



California Civil Rights Report: Hinduphobia is real & kicking!

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Prejudiced violence against Hindu minorities be countered by rejig in anti-hate crime laws, legal counseling, education, understanding on Hindus

Introduction:

Civil Rights Department (CDR) of California recently put together a report outlining frequency in cases relating to religious hatred in the California state, USA. As per the report, incidences of anti-Hindu hate crimes accounted for 23.3 per cent of all religious hate crimes reported to Department's Anti-Hate Hotline in one year. Almost one-quarter of all reported religious hate crimes were directed at Hindu community. The rise in such crimes is a serious concern and necessitates a closer look at the underlying reasons, ramifications and possible remedies to stop this worrying trend.

Among the states with most diversity in terms of culture and religion in the US is California. Hindus make up a sizable chunk of the state's population; they are mostly Indian Americans who enrich the social, cultural and economic fabric of the region. This diversity notwithstanding and the ideals of acceptance, reports of religious hatred and intolerance persist. Verbal abuse, physical assaults, vandalism of places of worship, harassment and other types of hate speech or discrimination against Hindu persons or groups are examples of anti-Hindu hate incidents. Substantive absolute number of incidents suggests that the larger problem of religious intolerance is anti-Hindu hostility.

Background:

Non-availability of data relating to registered Hindu population in US Census forces researchers to rely on open-source estimates. These

estimates vary on a wide range. But US is home to over three million Hindu Americans and account for one percent of the country's population. With an estimated three percent of the population, New Jersey has highest percentage of Hindus living in any state while in Arizona and Delaware, Hindu Americans make up the largest non-Christian religious group. There are over a thousand Hindu temples and other religious buildings and institutions in the US.

Asian immigration to Pacific Northwest increased in late 19th century, with Sikhs and Hindus among those who came to work as low-wage workers. In response to growing demand for Asian labour, a coalition of 67 unions formed Japanese and Korean Exclusion League, subsequently renamed as Asiatic Exclusion League. The league actively lobbied to stop Asian immigration to United States.

First persecution and mob attack against Asian Indian immigrants was carried out by self-styled anti-Asian union called Asiatic Exclusion League in Bellingham, Washington, in September 1907, driving out over a hundred of them from the city. Sadly, no one was held accountable for the crimes and it was rejoiced upon when the "Hindus" were expelled from Washington. All Hindu and Sikh people were driven out of the Pacific Northwest because of similar attacks that ensued in other cities in the region.

In response to pressure from Asiatic Exclusion League and other nativist groups, US Congress passed Naturalisation Act of 1906 which limited eligibility for naturalised citizenship for others, effectively barred Asians from obtaining US citizenship and deprived Hindu and Sikh communities of their rights. These legislative limitations persisted for 22 long years till signing of Luce-Celler Act of 1946 by President Harry Truman's which allowed Hindus and other groups who had previously been denied citizenship to become naturalised citizens with a cap of 100

Indian immigrants per year. This quota system remained in effect until Hart-Celler Act of 1965 that was passed by US Congress thereby eliminating national origin quota and instituted a preferences-based system in its place.

By the 1980s, many US states including New York, New Jersey, and California had sizable Hindu population and several Hindu temples. Frustrated anti-Hindu and anti-Bharat Immigrant unions started persecution / targeted attacks and harassment. Hindus using traditional headgear, bindis, and saris started to draw criticism and abuse from other communities.

A group of anti-Hindu extremists, in a letter published in New Jersey Journal in 1987, called for violence to be used to force Hindus out of New Jersey. Shortly after the letter's publication, an Indian Parsi man named Navroze Mody was fatally attacked & killed in Hoboken. Few days after this, another Indian Hindu, Kaushal Saran was attacked in Jersey City Heights and battered into unconsciousness.

Encouraged by authorities taking no action or remaining mute spectator, vicious attacks on Indians especially Hindus and Sikhs continued with 3-4 incidents reported very month. Brutal killing of two Hindu men, Kanu and Mukesh Patel in 1999 that involved shooting in an execution-style at a Dunkin Donuts in Maryland heightened further fears.

Although there was a downward trend in the attacks, September 11, 2001 terrorist attack changed the environment. In the aftermath of 9/11 backlash, over 600 targeted attacks were carried out affecting individuals, homes and businesses of Indian origin, especially Hindus. These targeted attacks on Indian diaspora started immediately after Twin Towers attack where the victims were either brutally killed, assaulted & beaten to death or their business establishments were vandalised. Hindu

faculty members in Universities and Indian students, be it the school, college or university, were not spared and had to face harassment, attack and discrimination.

These targeted Hindu hate crimes continued unabashedly, be it the case of a nine-year-old minor who was forced to eat beef against his belief in school to 57-years-old Suresh bhai Patel who was partially paralyzed by police officer in Madison, Alabama and the list goes on...

