Unity and Struggle Beyond Borders: 
An Examination of Anti-Hindutva Activism in the United States

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As Karl Marx wrote in *Grundrisse*, “Society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand.” Even if we are separated by time or space, our lives are still entangled in such remarkable ways. Therefore, if I had to cite everyone who made this project possible, I would have to put down the name of every human in the world who has ever existed. In addition, I would also probably have to add every non-human living thing as well, such as my dog Minchu. While I am at it, I might as well include non-living things, such as the Sun, without which I would not be alive. Since I am unsure that it is possible to enumerate such a massive list of everyone and everything, instead I am listing here just a few acknowledgements of some of the people who made completing this thesis possible.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On August 14, 2022, hundreds of Indian Americans gathered in Edison, New Jersey for the NJ India Day Parade organized by the Indian Business Association (IBA) to celebrate Indian Independence Day. Among the floats that made an appearance on this blistering Sunday afternoon was a bulldozer, adorned with a large photograph of Yogi Adityanath, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh in India and outspoken Hindutva ideologue, known for his use of the bulldozer as a vehicle of destruction directed towards Muslims in India. The presence of the bulldozer in the New Jersey parade was met with outrage from community members who identified it as an unabashed public expression of a Hindu nationalism. In the aftermath of the event, multiple local and national organizations issued statements condemning the appearance of the bulldozer, and organizational representatives and residents demanded accountability at the following Edison town council meeting. By the end of the month, the IBA issued an apology for including the float in the parade, and the Middlesex County Prosecutor’s Office reported and classified the event as a hate incident.

Being born in Edison myself and having lived most of my life in its vicinity, this public incident of Hindu nationalist anti-Muslim bigotry was an uncomfortable reminder of how Hindutva politics are not just a far-away Indian issue, but they have insidiously found a home amongst Indian Americans. Hindutva is the predominant ideology of Hindu nationalism in India today. First formulated in 1923 by Indian nationalist Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Hindutva advocates for a vision of India as a nation that is geographically, culturally, ethnically Hindu. Hindutva’s rise has led to not just the proliferation of religious chauvinism in the form of Hindu

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majoritarianism, but also the heightened expression of caste violence, with Hindutva upholding the role of caste in structuring Indian society. There are many other important aspects to the Hindutva political project, such as settler-colonial tendencies which are most visible in the occupation of Kashmir, as well gender-based violence associated with the establishment of a patriarchal Hindu family. ³

A large collection of organizations collectively referred to as the Sangh Parivar support Hindutva, which includes the current ruling party of India, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). While the birthplace of Hindutva as a political and cultural force is in India, its tentacles of influence have extended to the entire world. In fact, the Sangh Parivar has expanded its organizational presence to the United States, with many organizations with Hindutva connections across the country. The international mobilization of Hindutva has not proceeded without opposition. Many activists and organizations have participated in efforts of resistance against the presence of Hindutva politics in the United States. In the case of the Edison bulldozer incident, various community members and organizations responded to the bulldozer with forceful condemnation, leading to tangible repercussions against those who organized the parade and wider recognition of the harms of Hindutva politics in the United States.

The case in Edison is just one example of a growing and evolving movement against Hindutva politics in the United States; just as Hindutva is not static, neither is the realm of anti-Hindutva activism. In particular, the fight against caste discrimination has increasingly featured as a prominent element in the anti-Hindutva struggle in the United States. A recent site of resistance against caste discrimination in the United States has been the city of Seattle, which

³ I discuss the history and ideology in more detail in the “Background” section later in this chapter, with complete references included in that section.
recently passed an ordinance against caste discrimination On February 21, 2023. This ordinance was made possible by a broader movement against caste violence in workplaces, universities, cities, and states across the United States, involving many anti-Hindutva activists and organizations.

