world regularly, and sometimes openly, avoid the ethical ethnographic

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39. U.S. Congress, House, *Recognizing the Bangladesh Genocide of 1971*.
40. Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011).
41. Adluri and Bagchee, "Cry Hindutva," 2.

practices governed by the Common Rule,[42] which helps ensure researchers are protecting participants' rights, including accurately representing their testimonies. Instead, the scholars' own interpretation of the speakers' words and ideas are presented as accurate. James Mallinson's "Yoga and Yogis"[43] captures a lecture the Sanskritist gave at Columbia University as a part of Sheldon Pollock's Mellon Sanskrit series. Mallinson describes his interactions with yogis, focusing on the Nāths, a small indigenous group in India. He openly reveals that, although his work is ethnographic, he meticulously avoids calling it ethnographic work so that he cannot be held accountable to its standards:

> I am also something of an amateur ethnographer. I even did an MA in ethnography, with a dissertation on asceticism in India, but I was deterred from continuing down the path of formal ethnography by what Sheldon Pollock has called "the hypertrophy of theory" which afflicts the humanities, so for my doctoral thesis I returned to philology, seeking to make sense of Indian asceticism through texts.

> I did continue my ethnographic efforts, however, albeit on the side. The Khecarīvidyā is about khecarīmudrā, a yogic practice in which the tongue is loosened and lengthened so that it can be turned back and upwards into the cavity above the palate, in order to access the amṛta, the nectar of immortality, dripping from the top of the skull. In order to shed light on the text, I sought out traditional yogis in India who practice khecarīmudrā but I made sure I didn't do so much ethnography that I had to justify my methods.[44]

It is important to note here that Mallinson has based much of his oft-cited scholarship on his doctoral thesis, which, he openly confesses, is based not on the ethical representation of the expertise and testimonies of the Nāth yogis he sought out, but on a methodical evasion of the ethical principles of ethnography. Mallinson substituted Nāth testimonies with his own presumed authority, which he validated through his philological examination of Hindu texts. Note that Hindu scholars Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee were accused of being "Hindutva" for offering a robust scholarly critique of philology:

> As scholars we have a duty to examine Indologists' claims, especially when they assert 'critical', 'text-critical', and 'philological' expertise. [...] Brandishing epithets such as 'critical', 'philology', and 'careful and critical scholarly reading' cannot substitute for real scholarship. Crying Hindutva does not exonerate Indologists from examining their own discipline's epistemic and institutional shortcomings.[45]

The same tactic of testimonial injustice is employed by journalists. For example, after the first Understanding Hinduphobia conference in July 2021, WNYC News'[46] race and immigration reporter, Arun Venugopal, interviewed[47] members of SASAC, who argued that Hinduphobia was a false claim to justify

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42. Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), "Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects ('Common Rule')," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, March 27, 2024, https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/regulations/common-rule/index.html.
43. James Mallinson, "Yoga and Yogis," *Nāmarūpa* 3, no. 13 (March 2012): 2–27.
44. Mallinson, "Yoga and Yogis," 2.
45. Adluri and Bagchee, "Cry Hindutva," 6–7.
46. A subsidiary of National Public Radio.
47. Arun Venugopal, "American Scholars of India Confront a Rise in Threats," interview with Audrey Truschke and Simran Jeet Singh, podcast audio, July 19, 2021, https://www.wnyc.org/story/american-scholars-india-confront-rise-threats/?fbclid=IwAR34WGH1xNnDtT_A_Uc2_33GyJyjFiVwzUKD7-nmg_Ly88oLU99Xl8RYZAY.

attacking them. While Venugopal appeared to know about the Understanding Hinduphobia conference, he failed to contact anyone related to the initiative to learn more about it, despite the fact that our names are publicly available. Instead, he asked his SASAC interviewees. They chose to cherry-pick data, describing a two-minute session during the conference, where the speaker, an undergraduate student, chose to remain anonymous while describing her direct experiences of Hinduphobia in college. Venugopal and the interviewee used the anonymity of this speaker to undermine the credibility of the entire conference. "People are unwilling to come forward about Hinduphobia."[48] He fails to mention that this was the only anonymous speaker during a day-long conference publicly available on YouTube.[49] Given the impunity with which Venugopal and his guests misrepresented and erased Hindu American testimonies and scholarship, it is no wonder that the student felt she had to remain anonymous.

