

Date July 1, 2021

To:

Dr. Jonathan Holloway, President, Rutgers University
Dr. Nancy Cantor, Chancellor, Rutgers University - Newark
Dr. Enobong (Anna) Branch, SVP for Equity, Rutgers University

As Hindu temples and spiritual organizations located in the United States, we write to you to register our disappointment and concerns about events at Rutgers University where Professor Audrey Truschke's comments on Hinduism have caused intense trauma not only to Hindu students on campus, but also to the broader Hindu community. We also stand in solidarity with the Hindu students and want you to know that we are ready to assist them in every way possible.

As the students have highlighted, Professor Truschke has [called](#) Shri Rama, one of the most popular (or revered) deities in the Hindu tradition, a "misogynistic pig." She also [declared](#) that the *Bhagavad Gita*, an internationally renowned and revered Hindu text, "rationalizes mass slaughter" while the *Mahabharata*, another immensely popular and sacred Hindu text, rationalizes rape and other social problems in India. In doing so, Professor Truschke demonizes Hinduism as inherently misogynistic, oppressive, and savage.

Hundreds of thousands of Americans attend Hindu temple services and educational programs every day. To them, Shri Rama, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and the *Mahabharata* provide a path to devotion, self-realization, and inner strength and a way to bring about peace, harmony, and mutual understanding in a world that is ripe with many conflicts and challenges. Thousands of yoga and spiritual centers around the country take solace in the *Bhagavad Gita* in order to live a life of well-being and peace. The *Bhagavad Gita* has inspired world renowned personalities such as Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Einstein, Carl Jung, Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Hermann Hesse, T.S. Elliot, and many others.

Many American Hindu temples house the *murthi* (image) of Shri Rama and devotees lovingly offer *puja* services. Tens of thousands of kids of all ages attend Hindu temple programs to learn about their heritage and culture where they develop a sense of cultural identity.

Traditional and well-known translations of the episode that Professor Truschke refers to regarding Shri Rama clearly show that his wife (Sita) never uses words that are remotely close to "misogynistic pig." For example, in this freely available [translation](#) of the chapter in question, Sita, while engulfed in sorrow, addresses Shri Rama as "Viira" (valiant), "Mahaabaaho" (long armed one), "Prabho" (Lord), "Maanada" (bestower of honor), etc. Throughout the entire chapter, Sita can be seen maintaining dignity and respect while gently chiding Rama.

Coming to the *Bhagavad Gita*, Professor Truschke decides to focus on a select few portions of the text without providing readers any context and ignoring a majority of the verses which focus on deep philosophical and metaphysical commentaries on Bhakti Yoga, Gyana Yoga, Karma

Yoga, Raja Yoga, etc. – aspects that are popular among hundreds of millions of people around the world. Even when Krishna exhorts Arjuna to fight, he provides beautiful philosophical context to remind him of his duty as a warrior in the battlefield, as seen in this [translation](#) of Chapter 2, Verse 18, which reads: “Only the material body of the indestructible, immeasurable and eternal living entity is subject to destruction; therefore, fight, O descendant of Bharata.” The *Bhagavad Gita* is filled with profound messages to overcome inner doubts and struggles of daily life. To view this entire text as a rationalization of mass slaughter is just appalling scholarship. Hers is a translation with the deliberate goal of misrepresenting the sacred text in the minds of those who do not know it.

Finally, on Professor Truschke’s claims regarding the *Mahabharata* and the modern connection to rape. There is no evidence that the rapists in question had any clue about the *Mahabharata* nor that they were specifically inspired by the text to commit such a heinous crime. Professor Truschke also invents an implication out of thin air: Draupadi was “punished” for speaking out and carried a reputation for being a “shrew” and a “troublemaker.” This is pure fantasy at best – where in the *Mahabharata* does she carry such a reputation? We invite Professor Truschke to read the following free [translation](#) of the *Sabha Parva*, where the incident involving Draupadi takes place. One can clearly see the respect accorded to Draupadi by the author and the elders of the family. When she was disrespected, the author brings in important voices that denounce and censure such treatment in harsh words, for she was a powerful and illustrious queen who was well regarded in society. Her treatment was considered unjust, immoral and against *Dharma* (righteousness).

Thus, we cannot help but feel intensely hurt and abused when a professor uses her authority and deliberately misinterprets Hindu sacred texts or slanders Hindu deities while rationalizing such behavior as “academic freedom.”

We can all agree on the need to support academic freedom and the pursuit of knowledge. We also condemn violence and threats of violence as they are antithetical to Hindu ethos. Yet, bigotry and Hinduphobia on social media and in scholarship cannot be excused as academic freedom, especially when these remarks have grave consequences for how Hindu students at Rutgers will be perceived by their own peers.

Would Rutgers, an institution that puts great value on its principles of diversity and inclusion, allow a professor to use his or her authority to characterize figures and texts from other religions in such a bigoted fashion? Especially that of a minority indigenous faith, that is already highly misunderstood? As Hindu temples and spiritual institutions, we ask you for the same consideration as other minority groups that comprise Rutgers’ diverse community.

With rising anti-Asian hatred and violence across our nation and Rutgers’ recent affirmation of its commitment to its Asian (and Hindu) campus population, it is imperative that the university also stamps out hatred and bigotry by those in authority.