A few days before the successful passing of the Seattle ordinance against caste discrimination, the *South Seattle Emerald* published an article written by anti-caste activist Prashant Nema, titled “Confessions of an American Caste Traitor”. Nema, a member of an anti-caste organization called Ambedkar King Study Circle (AKSC), describes the role of dominant caste South Asian Americans in perpetuating the caste system in the United States. In doing so, Nema purposefully juxtaposes his own dominant caste background with his anti-caste activism, subsequently self-identifying himself as a “caste traitor”. Growing up in a dominant caste family myself, while being involved in anti-Hindutva activism (and writing a thesis about it), I have thought about whether term could apply to me as well.

Even as a child, I was familiar with the notions of religion and caste, although at a younger age, my dominant caste Hindu background led me to be painfully unaware of the dynamics of religious and caste oppression within the United States. Around the time of Narendra Modi’s election for Prime Minister in 2014, I remember witnessing contentious discussions between relatives and family friends about Hindu nationalism and the future of India. I soon developed a strong anti-Hindutva consciousness – it became clear to me how the oppressor benefits from obscuring oppression and making it seem invisible. Since entering college and through engaging in activism, I have been fortunate enough to learn much more

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5 I discuss the Seattle ordinance against caste discrimination, and the mobilizations surrounding it, in more detail in Chapter 3.
about these issues from friends, peers, scholars, which has especially expanded my understanding of the enormity of Brahmanical caste oppression, and its relationship to Hindutva politics in the United States.

In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Brazilian educator challenges the notion of solidarity among oppressors with the oppressed:

“The oppressor is [in] solidary with the oppressed only when he stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category and sees them as persons who have been unjustly dealt with, deprived of their voice, cheated in the sale of their labor—when he stops making pious, sentimental, and individualistic gestures and risks an act of love. True solidarity is found only in the plenitude of this act of love, in its existentiality, in its praxis. To affirm that men and women are persons and as persons should be free, and yet to do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce.”6

For Freire, being in solidarity requires love. There are many who are near and dear to me that more directly affected by the oppressive forces unleashed by Hindutva. While love for the cause of liberation has been the driving motivation for this project, I recognize that solidarity for a potential “caste traitor” like myself necessarily constitutes more than a written analysis of the contemporary anti-Hindutva movement can offer. That being said, my goal for this dissertation, as a member of an oppressor caste, is to be in as “true” of a solidarity as bourgeois academia can afford.

This dissertation is a pursuit to study the transnational and organized resistance against Hindutva in the United States with an emphasis on the contemporary period since Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s election in 2014. I argue that the United States is a major site of

transnational activism against Hindutva, and I explore how several US-based organizations have responded to the rise in Hindutva both in India, as well as its manifestations in the United States. I particularly focus on how this anti-Hindutva resistance has addressed religious discrimination and caste discrimination. I look at contradictions between Hindutva and anti-Hindutva politics in the United States, describing ways in which these forces have impacted each other. I also consider the contradictions within the anti-Hindutva movement, especially when it comes to the relationship between caste, Hinduism, and Hindutva. I also reflect on how the transnational anti-Hindutva movement has grown more interlinked with other social justice movements in the United States, making it constitute an important component in the struggle for global liberation.

This dissertation is structured as follows. In this first chapter, I begin by laying context with a historical background, weaving the emergence of Hindutva politics in India with anti-Hindutva activism, and subsequently tracing these threads to their manifestations in the United States. I lay out the research goals and methods for the rest of the thesis, and include a brief literature review mentioning other efforts to study progressive and anti-Hindutva activism in the United States. In the second chapter, I sketch the current landscape of anti-Hindutva activism in the United States, with a focus on the involvement of several organizations that are involved in the contemporary anti-Hindutva movement, including Ambedkar King Study Circle (AKSC), Hindus for Human Rights (HfHR), and Indian American Muslim Council (IAMC). I argue that anti-Hindutva organizations are heterogeneous in their self-orientations and diverse in the kinds of work they conduct.

In the third chapter, I contend that anti-Hindutva organizing in the United States can be classified into two categories - organizing against Hindutva actions in India and organizing against Hindutva actions in the United States. I look more closely at responses to multiple
incidents in each of those categories, specifically protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in India, protests against the Bhima Koregaon Violence in India, the Edison bulldozer incident in the United States, and the Seattle ordinance against caste discrimination in the United States. I identify multiple forms of resistance that have been prevalent in each of those incidents, specifically the organizing of public demonstrations, engagement in legal recognition, the dissemination of educational materials, and the hosting of community events. I also describe multiple additional features of resistance, namely the historical continuity and rupture that Hindutva presents from past South Asian American organizing, the relevance of contestations with Hindutva opposition, and the role of organizational solidarities in responding to incidents.