Hermeneutical injustice refers to a gap in a community's interpretive and communicative resources, rendering some of their experiences or phenomena obscure, inexpressible, or incomprehensible. This injustice is often rendered by the kinds of erasures described earlier; if the events or contexts that help locate the expression of an experience or phenomenon have been erased in the public imagination, the experience can become impossible to convey. For instance, Arvind Sharma problematizes the construction of religious freedom,[50] codified in legal documents by the U.N. and the U.S. Constitution.

A critical aspect of Sharma's critique is that while the right to convert religions is enshrined in these documents, the right to defend against proselytization is not. For communities like Hindus – both Indian and diasporic – attempts at defending against the aggressive, often insidious campaigns of proselytization that pervade institutions and daily life are interpreted as acts of violence against freedom of religion itself. Since the legal definition of freedom of religion is internalized in the public imagination as both moral and integral to a functioning democracy, Hindus can find it impossible to explain the experience and morality of protecting their right not to be converted. This gap plays out in other ways. The inaccuracy in applying universalized Western constructs, like religion, to Hinduism, something that some non-Hindu scholars even recognize,[51] leads many Hindus to offer equally ineffectual, indeterminate statements like, "Hinduism isn't a religion. It's a way of life." Hindus may struggle to make Hinduism, itself, comprehensible to others in their everyday interactions.

In October 2023, the Harvard Political Review published an opinion piece[52] by Muskaan Arshad, who claimed that the Understanding Hinduphobia initiative was established to "increase public consciousness and discourse about Hinduphobia." It is unclear where Arshad found this description, as it appears nowhere in our language. Arshad then attempts to discredit the entire category of Hindu scholars speaking about Hinduphobia, even going so far as to question the validity of a quantitative study about Hinduphobia out of Rutgers University, because the Hindu American authors "posed as neutral."[53] He states

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48. Venugopal, "American Scholars of India Confront a Rise in Threats."
49. Hindu Students Council, "Understanding Hinduphobia Conference 2021 - Hosted by Hindu Students Council at Rutgers University," YouTube, April 28, 2021, 17 videos, https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLBeANoI-yc25dtdF1G0h2Vt4IKrQt7VRZ.
50. Arvind Sharma, *Problematizing Religious Freedom* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2012).
51. Jessica Frazier, *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hindu Studies* (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2014).
52. Muskaan Arshad, "Unmasking Hinduphobia in the US," *Harvard Political Review*, October 6, 2023, https://harvardpolitics.com/unmasking-hinduphobia-in-the-us/.
53. See Prasiddha Sudhakar et al., "Anti-Hindu Disinformation: A Case Study of Hinduphobia on Social Media," Network Contagion Research Institute, July 12, 2022, https://networkcontagion.us/reports/7-11-22-anti-hindu-disinformation-a-case-study-of-hinduphobia-on-social-media/. It bears mention that there are several highly respected

> These Hindu nationalist groups, with their connections and history of mass death and extremist ideas in the homeland, operate quietly and employ a framework of general Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion language to advance their agenda in the United States. The term Hinduphobia is almost exclusively used by such organizations as a benevolent front for their political goals. […]

> This false narrative of Hinduphobia is also perpetuated by biased studies that target political criticism. A study conducted at Rutgers University researching Hinduphobia is often cited by Hindu nationalist organizations in the diaspora as proof of widespread Hinduphobia. Posed as neutral, some of the authors of the study are linked to VHPA and other Hindu nationalist organizations.