Hindu places of worship are often targets of vandalism, trespassing and burglary as there is little security, prominence and distinctive architecture. From firebombing of a Hindu temple in 2001 in New Jersey to vandalization of a Kentucky Hindu temple in 2019, there have been number attacks on Hindu temples and houses of worship in the last fifteen years.



Federal Bureau of Investigation did not keep track of hate crimes against Hindu minorities until 2015. As a result, information about hate crimes against Hindus in the US was not centrally available.

USA Hate Crime Incidents¹:

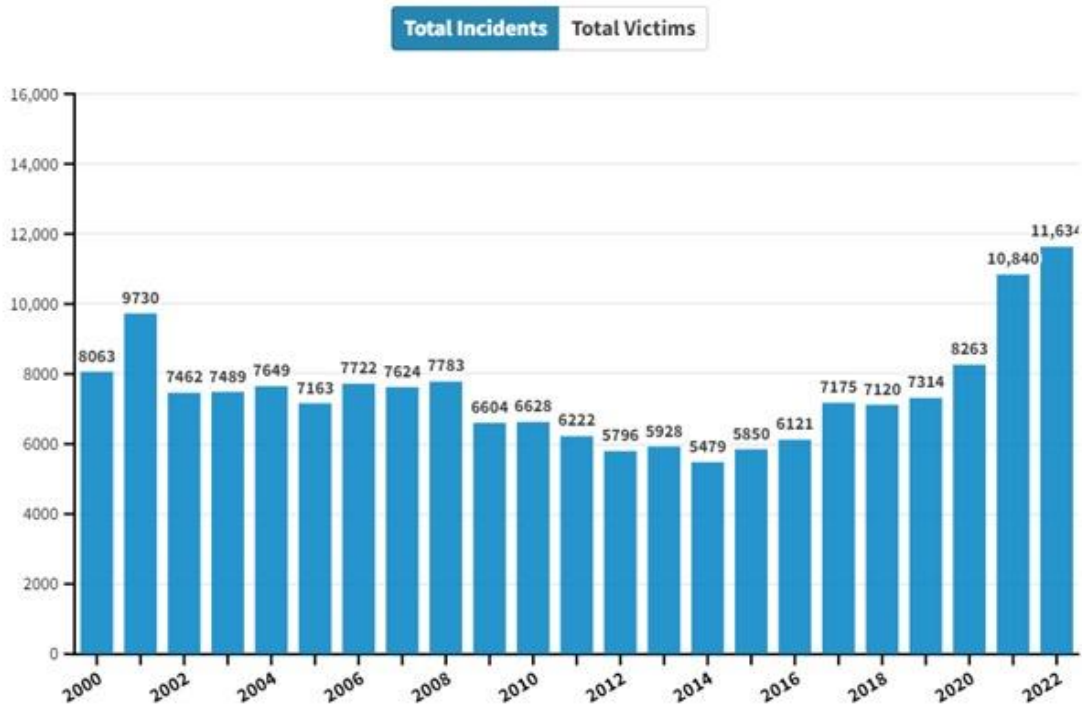
Indian Americans have recently been the target of an unsettling number of attacks that are motivated by race in USA. Concerns regarding safety and security of Indian students and citizens across the country have been rekindled by these instances. The government must investigate the possibility if these murders had anything to do with "hate crimes."

Let's examine patterns of hate crimes in the US. FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Programme defines hate crime as a criminal offence motivated, entirely or in part, by an offender's bias against specific race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity. Since the beginning of the data collection process, numerous changes have occurred. Gender and gender identity have been included as bias motivations since 2013, and as of 2015, bias motivations based on individual race and ethnicity have been combined into a single category.

¹ <https://factly.in/data-significant-increase-in-hate-crime-incidents-in-usa-including-those-with-bias-motivation-closely-linked-to-indians/>

Number of Hate Crime incidents and Victims in US

(All values in absolute numbers)