In the fourth chapter, I also look more closely at what constitutes the anti-Hindutva struggle, with a particular examination of the relationship between critiques of Hindutva and critiques of Hinduism among anti-Hindutva organizations in the United States. In doing so, I explore how anti-Hindutva organizations have responded to being labeled as “Hinduphobic” especially when critiquing the Brahmanical nature of Hindutva. I argue here how the struggle against Hindutva has become deeply intertwined with the struggle against Brahmanical structure of caste in Hinduism. Finally, I assess how the anti-Hindutva movement is fostering stronger connections to broader struggles for liberation. I conclude with a reflection on where the trajectory of the anti-Hindutva movement in the United States might take us from the present to the future.
Background

Emergence of Hindu Nationalism

While the origins of certain aspects of Hindutva politics can be traced before the modern era, especially related to the Brahmanical system of caste, the British colonial period in India planted seeds for the contemporary expression of Hindu nationalism. The imposition of colonial rule created a “sense of backwardness and decline among colonized and dominated peoples”7, which motivated particularly dominant-caste Hindus to resist this form of domination and maintain self-respect through the development of cultural nationalism8 and the construction of new, syndicated versions of Hinduism.9 Being adjacent to the broader realm of nationalist struggles against British colonial rule, the projects of reimagining Hinduism adopted a nationalist character through imagining India as a Hindu nation. A key figure in connecting Hinduism to the Indian national project was Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, an Indian revolutionary nationalist who formulated the basic ideology of Hindutva while imprisoned for anti-colonial activities. In his 1923 book Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?, Savarkar outlined the philosophy of Hindutva, consisting of a vision of India as a Hindu nation that is united through geography, race, and culture. Geographically, Savarkar of Hindutva locates the Indian subcontinent as the home of Hindus, with the Indus River forming a western border. Racially, Hindutva identifies Indians as belonging to a common ‘blood’, or ‘race-jati’. Culturally, Savarkar identified certain features of Hinduism as constituting a cultural basis for India, including Brahmanical texts and rituals as well as the Sanskrit language. Altogether, Savarkar’s Hindutva sought to create a congruence between being Hindu and being from India.10 The concept of a “Hindu Rashtra” or a culturally

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8 Tanika Sarkar, Hindu Nationalism in India (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 126.
9 Romila Thapar, Syndicated Hinduism (Critical Quest, 2010), 74.
Hindu nation was further popularized by Hindu nationalist thinker M. S. Golwalkar, who viewed Hindu identity as a “cultural manifestation which could be used to 'cement' national unity.” Golwalkar was also “the longstanding leader and the most prominent ideologue” for the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a nationalist organization constructed to build a physically able Hindu body capable of spreading Hindutva ideology and constructing “Hindu Rashtra”. Initially formed in 1925, the RSS grew significantly in influence by the end of British rule in 1947 and has since continued to expand its influence, spawning many other Hindu nationalist organizations which are collectively known as the Sangh Parivar.

The influence of Hindutva ideology in newly independent India was far from commanding, with significant opposition including from more secular liberal and Marxist political bodies. In 1948, Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated by a Hindu nationalist named Nathuram Godse, a former member of the RSS and supporter of Savarkar’s Hindutva ideology. As a consequence of this attack, efforts were made by the Indian government to suppress the burgeoning Hindu nationalist movement. However, with protracted organizing of the Sangh Parivar in the decades following independence, the popularity of Hindu nationalism significantly experienced a crescendo by the late 1970s. Forays into parliamentary politics developed in tandem with this broader mobilization, from the creation of the Jana Sangh in 1951 to the formation of a broader coalition of the Janata party in 1977 to oppose the government led by Indian National Congress. Finally, in response to failures of the Janata party, the Bharatiya Janata Party was formed in 1980, which today serves as the modern-day vanguard of the Hindu nationalist movement in India. Through the strategic levying of communal rhetoric which