Arshad attempts to validate these claims by citing Hindus for Human Rights, an organization that claims to represent Hindus, yet has no significant track record of recognizing Hindu persecution, including the documented genocide of Hindus across South Asia.

This illuminates an important distinction – when Hindus endorse the endogenous cycle of Hinduphobia, their testimonies are considered valid. Given the very human desire to be believed and the psychological implication of not being believed, this creates a strong psycho-social incentive for Hindus to provide testimonies that sustain the master narrative. (This is not to say that their experiences are not real, only to provide the larger context within which those stories are being shared.) There is an entrenched history of the Academy treating Hindus and Hinduism as passive curiosities of study from a non-Hindu gaze. This systematic devaluation silences and distorts a certain spectrum of Hindu voices, enabling the established master narrative to continue speaking uninterrupted with authority and an apparent unanimous consensus.

Arshad's essay is an excellent example of how handily the interplay of stereotypes, erasures, and testimonial and hermeneutical injustice give rise to epistemic injustice, undermining the epistemic authority of Hindu scholars. Intellectually honest scholarly interruption and critique of the master narrative about Hindus and Hinduism are discredited with ad hominem attacks on the Hindu scholars themselves.[54] This phenomenon extends more broadly into the very study of Hinduism, where Hindu scholars can be methodically excluded. As a simple experiment, I looked up the contributing authors to the following: the Bloomsbury Companion to Islamic Studies,[55] the Bloomsbury Companion to Jewish Studies,[56] and the Bloomsbury Companion to Hindu Studies.[57] One notable difference between the three Contributors sections is that the Islamic and Jewish Studies volumes include paragraph-length biographies describing the authors' scholarship, service, and experience as they relate to the respective religions; the Hindu Studies volume only lists the authors' names, positions, and institutions. The most striking difference, however, is in the authors themselves. Out of the eight listed contributors in the volume on Islamic Studies, three have Muslim names. The Jewish Studies book includes twelve contributors, all of whom are Jewish. The Hindu Studies book also includes twelve contributors; not a single one of them has a Hindu name. While this is a limited

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authors in the study, including Lee Jussim, Distinguished Professor of social psychology, who has served as the Chair of the departments of psychology, criminal justice, and anthropology at Rutgers University. In the interest of full disclosure, my name also appears as a contributor to the study.

54. Arshad, "Unmasking Hinduphobia in the US."

55. Clinton Bennett, ed., *The Bloomsbury Companion to Islamic Studies* (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2015).

56. Dean Phillip Bell, ed., *The Bloomsbury Companion to Jewish Studies* (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2015).

57. Jessica Frazier, ed., *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hindu Studies* (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2014). The aforementioned volumes do not claim to be authoritative primers on these religions, but explorations in conversation with foundational scholarship. Still, at least in the case of Hindu Studies, the assumed context for the study of Hinduism merits critique and examination, as discussed throughout this paper.

examination, it is still compelling. Why are Hindu scholars uniquely excluded from a compendium of scholarly discourse about their own tradition? While there is scholarly chatter about authority and voice in Hindu Studies, these conversations flip the script, so to speak, back onto Indian politics, claiming that the rise in Hindu nationalism threatens the academic freedom of non-Hindu scholars of Hinduism. "Who Speaks for Hinduism?"[58] is a series of articles published in 2000 by *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, which begins with this premise. Twenty-three years later, as a callback to the earlier publication, Supriya Gandhi, a scholar with a Hindu name, extends this narrative:

> [T]he succeeding years have witnessed the growing dominance of Hindutva as a cultural and political project of right-wing ethno-nationalism, which now looms large over academic inquiry into Hinduism. Today, Hindu nationalists leverage social media, capital, and the long arm of the Indian state to advance their claim of representing the authentic voice of Hinduism.[59]

I want to emphasize that I am not suggesting that non-Hindus are disqualified from being legitimate scholars of Hinduism because of race or religion. Rather than "who speaks for Hinduism?" the more troubling question I am asking is, "Why are not more Hindus allowed to speak for Hinduism?" This is implicitly answered by the master narratives and evocative imagery of a looming, long arm of Hindutva reaching around the globe. Again, I am not suggesting that no Hindus are allowed to speak, but it does appear to me, a Hindu American scholar of education (not a scholar of religion or region), that the epistemic authority of Hindu scholars is recognized more readily if they espouse viewpoints that are tethered to the master narrative.