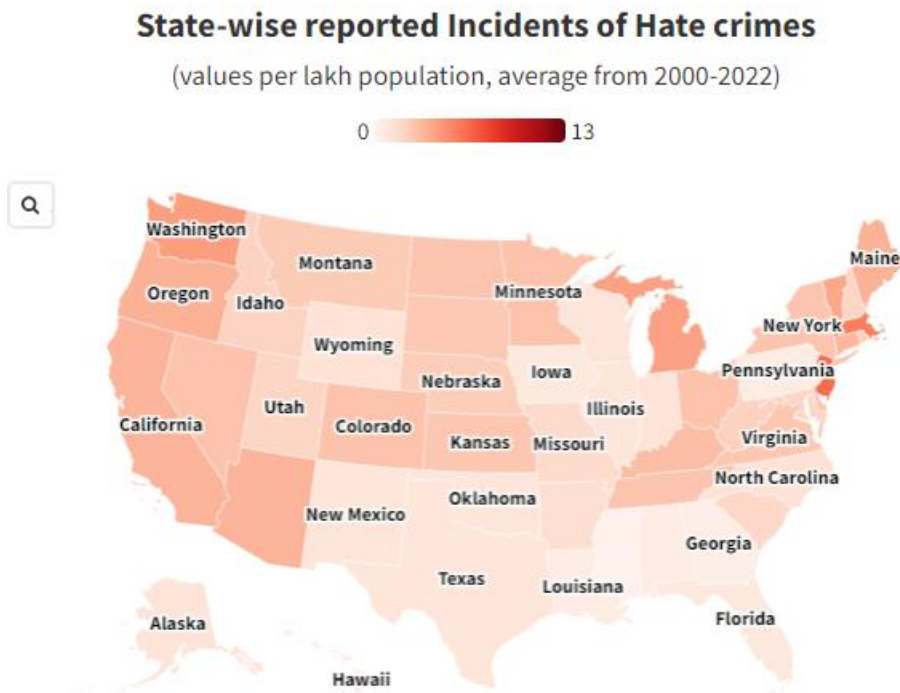
Source: Dataful

According to data on hate crimes, 2022 had the highest number of cases—11,634 overall — compared to the previous year's 10,840 instances. Additionally, 2021 was the first year when more than 10,000 incidents were reported. Hate crime incidences increased by 44 per cent from 8,063 in 2000 to 11,634 in 2022. More than 97 per cent hate crime instances, according to a Data & Information portal, are due to single bias.

According to research on the primary causes of hate crime occurrences race / ethnicity accounts for an average 60 per cent or 3/5th of total incidents, followed by religion which accounts for 12 per cent and sexual orientation at 10 per cent. Percentage of hate crimes motivated by religious orientation and sexual increased from 11 to 18 per cent and 10 to 17 per cent respectively between 2020 and 2022.

California, with 17 per cent of all hate crime incidences since 2000, leads the nation in reported instances.

According to data on state-level reports of hate crime occurrences, California leads all states with 17 percent of all reported instances, followed by New York and New Jersey with eight per cent each. Of all hate crime events reported since 2000, Michigan, Massachusetts, Ohio, and Washington account for more than half of them.

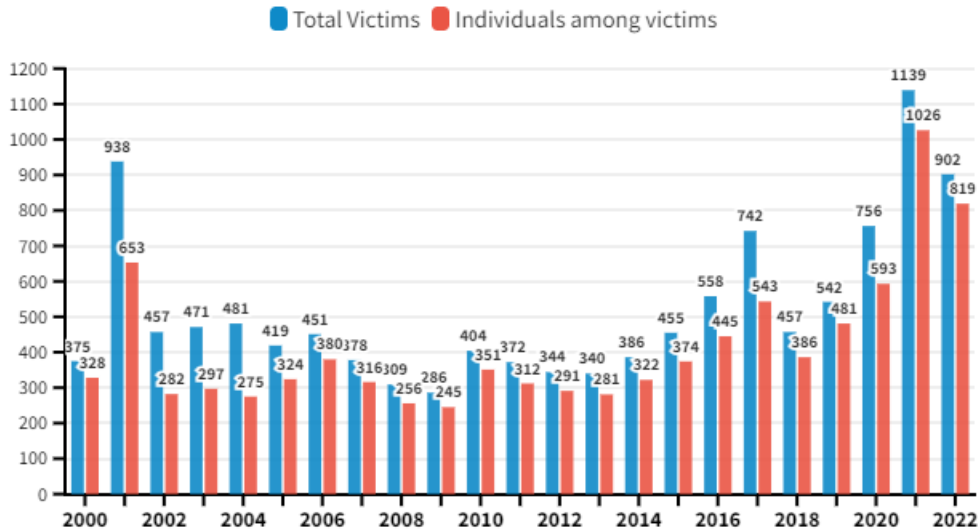


Source: Dataful

There isn't any independent data available to assess instances of hate crimes against Indians. Nonetheless, some of prejudices that drive commitment to hate crimes — such as anti-Asian, anti-Hindu, anti-American Indian, anti-Sikh and anti-Buddhist — are most closely associated with identity of Indians. Given dearth of information regarding victims' nationalities, this identity description is closest to an Indian setting.

Victims of Hate Crime Incidents closest to Indian context based on description of biases

(values in absolute number)



Source: Dataful

Prejudice Against Hindus Heard in the Public

When Hindu Americans want to engage in public life, they encounter discrimination and harassment based on their religion.

