

Public Feedback
on
“Symbols of Hate” Bill A8545

Presented to

Assemblywoman Mary Beth Walsh

Ranking Minority Member Education Committee

New York State General Assembly

By

Clifton Park Hindu Community

Participants

Local Residents

- Dr. Swatantra Mitta
- Prof. Dr. Ganpati Ramanath
- Dr. Rajesh Ramamurthy
- Bhargavi Ramamurthy

Experts

- Nikunj Trivedi
 - *President, Coalition of Hindus of North America, NJ*
- Suhag Shukla Esq.
 - *Hindu American Foundation, Washington DC*

Hindu Community Facts

- Hindu Community of Capital District with over 5000 families
 - Albany Hindu Temple
 - Swaminarayan Temple
 - Shirdi Sai Mandir
 - Schenectady Hindu Temple
- Hindu Community of USA
 - 1000+ temples
 - ~3.5 Million

Background

- New York Senate Bill S6648 passed on July 21, 2020
- Current status of the bill
 - ✓ Has moved to New York Assembly for consideration as A8545
 - ✓ With Education Committee of New York General Assembly
- Requires grade 6-12 curricula to incorporate Symbols of Hate
- Explicitly calls out two specific symbols of Hate:
 - Swastika
 - Noose
- Mandates teaching Swastika as an emblem of Nazi Germany for 6 continuous years of instruction

Hindu-Americans are aware and empathetic

- Increased expressions of hate against Jewish and African Americans
- Disturbing Nazi Graffiti scrawled outside properties
- Goal of perpetrators is to instill fear and intimidation
- We applaud the intent and spirit of the Bill to address challenges of anti-Semitism and racism via education

Issues with Bill

- Demonizes the sacred Swastika
 - Does not distinguish the sacred Swastika from the Hakenkreuz (Hooked Cross)
- Misattribution of the Hooked Cross as the Swastika should not negate 1000s of years of religious faith and tradition
- Proposed legislation without nuance and adequate safeguards
 - May deny people of Indic religions their right to religious freedom
 - Kids of Indic faiths could become targets of hate and bullying
 - Undermine the rights of parents of Indic faith from teaching their children their religion, symbols, traditions and values

The Swastika--a sacred spiritual symbol of 3 Indic Faiths for millenia



- Buddhism, Jainism & Hinduism, which represent at least 1/5th of humanity
- Native Americans (e.g., Navajo, Hopi), Africans (Akan, Ashanti from Ghana), ...
- Sanskrit meaning **Su + Asti = Well + Being** denotes Wellness for All
- Connotes sanctity, auspiciousness, good luck, well-being, insight, eternity, and the sublime – is a spiritual symbol with multifaceted meanings
- Ubiquitous use by millions for consecration, inspiration and spiritual well-being
 - e.g., home-threshold drawings, pendants, altars, home exteriors, vehicle decoration, entrances of businesses, doors, tattoos, rituals, ...

Examples of multifaceted, pervasive use

Diwali decoration



Rangoli @ Home entrance



Rite-of-passage ceremony



Consecrating vehicles



Buddhist, Jain, Zoroastrian, and many other traditions, worldwide

Hindu Altars and Instruments



Zoroastrian



Zenkoji, Japan

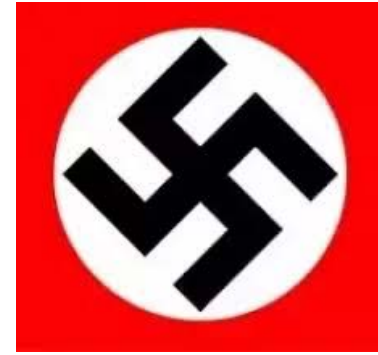


Change.org petition against bill: 8000+ signatures in record time

**The
Sacred
Swastika**



IS NOT



**The
Hakenkreuz
(hooked-cross)**

- The Swastika is clearly distinct from the Hakenkreuz
- The Hooked-Cross has been incorrectly associated with the Swastika
- Hijacked by the National Socialists (Nazis) in 1920

Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit Declaration

- Recognizes

- The sanctity of Swastika for Hindus for millennia
- Distortion and misappropriation by the Nazis

“The Svastika is an ancient and greatly auspicious symbol of the Hindu tradition. It is inscribed on Hindu temples, ritual altars, entrances, and even account books. A distorted version of this sacred symbol was misappropriated by the Third Reich in Germany, and abused as an emblem under which heinous crimes were perpetrated against humanity, particularly the Jewish people. The participants recognize that this symbol is, and has been sacred to Hindus for millennia, long before its misappropriation.”

—Declaration of the Second Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit, February 2008, Jerusalem



Understanding the Swastika

Use and abuse of a sacred symbol



AJC American Jewish Committee

Solutions

- Designate the Hakenkreuz (the Hooked Cross) as the hate symbol
- Educate grade 6-12 students that
 - the Hakenkreuz is not the sacred Swastika
 - the Swastika is a sacred symbol across multiple cultures for millenia
 - the Hakenkreuz was mis-associated with the Swastika, and misused for hate crimes
- Include adequate safeguards for the sacred Swastika and its multifarious uses
 - Religious, cultural, artistic, aesthetic, spiritual, mundane, mathematical, ..

Adverse Incidents impacting Hindu Community

Swastika incidents specific incidents adversely affecting Hindus

- Home Owners' Association
- George Washington University Student
- Brandeis University Student, on-going
- Car example
- School artwork

Hindu Community Appeal

Great Significance of Swastika to Hindu Community of Capital District

- Symbols present in Albany Temple
- Ubiquitously used by many Hindu residents
- Religion Classes in temple teach significance of Hindu symbols to children

Hindu High School Student Appeal

- Material taught by our teachers is seen as factual and trustworthy by students
- Nuance is important to nurture critical thinking

Public Feedback Opposed to Current Language

- A Change.org petition with 8000+ signatures nationwide
- Capital District community with 150+ signatures in an appeal petition to Assembly Education Committee
- Several individuals of eminence have directly appealed to their Assembly and senate representatives

Summary

- Hindu Americans strongly oppose the current language of the Bill
- We request your leadership
 - in developing Bipartisan support to sufficiently address our concerns with the Bill
 - in keeping us informed and involving us in the legislative process moving forward
- We deeply appreciate your time and attention