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13 Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 86.
antagonized Hindus against Muslims, the BJP increasingly took the lead in Indian political discourse in the 1980s and 1990s. The Sangh Parivar’s influence also increased with mass demonstrations and mobilizations, the most notable being the infamous demolition of the Babri Masjid by a crowd of Hindus in 1992. Subsequently, with numerous electoral gains by the turn of the century, the Hindutva movement spearheaded by the BJP and RSS “transformed from an insurgent mobilization to a governing formation that has captured state power at both sub-national (regional state) and national levels”. In 2002, communal riots exploded in the state of Gujarat, leaving over a thousand dead and many more injured. Narendra Modi, who was the Chief Minister of Gujarat at the time, was accused of permitting violence against Muslim communities in Gujarat during the riots. This event catapulted Modi from a regional politician towards the national political scene. These parliamentary successes culminated in an overwhelming victory in the 2014 Indian general elections for the BJP and their leader Narendra Modi. Since 2014, The BJP has been in power as the nationally elected government under Prime Minister Modi, enjoying unprecedented control in steering the imagination of India. The current iteration of the BJP’s rule has been characterized as a “New Hindutva” centered around a form of democratic authoritarianism which integrates the Hindu nationalist project with the constitutional institutions of parliamentary democracy in India.

**Key Characteristics of Contemporary Hindutva: Religion, Caste, and More**

The advancement of Hindu majoritarianism is central to Hindutva. Hindu nationalism attempts to associate Hindu identity and membership with the Indian nation, subsequently

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demarcating non-Hindus as alien to the Indian national project. Consequently, Hindutva politics has involved the direction of religious extremism towards religious minorities in India.

According to the 2011 Indian census, Hindus make up 79.8% of India’s population, Muslims account for 14.2%, and other religious groups account for the remaining 6%, which includes Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains.\textsuperscript{17} Out of these groups, Muslims have been most visibly targeted by religious extremists. One of the principal myths of Hindutva ideology is the exaggeration of persecution that Hindus experienced under Mughal rule in early-modern India, which is a narrative used to “justify the inculcation of anti-Muslim sentiments among the Hindus of today”.\textsuperscript{18} Hindu nationalism views Muslims as “a demographic threat, a source of non-vegetarian pollution, and a threat of violence”.\textsuperscript{19}

Legal demolition is a major tactic of disempowering Muslim communities; in 2012, “more than 2,000 houses, mainly in Muslim areas in the old city, were declared ‘unauthorized’ and many were quickly demolished” (Hansen, 2022, p. 167). The bulldozer, as a machine of demolition, remains a highly visible symbol of these acts of anti-Muslim violence. In fact, prominent Hindutva proponent and Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Yogi Adityanath has utilized bulldozer demolitions of Muslim communities extensively, even developing the moniker “bulldozer baba”.\textsuperscript{20} Overall, the nationalist agenda against Muslims has heightened over the course of the Modi regime under a Hindutva that is “more confident, proud, brazen, and


\textsuperscript{18} Romila Thapar, \textit{Syndicated Hinduism} (New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2010), 63.


belligerent than ever before”\textsuperscript{21}, with “the celebration and justification of attacks, lynching, and pogroms [against Muslims] as a manifestation of a new, aggressive, and unapologetic Hindu”.\textsuperscript{22}

The ‘othering’ of Muslims made headlines with the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), a controversial law passed by the Modi government in December 2019 to provide a fast track to Indian citizenship for non-Muslim immigrants from neighboring countries of Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan who arrived in India on or before December 31, 2014. The CAA has been criticized for specifically excluding communities of Muslims in India from citizenship, and it can consequently be seen as part of the broader Hindu nationalist effort to marginalize India's Muslim minority in the creation of a Hindu Rashtra. The CAA has also been associated with the proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC), which would require all residents of India to provide documentary proof of their citizenship. The combination of the CAA and the NRC has raised concerns that it could lead to the disenfranchisement of millions of Muslims, who would be unable to provide the necessary documentation to prove their citizenship. The active resistance from members of Muslim and other anti-Hindutva communities against the CAA was met with further state violence from Indian state forces that favor the Hindutva agenda.\textsuperscript{23}