By contrast, Hindu scholars (with the requisite academic credentials and training) who seek to critique the established scholarship on Hindus and Hinduism experience visible epistemic injustice; one can only imagine the constraints faced by the broader Hindu community and their capacity to be seen and heard as legitimate narrators of their own experiences and interpreters of their cultural and religious landscapes. Hinduphobia arises from a perfect storm of all of these mechanisms, from stereotypes to epistemic injustice, securing the permanency of the endogenous cycle of Hinduphobia and creating a permission structure for the scholars and journalists at elite institutions and media houses to ignore, dismiss, and demonize Hindu Americans, a mostly immigrant community.

It is only after establishing this broader context that we can begin to understand the 2016 California textbook testimonies. This is a brief, preliminary discussion of a collection of twenty-two interviews I conducted with Hindu Americans in the Bay Area in August 2023. My examination in this paper emerges from the following question: How do stereotypes, erasures, and epistemic injustice appear in the California textbook debates of 2016?

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58. Sarah Caldwell and Brian K. Smith, "Introduction: Who Speaks for Hinduism?" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 68, no. 4 (2000): 705–710, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1465850.
59. Supriya Gandhi, "Who Speaks for Hinduism?" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 90, no. 4 (December 1, 2022): 795–800, https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfad024.

Methodology

The study was launched after receiving IRB approval.[60] Because of its focused nature, I used criterion-based sampling[61] to recruit participants. Participants for this study fell into one of two categories: Hindu Americans (18 and older) who testified as minors before the California Department of Education in 2016 when they were enrolled in the California public school system (Group A); or Hindu American parents who testified or supported their children's testimony before the California Department of Education in 2016 (Group B). As an active member of the Hindu American community, my connections with several Hindu American cultural organizations, institutions, and networks supported participant recruitment. My contacts facilitated introductions with potential participants, establishing a level of trust and accountability to put them at ease while they considered their participation. Anyone who expressed interest in participating in the study received an IRB-approved formal invitation to participate, which included a fuller description of the research, selection criteria, guidelines and expectations for participation, and their rights as participants. I followed the highest standards of ethics in human subject research, reviewing participant rights and risks with each potential participant prior to their participation, and confirmed active, informed consent with their signatures on IRB-approved participant consent forms before any data was collected.

Data was collected during a ten-day period in August 2023, when I travelled to the Bay Area and met with participants in their chosen place of convenience. For the most part, I was invited into their homes; in a few cases, we met at local coffee shops. In total, there were twenty-two participants: twelve from Group A and ten from Group B. Interviews were semi-structured, and the average interview time was fifty-six minutes. Participants chose their own pseudonyms, and all data were recorded using only pseudonyms. I took manual notes for two participants, who preferred not to have their interviews audio-recorded. The remaining participants were audio-recorded on my iPhone. These recordings were immediately transferred to a secure Google Drive folder, which only I can access. Recordings were then transcribed; these transcriptions are saved in the same secure folder as the recordings, along with the manual notes. For the purpose of this paper, I focused on the testimonies of Group A. I coded the transcripts and notes with the themes discussed above – stereotypes, erasures, and epistemic injustice – which arose during the interviews, as I was conducting them. The following is a concise description of my findings, followed by direct quotes from participants. In the spirit of testimonial justice, my goal is to offer unvarnished representations of their testimonies.[62]