Lastly, we are perturbed by the vehement dismissal of genuine student concerns by some academics (including Professor Truschke) and organizations as the handiwork of “right wing extremists” or a foreign government and condemn such attempts. These sideline the real issues at

hand and deny Hindu students the right to bring about legitimate grievances to reach a solution and subject them to further abuse and ridicule. The university must not fall prey to such propaganda and must ensure the safety and protect the rights of the Hindu students – many of whom are still afraid of speaking up from fear of being bullied and harassed on social media or other places.

We are reminded of a [quote](#) from the *Bhagavad Gita* (Chapter 3, Verse 21) regarding the duties of leaders and those in the position of authority and request you to reflect upon its meaning in the current context: Whatever action is performed by a great person, others will follow, and whatever standards he/she sets by exemplary acts, all the world pursues.

We stand by the Hindu students and expect Rutgers to lead by example and work closely with them to recognize and combat Hinduphobia on campus.

Sincerely,

The Undersigned

Arya Samaj of New Jersey, Ridgewood, New Jersey

New Jersey Arya Samaj Mandir, Jersey City, New Jersey

Chinmaya Mission Tri-State Center, Cranbury, New Jersey

Dharma Palana Sabha, Princeton, New Jersey

Durga Mandir, Princeton, New Jersey

Gayatri Chetna Center, Piscataway, New Jersey

Govinda Sanskar Center, Jersey City, New Jersey

Hindu Community Center, Kearny, New Jersey

Hindu Jewish Coalition, Princeton, New Jersey

Integral Yoga Institute, New York, New Jersey

Shree Swaminarayan Hindu Temple (ISSO), Parsippany, New Jersey

Om Sri Sai Balaji Temple, Monroe Township, New Jersey

Sai Datta Peetham, Edison, New Jersey

Sanatan Mandir, Parsippany, New Jersey

Swaminarayan Gurukul USA, Paramus, New Jersey

Umiya Mataji Temple, Edison, New Jersey

Yoga Vedanta Center, Matawan, New Jersey
Hindu Temple of Central Arkansas, Little Rock, Arkansas
Gayatri Scientific Spirituality Center, Santa Clara, California
Irvine Hindu Mandir, Irvine, California
Shiva Vishnu Temple of San Diego, San Diego, California
Shri Mandir of San Diego, San Diego, California
Sri Ashtalakshmi Temple, Fremont, California
Hindu Temple of the Rockies, Centennial, Colorado
ISKCON of Colorado, Denver, Colorado
Shri Shirdi Sai Baba Temple, Centennial, Colorado
ISKCON of Connecticut, East Hartford, Connecticut
Florida Indo-Cultural Society, Miami, Florida
Hindu Society of America, Miami, Florida
New Age Seers, Orlando, Florida
South Florida Hindu Temple, Southwest Ranches, Florida
Gokuldharm Haveli, Buford, Georgia
Greater Atlanta Vedic Temple, Lilburn, Georgia
Shiv Mandir of Atlanta, Sugar Hill, Georgia
Shiva Durga Temple, Cumming, Georgia
Shree Sai Parivar, Locust Grove, Georgia
Shree Shakti Mandir of Atlanta, Lake City, Georgia
Shree Umiya Mataji Mandir, Macon, Georgia
Siddhi Vinayak Mandir Atlanta, Norcross, Georgia
Chinmaya Mission Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
Hindu Temple of New Orleans in Metairie, Metairie, Louisiana
Chinmaya Mission Washington Regional Center, Silver Spring, Maryland
India Discovery Center, Lincoln, Massachusetts
West Michigan Hindu Temple, Ada, Michigan

Hindu Society of Minnesota, Maple Grove, Minnesota
Albany Hindu Temple Society, Albany, New York
Arya Samaj USA, New York, New York
Arya Spiritual Center, Jamaica, New York
Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, New York, New York
Bhavaanee Maa Mandir, Brooklyn, New York
Bhavani Shankara Mandir, Central Islip, New York
Divya Jyoti Jagrati Sansthan, Queens, New York
Federation of Hindu Mandirs, South Richmond Hill, New York
Ganesh Temple, Flushing, New York
Hindu Center, Flushing, New York
Hindu Temple of Tristates, White Plains, New York
Shiva Mandir, East Elmhurst, New York
Shri Adi Parashakti Devi Mandir, Jamaica, New York
Shri Navagraha Devasthanam of North America, New Hyde Park, New York
Shri Surya Narayan Mandir, Queens, New York
Shyama Shyam Dham, Jamaica, New York
USA Pandits Parishad, Queens, New York
New York Sanatan Shiva Mandir, Brooklyn, New York
Hindu Temple Dayton, Beavercreek, Ohio
Shiva Vishnu Temple of Greater Cleveland, Parma, Ohio
Adi Parashakti Sai Educational Center, Hillsboro, Oregon
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Saylorsburg, Pennsylvania
Hindu Jain Temple, Monroeville, Pennsylvania
Vraj Temple, Schuylkill Haven, Pennsylvania
Chinmaya Mission Austin, Austin, Texas
Chinmaya Mission DFW, Dallas, Texas
Sri Ramanuja Thondarkulam, Allen, Texas

Balavikas of Fairfax, Fairfax, Virginia

Durga Temple of VA, Fairfax Station, Virginia

Hindu Temple of Wisconsin, Pewaukee, Wisconsin