It is impossible to understand Hindutva without discussing caste. The caste system in India is a social hierarchy which separates humans into various groups, or castes, and furthermore enforces these separations through social and class stratification, anti-miscegeny,


and hereditary fixture. The caste system has its origins in ancient India; the Vedas, an ancient Hindu text, classify four main types of castes, or *varnas*, in the hierarchical order of Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra. In addition, there are thousands of further classifications of castes known as *jatis* which contribute to a complex relational web of caste identities in India. The term *Dalit* refers to those excluded from the four-varna system, known previously as “untouchables”. In contemporary anti-caste politics, the category of *Bahujan* is often used to refer to oppressed caste communities, constituting Dalits, Shudras, as well as Adivasis (tribal and indigenous peoples of India). To this day, caste “defines the selfhood of most Hindus in rural and urban India”²⁴, and the political economy of India is structured by division of labor enforced by caste hierarchies.

One of the most prominent social reformers and anti-caste activists in India was Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Ambedkar, who remains an icon of Dalit liberation struggles to this day, wrote extensively about the pervasiveness of the caste system and its influence on Indian society. In his famous undelivered speech *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar writes that “caste is not just a division of labour, it is a division of labourers”.²⁵ Ambedkar also actively critiqued the origins of caste and its basis in ancient Hindu texts, characterizing this Hindu ideology as Brahmanism and characterizing a casteist Indian society as Brahmanical.²⁶ Ambedkar’s politics have inspired a massive legacy of anti-caste resistance, with many anti-caste and anti-Hindutva organizations politically identifying as Ambedkarite.

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Caste is neither irrelevant nor orthogonal to the Hindutva nationalist project. In fact, scholars like Dilip Menon argue that caste plays a central role to even communalism between Hindus and Muslims in India, as he writes, “It is through the forgetting, and even the violent suppression of egalitarianism within putative blocs like Hinduism and Islam, that unitary, militant identities are sought to be forged. In that sense, communalism in India may well be the return of the repressed histories of caste.”

Hindu nationalism posits Hindu unity across all castes in order to address the fundamental contradiction of caste oppression. The primary historical force of Hindu nationalist organizations and their leadership have been middle-class Hindus, particularly those of upper caste backgrounds. Many members of upper caste communities worry “of the rise of the numerous lower caste communities in public life and education”, and consequently view the preservation of caste hierarchies as central to maintaining their status of power. However, the project of constructing a majoritarian Hindu state has involved strategies of ideology building that incorporated broader sectors of society including oppressed caste communities into the Hindu nationalist project. Efforts to circumvent caste by “framing and promoting Hinduism as a national civil religion” can explain “the fatal attraction that the BJP holds for Adivasis and Dalits”. However, addressing the oppression of caste remains a major challenge for the Hindu nationalist movement as it continues to deal with resistance from anti-caste movements.

A major incident highlighting caste discrimination in India is the Bhima Koregaon violence of 2018. On January 1, 2018, Dalits who were celebrating the 200th anniversary of the

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Battle of Bhima Koregaon were attacked by dominant caste Hindutva men. The original Battle of Bhima Koregaon was fought on January 1, 1818, between the British East India Company and the Brahmanical Peshwa-led Maratha Empire. The Dalit Mahar community played a significant role in the battle, and their victory is celebrated as a symbol of their struggle against caste oppression. Ever since B.R. Ambedkar organized a commemoration event at Bhima Koregaon in 1928, the area has been the site for annual celebrations for Dalits in the region. The day before the 200th anniversary celebration, an event called the Elgaar Parishad was held, with over 250 organizations, with celebrations and performances containing anti-caste themes which upset supporters of Hindutva in the region. The next day, for the 200th anniversary celebration, the Dalit community was met by mobs led by Hindutva leader Milind Ekbote and the followers of Hindutva activist Sambhaji Bhide ‘Guruji’. Dalits were attacked by the Hindutva mobs, with multiple injured and one killed.