Findings

Every participant reported that the section in their middle school textbook that represented Hinduism was significantly shorter than the sections on Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Some of them recalled that, while the other world religions had standalone chapters, Hinduism only received a section in a chapter on Eastern religions, which also covered Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism. Rather than presenting the larger philosophy or values, these limited spaces focused on the caste system, sati, and the notion of polytheism. "[O]ne of the defining things that made us different from other religions was that it's

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60. HIRB project No. 06062023-486, Heartland Institutional Review Board, LLC, 4226 Woodfield Place, Suite 100, Swansea IL 62226-7800.
61. Oliver C. Robinson, "Sampling in Interview-Based Qualitative Research: A Theoretical and Practical Guide," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 11, no. 1 (November 18, 2013): 25–41, https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2013.801543.
62. I will share a longer, more comprehensive analysis of this data and presentation of findings in a future paper.

polytheistic."[63] Participants had been educated about Hinduism by their parents, other family members, and through community organizations; some articulated an awareness of how these representations left their non-Hindu classmates with a very negative impression of Hinduism:

> I remember this very well, that they talked a little, they never really talked about the religious beliefs, the value systems. They kind of painted it over with one brush, saying that Hindus believe in multiple gods and that they revere a monkey as a god. They revere a guy with an elephant head as a god (Ganesha). And it was certainly, you can argue, very bigoted or at the very least, very ignorant of what Hinduism actually is. So that's how the Hinduism textbook was portrayed in my middle school class.[64]

> I said that every religion has had negative aspects to it in its history, in its past in religion, sanctioned slavery, second-class treatment to women, […] lack of rights for LGBTQ people, et cetera. But none of these are talked about in any of the other religions in our textbooks. But Hinduism was the only one that was targeted for the caste system or sati, which that's a whole different thing. So why, I kind of asked, why was there this disparity between all the other religions and Hinduism being treated so negatively, looked at from such a negative light?[65]

A few participants reported that their teachers enacted role plays premised upon the caste system that was presented in the textbooks. These textbooks reinforced reductive stereotypes about Hindu students amongst their peers. Some participants reported feeling socially pressured by their classmates to answer to the negative stereotypes of Hinduism presented in class:

> I remember when we did the caste system stuff, people being like, "Oh, what caste are you in?" And it was so funny because I had never even talked about caste with my family. My dad never brought it up. My parents never brought it up. It was just not a component of our day-to-day lives that made sense to talk about. So, I would tell them, I was like, "I don't know. That's not relevant." But anyway, they were like, "Oh, we think you're this [caste]." And I'm like, "Don't make generalizations."[66]

Some participants reported that while some of their Jewish and Muslim classmates were more open about discussing their religion, they felt wary of talking about being Hindu amongst their peers, because of the ideas that had been cultivated in class:

> I didn't really talk about being a Hindu kid that much, especially in middle school, because it was still fresh from that, from the sixth-grade curriculum, where I felt like, oh, I felt kind of ashamed and embarrassed that I was like, oh, is this really what it is? And I felt like it was so much effort to try to convince other people that it's not all that Hinduism is about. And I didn't want to keep defending my religion in a sense, so I wouldn't really bring it up too much.[67]

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63. Chandini, interview with Indu Viswanathan, August 10, 2023.
64. Vayu, interview with Indu Viswanathan, August 7, 2023.
65. Arjun, interview with Indu Viswanathan, August 3, 2023.
66. Chandini, interview with Indu Viswanathan, August 10, 2023.
67. Meghana, interview with Indu Viswanathan, August 7, 2023.

