

**To: President Holloway, Chancellor Nancy Kantor, SVP Anna Branch**

We, the students of Rutgers University, are writing to you regarding actions that have shaken the foundation of our beliefs of Rutgers being a place that welcomes minorities and stands for the principles of diversity and inclusion. Specifically, we bring to your attention the recent and continued actions of Prof. Audrey Truschke, who teaches South Asian History at Rutgers Newark. While we still hold dear the core values of Rutgers - [students and community, inclusion, learning, and integrity](#) - we are aghast at the **bigotry being peddled against Hindus via continued derision of our religion, our deities, and our sacred texts**. Hindu students at Rutgers are concerned about their safety because we fear potential attacks, bullying, and backlash, either on campus or via social media, due to our faith. We provide a few examples to illustrate our concerns:

1. Following the horrific Capitol Hill insurrection and riots which shook our nation's fabric, Prof. Truschke [tweeted](#) about the presence of an Indian flag at the scene and immediately declared it to be the handiwork of "The Hindu Right," even though various media outlets showed that the [perpetrator was not a Hindu](#). Not to mention, the [national flags](#) of Israel, Vietnam, Georgia, South Korea, Canada, Australia, and Iran were also carried by some people to Capitol Hill on that day. Such conflation creates a dangerous environment for Hindus and opens us up for potentially violent attacks by falsely linking Hindus to White Supremacists.
2. In a recent article in [Aeon](#), Prof. Truschke **accused the *Bhagavad Gita***, one of the most famous and sacred Hindu texts that were the basis for Mahatma Gandhi's non-violence movement, as "**rationalizing mass slaughter**." Without any remorse, she even compared the 2012 Nirbhaya gangrape case in India to an incident in the sacred epic *Mahabharata* and essentially led readers to **conclude that Hinduism endorses "rape culture" and misogyny** and thus lacks any ethics or value system.
3. In April 2018, Prof. Truschke [called Rama](#), one of the most revered and central figures in Hinduism and Jainism, a "**misogynist pig**." What's worse, she claimed using the translation of Professor Robert Goldman, a well-reputed scholar on the Ramayana. However, [Goldman has himself clarified](#) that **Prof. Truschke's words have "nothing to do with our translation,"** that her language was "highly inappropriate," and that the whole saga was "extremely disturbing" and "quite shocking." Does brazenly misrepresenting another professor's work to support these specious, degrading claims align with Rutgers' commitment to ethical scholarship?
4. In November 2018, as has been a repeated pattern, **Prof. Truschke brushed away the trauma inflicted on Hindus** and the people of India by Mughal king Aurangzeb, claiming that such numbers are often exaggerated as there was really no way of knowing how many people existed in India at that time; and that people of that time made up numbers! Interestingly, **reputable sources have demonstrated that Aurangzeb enslaved and murdered 4.6 million Hindus** and others while Prof. Truschke, who claims to be a "responsible historian" **conveniently decided to whitewash such horrific statistics**. In other instances, Prof. Truschke has defended the Mughal King by saying that he "protected more Hindu temples than he destroyed" and that he [increased](#) Hindu participation at the elite levels of the Mughal state."

**Would Rutgers administration fail to address a professor on campus characterizing the Prophet Muhammad, Jesus, or another other central religious figure or sacred literature in a similarly ghastly, bigoted way? Why is it permissible about Hinduism and Hindus?**

Such a characterization is antithetical to the spirit of inclusion and integrity, which should make the campus community feel welcomed.

Let us now turn your attention to her [course material](#), which presents India and Hinduism as **an exotic-erotic-violent society and tradition**, thus blatantly casting aspersion on a religion and culture that has embraced pluralism and mutual respect. **Thousands of years of rich and vibrant history are analyzed along with selective and pejorative portrayals of sex, violence, misogyny, immorality, etc.** in ancient Indian society, along with the “horrors” of “caste.” Save for a few occasional mentions, there is no substantive material showing the historical achievement of ancient Indians in fields like science, mathematics, architecture, literature, governance, etc.

In addition, Prof. Truschke uses works from authors who have a known history of demonizing Hindu deities and Hindu texts. **Her coursework relies on many outdated and colonial theories and does not offer an opportunity for alternative views of Hinduism and India** - something that would greatly benefit the students taking her class. To illustrate:

1. Prof. Truschke's course material relies significantly on the works of Prof. Wendy Doniger. Doniger's penchant for **painting Hinduism through the lens of sex, exoticism, and violence** is well-known. But, more insidiously, Doniger has gone on record for grossly [mischaracterizing](#) sacred Hindu texts such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, along with the *Bhagavad Gita*. In November 2000, Prof. Doniger declared: “The Bhagavad Gita is not as nice a book as some Americans think...Throughout the Mahabharata, the enormous Hindu epic of which the Gita is a small part, Krishna goads human beings into all sorts of murderous and self-destructive behaviors such as the war in order to relieve ‘mother Earth’ of its burdensome human population and the many demons disguised as humans ... The Gita is a dishonest book; it justifies war.” It is no coincidence that such a theme resonates with Prof. Truschke as seen earlier, given that Doniger had [supervised](#) her undergraduate thesis and has been one of her mentors.
2. While discussing the *Mahabharata* in week 4 and its “present-day connection” Prof. Truschke deliberately links the great epic to a bizarre claim made by someone in modern India that ancient Hindus invented the internet, in order to **portray Hindus as crackpots and devoid of scientific acumen**. We can't help but wonder whether such preposterous connections are made by professors who teach other religions and sacred texts at Rutgers.
3. In the same vein, when discussing the *Ramayana* in week 6, the focus is on “social discontents” within the great epic, with a special “present-day connection” to the “fire test” (where Sita, one of the main characters of the epic, is asked to undergo a fire test to prove her chastity) to once again **paint a picture of “endemic misogyny” within Hinduism and a dangerous idea that today's social problems in India can be traced back to sacred Hindu texts**. This