- *The first-ever protest against invocation in US Senate history occurred on July 12, 2007 when Nevada Hindu leader Rajan Zed stood up to speak. Three protesters began yelling at Zed, "This is an abomination!"*
- *Not long after the event, former Navy Chaplain Gordon Klingenschmitt wrote in support of demonstrators claiming that Hinduism was idolatry and was not to be honoured in United States.*

- *Rev. Flip Denham in similar vein denounced the prayer criticizing equality of Christianity and Hinduism and charging Hinduism with worshipping a "false god."*
- *Zed who had received an invitation to deliver the invocation in Idaho State Senate faced objections internally from its Members in March 2015 unlike protests in 2000 and 2007 that were by outside groups. The protest organizer Senator Steve Vick claimed that Idaho should not accept Hinduism because Hindus "worship cows" and "have a caste system." Adding further, Sen Sheryl Nuxoll said that "Hindu is a false faith with false gods."*
- *Republican opponent asked Satveer Chaudhary, a former state Senator from Minnesota, to become a Christian. "The race of your life is more important than this one," she uttered. I sincerely hope that you will come to know Jesus as your Lord and Saviour. Jesus is the way."*
- *Governor Steve Beshear of Kentucky came under fire from State Senate President David Williams for going to groundbreaking of a Hindu temple. Williams asked that all Hindus in Kentucky convert to Christianity in his statements, announcing that he would never take part in a non-Christian religious ceremony.*

Present Scenario:

To evaluate legal environment for Hindu Americans, Civil Rights Department of California examined extent of violence against Hindus motivated by hate crimes and evaluated the body of case law defending Hindu civil rights.

There are several factors that could have contributed to this surge:

- Misinformation has a major role in foster animosity against religion. Prejudice and hostility are fueled by false impressions and stereotypes of Hindu customs and beliefs. Misrepresentations of Hinduism in the media and on social media frequently make this worse.
- Local opinions can be influenced by political discourse and international events, especially when they concern India, Pakistan, and other nearby nations. Intense situations in South Asia frequently affect expatriate populations, escalating hostility and the number of hate crimes committed against Hindus.
- Prejudices and tensions within larger South Asian community can have an impact. Anti-Hindu emotions are ingrained in part due to historical caste-based persecution and local prejudices.

The reported rise in anti-Hindu incidents has several implications for Hindu community in California:

- Serious psychological trauma is frequently experienced by victims of hate crimes. Hindus in California suffer from anxiety, despair, and a generalised sense of insecurity due to their fear of being targeted because of their religious identity.
- A divided society results from an increase in religious hate crimes, which weakens the social fabric. These differences can exacerbate an atmosphere of distrust and animosity that undermines initiatives to create inclusive and cohesive communities.
- Incidents of hate can also have negative effects on life in general, earnings, jobs, socio-economic relations and education. For example, Hindu-owned businesses have experienced vandalism or boycotts and pupils experience bullying and prejudice in schools,

which negatively impacts their general well-being and academic performance.

Hindu Americans that prefer to engage in public life, whether they lobby legislators or run for office, often such Hindu leaders encounter harassment and religious bigotry due to degree of misunderstandings and misinformation about the Hindu community and its beliefs.

Attempts by Hindus to display their heritage alongside Christian monuments have also been met with recurrent rejection. Oklahoma and Arkansas have turned down requests to place Hindu statues next to the Ten Commandments. Hindu politicians have often faced insults and discrimination based on their religion or faith.

American Hindus have frequently encountered xenophobic bigotry from their fellow citizens. A significant portion of this discrimination has been disseminated by extreme evangelical groups that support ideas of Christian supremacy and often demean Hindus and their belief, attacking Hindu deities, calling Hindu worship as demonic.

To effectively address and mitigate anti-Hindu hate, a multi-faceted approach is necessary:

- Strengthening anti-hate crime legislation and making sure that strict enforcement works to discourage possible criminals. Legal aid and counselling services should also be expanded to better assist victims.
- Responsible reporting should be the goal of media outlets; sensationalism should be avoided in favour of a fair and impartial portrayal of all communities.

Concluding Observations:

It is alarming that a large percentage of religious hate crimes in US especially in California State are motivated by anti-Hindu sentiment, as disclosed in the State's civil rights department report. Statistics show that anti-Hindu occurrences made up about 25 percent of all recorded religious hate crimes indicating a worrying pattern of prejudice and violence against the Hindu minorities in California.

A sobering reminder of difficulties that religious minorities still confront, even in diverse and progressive places like California, is the high percentage of anti-Hindu events reported to the state's Anti-Hate Hotline.

A multifaceted strategy including community support, public education, strong legal frameworks, and aggressive actions from governmental authorities is needed to address these concerns. A truly inclusive society must prioritize protecting safety and dignity of all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation or faith.

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