All the students reported that there was a gap between what they knew to be Hinduism and what was presented in school about Hinduism:

> I went through all the texts in that India chapter, Hinduism chapter, and I was at that age of, I don't exactly remember, but as a kid, I was able to see that this is not right. It didn't take a huge amount of brains to do that. I didn't need a degree in South Asian studies to do that because it was clearly everything that I practiced, everything that all my friends practiced, the family circles practiced. That is not what was being written in the textbooks.[68]

Every one of the participants I interviewed reported that no scholar had ever reached out to them to find out their perspectives or to gather their testimonies. I asked them to respond to the popular claim made by journalists and some scholars that Hindu children had been coerced into testifying by their parents, who fed them scripts to read. Every single participant reported that, while their parents had given them the information about the opportunity to testify and supported them in preparing to speak publicly for the first time, they all had a choice to speak. When it came to the public testimony, some of the participants recalled how troubled they were by the hostility directed at the students by scholars and other adults:

> Some of [the South Asian Faculty Group], they were just so hateful. I mean, they were screaming, they were yelling. They had all these posters. They called us Nazis, fascists, whatever. Which is, first of all, an insult to millions of Jews and millions of other people who were killed by [the Nazis]. And also, they're just taking this term and muddling it down because we just want to protect our beliefs, we want people to know about us in a true unbiased way, and they (the South Asian Faculty Group) want to change that. So their reactions were … they were very upset. In fact, one lady was yelling at me. She called me an a-hole, I think once or twice. I was in eighth grade.[69]

One participant remembered with disappointment that the Department of Education committee that was hearing testimonies did not appear particularly engaged:

> They were not very welcoming. I think I only remember one person who was smiling a little bit or was more encouraging. The general sense just felt like they didn't really care all that much, and this was just another thing that they needed to get through, which was, I didn't mind it personally for me when I was speaking, but when the younger kids would come up, or you would have parents that would come up who are immigrants, who are mustering up the courage to say something in a land that sometimes doesn't even feel like their own, despite how long I've been here, I was like, okay, this is rude. This is disrespectful to the people who have spent time to come say something. And you're not giving them even the decency to look them in the eye or to show that you are actually listening.[70]

Conclusion

In the end, the participants reported that the committee's decisions did reflect many of the changes suggested by the Hindu Americans who testified before them. Additionally, all the students reported that when they spoke up in class, their teachers listened to their concerns and perspectives. Some students

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68. Arjun, interview with Indu Viswanathan, August 3, 2023.
69. Vayu, interview with Indu Viswanathan, August 7, 2023.
70. Chandini, interview with Indu Viswanathan, August 10, 2023.

reported that their teachers were even proud that they were going to testify before the Department of Education, announcing to the class that they were actively participating in American democracy. These are significant, positive indications that when they engage proactively and skillfully with members of the public education system, it is possible for Hindu Americans to receive epistemic justice and interrupt the endogenous cycle, at least temporarily. However, in order to address these phenomena at a systemic level, change must occur at the levels of higher education and in the media. This paper should serve as the first building block in naming, studying, and eventually interrupting the endogenous cycle of Hinduphobia at a much larger scale across multiple sites of study and experience. These sites might include K-12 history and social science curricula across the country, university-level South Asian studies and Indology programs, academic journals, news media coverage of Hinduism and Hindus, community advocacy addressing biases in public education, and domestic and foreign policy-making initiatives. Every component that was presented here merits deeper interrogation, critique, refinement, and exploration. The endogenous cycle of Hinduphobia hampers viewpoint diversity, which is the engine of sound scholarship and of the pluralism at the heart of a healthy, vibrant American democracy:

> Well, the United States has given me everything. Maybe if India has given me, we call it the motherland, I would say the United States is the fatherland, all the hardcore practical stuff, and all of that is here. And I would say I'm proud to be American just as much as I'm proud of my Indian heritage. I feel that people don't value that, at least here. Those that haven't seen or I guess conversed with people from other backgrounds, from other countries, the freedom, the prosperity, and the ability to do whatever we want and be whoever we want, is a lot more valuable than we think. And I'm proud to call myself American and to be able to participate in this nation.[71]

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71. Arjun, interview with Indu Viswanathan, August 3, 2023.

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