seems to be a deliberate pattern for Prof. Truschke, given her sordid portrayals of Rama, the *Mahabharata*, and the *Bhagavad Gita* as discussed earlier. The same week also focuses on a controversial work discussing how there are over 300 versions of the *Ramayana*, in an attempt to dislodge and demote the importance of the most popular and original version by the great sage Valmiki. Unfortunately, **Prof. Truschke fails to provide a balanced view of the two epics** which enjoy immense popularity and respect in many countries around the world, including Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, South Korea, Nepal, Guyana, Trinidad, and Tobago, etc.

4. While discussing 500 year period of history in week 8, **Prof. Truschke once again hones in on the “problems,” with a special focus on the burning of a Hindu text purportedly deemed as oppressive and horrible**, along with the “present day connection” discussing an article where women from the marginalized communities are blackening the face of a statue of the ancient author attributed to the Hindu text. It is another attempt to paint Hindu society as inherently backward and oppressive and devoid of anything moral.
5. In week 9, while discussing the great Gupta empire, the focus is on the *Kamasutra* and “sex” yet again. No discussion of the famous works of the great poet Kalidasa, along with scientific and architectural achievements of the era, from the discovery of zero by Aryabhatta to the numeral system, and myriad innovations and contributions that have deeply impacted world civilizations.

**One can easily see parallels between Prof. Truschke’s work and the works of colonial scholars who carried [intense disdain](#) for Hinduism and India. Using Eurocentric [race theories](#) and white privilege, these scholars and colonial administrators deemed indigenous cultures as savage and inherently inferior and thus worthy of colonization and slavery.**

Prof. Truschke’s bigoted stances, biased selection of coursework, and relentless focus on nothing but the “problems” of Hindu society deserve to be denounced. **Her deep-rooted prejudice against the Hindus and continued misinterpretation of sacred Hindu texts and religious figures is becoming increasingly manifest in her statements and the use of her authority to project Hindus as oppressors, violent and bigoted.** Her coursework and her statements offer her students and her followers a short-cut to “exotic-erotic-chauvinist-oppressive India.” In doing so, **she threatens the safety and voices of Hindus and students of Indian origin on campuses** - many of whom are genuinely fearful of their safety and hesitate to speak up due to concerns of backlash and attacks from Truschke and her supporters.

Hindu students are an important part of the Rutgers family and we uphold the diversity and inclusion that are core to the values of Rutgers. Yet, in spite of repeated complaints, petitions, private conversations with administrators, and many other ways to garner support for our grievances, **Rutgers has failed us.**

**Students and parents expect Rutgers to be a safe place that welcomes students to explore their passions and thirst for knowledge.** One important component of that is the

faculty that Rutgers employs and the policies and procedures it puts in place to safeguard these principles. Faculty members have a lasting impact on students and are instrumental in shaping their worldview. Thus, faculty members have a fiduciary obligation when exposing students to cultures and traditions that are often misunderstood or unfamiliar. When this fiduciary duty is repeatedly violated, Rutgers has an obligation to act and rectify the situation in the interest of its students and principles.

It is important to note that while Rutgers has [acted](#) against a professor for making racist and anti-Semitic rants in the past, **the university fails to apply the same standards for Hindus**. Today, we do not feel welcomed and included at Rutgers and are appalled that a reputable institution continues to **allow such open demonization of our religion and heritage while promising a commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion**.

We thus demand the following with immediate effect:

1. Prof. Truschke should not be allowed to teach a course that involves materials related to Hinduism and India due to her prejudiced views and selective portrayals of Hindus and India.
2. **Rutgers must publicly condemn Prof. Truschke for causing trauma to Hindu students, alumni, and the Hindu community at large** by her irresponsible tweets and utterances.
3. Rutgers must provide a platform where Hindu students can bring in faculty and researchers who can challenge Prof. Truschke's "scholarship" in order to provide realistic representations of Hinduism and India.
4. Rutgers must **acknowledge** that most Hindu students are children of immigrants, or are immigrants themselves, and that as a public institution, there is an obligation to ensure that all students feel welcome and included, and that the university does not exclude any group based on its identity.
5. Rutgers must officially **recognize** that Hindu students are religiously minoritized, and most are racially and ethnically minoritized, and, thus, should provide them with the same protections and considerations that other minoritized students have.
6. Rutgers must take sufficient measures to ensure the protection of Hindus on campus.
7. **Rutgers must take action against those who hurt a specific community on a college campus. This rule should be applied to everyone equally and all should feel included on campus.**

We hope that the above information and instances provide a clear picture of the grievances of Hindu students at Rutgers, along with those who believe in upholding the values of diversity and inclusion. **We also hope that Rutgers takes the necessary actions to restore the trust of Hindu students in the principles and values of the university, which we still hold in high regard.**

Sincerely,

Concerned Hindu students and allies at Rutgers Newark and New Brunswick.