In the aftermath of the violence, the Indian state claimed that they had uncovered a larger Maoist conspiracy behind the incident. The police alleged that left-wing Dalit and anti-Hindutva activists had organized the celebrations and were using them as a cover to incite violence and overthrow the government. The arrests were made under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), which is a controversial anti-terror law that allows for detention without trial. The most recent amendment to the UAPA in 2019 made it possible for individuals to be labeled as a terrorist and charged under the law if the person “commits or participates in acts of terrorism, prepares for terrorism, promotes terrorism or is otherwise involved in terrorism”. Many of the

activists who were arrested under the UAPA from the Bhima Koregaon violence were known for their work in defending the rights of marginalized communities and for speaking out against the Hindutva government's policies. The case has been mired in controversy, with allegations of fabricated evidence and political pressure on the investigating agencies. The arrested activists, who have come to be known as the Bhima Koregaon 16, have been held in custody for several years, with some of them being granted bail only recently. The Bhima Koregaon violence and the subsequent arrests have become a flashpoint in the ongoing debate around caste, identity, and dissent in India. The case has also raised serious concerns about the use of the UAPA anti-terror laws to target anti-caste and anti-Hindutva activists and intellectuals. It has been a prominent example of Hindutva politics attacking Dalits and caste oppressed Indians.\(^3^4\)

The contemporary Hindu nationalist movement also is concerned with the question of gender and the role of patriarchy. Among Hindu nationalists, there is a “fear of ‘western culture’ and the breakdown of conventional sexual and gender norms”\(^3^5\), which has contributed to a form of ‘xenophobic queerphobia’ “that justifies itself by constructing some models of queer as originating outside the nation”\(^3^6\) (Bacchetta, 2019, p. 375). In addition, the perceived effeminacy of Hindu men of the past is blamed for problems plaguing India; consequently, Hindu nationalism has involved the strengthening of masculinity through encouraging violence and the construction of the “ideal rank-and-file Hindu nationalist man” This construction of a more masculine Hindu nation has coincided with heightened patriarchal violence against oppressed

caste and religious minority communities, evident in the “mobilization of a violent female will” as well as the “pattern of male violence against Muslim women during ethnic pogroms.”

Today’s Hindu nationalist project also has an expansionist characteristic, most visibly in the BJP government’s treatment of Kashmir. The villainization of Kashmiri Muslims as agents of “terrorist violence, illegitimate religious impulses, sedition” serves to broaden the justified borders of the mythical Hindu nation and “Hinduize Kashmir’s border regions within the context of the ongoing Kashmiri struggle for azadi [freedom]” (Bhan, 2018, p. 77). Many Hindu nationalist ideologues envision a ‘Greater India’ as a “rhetorical device and geocultural method of territorial incorporation”, applying to claims to land in the Northeast India and further across South, Central, and Southeast Asia.

Hindutva in the United States

Altogether, the anti-Muslim sentiments, casteist logics, patriarchal views, and settler-colonial desires of the contemporary Hindu nationalist movement have all coincided to create a hegemonic force that is felt far beyond the borders of India or the region of South Asia. As Indian emigration increased in the 20th century, particularly to the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States, diasporic politics began to develop in relation to politics back at home. The development of nationalist politics among these diasporic communities has been influenced by the nostalgia of the immigrant communities and context of the host society; in particular, the combination of discrimination with the rhetoric of multiculturalism in countries like the United States encouraged the consolidation of ethnic and religious identity among the Indian diaspora.

37 Tanika Sarkar, Hindu Nationalism in India (Hurst Publishers, 2022).
The shine that Hindutva adds to Hinduism consequently appealed to both the “Hindu bourgeoisie” who wanted to be part of a ‘higher culture’ to combat the glare of a pernicious white supremacy, as well as to a “U.S. society that is superficially impressed by the antiquity of the subcontinent and its philosophical heritage”.\(^{40}\)

However, the primary motive force for Hindu nationalism in the diaspora has been the conscious intervention by the Sangh Parivar in India, who “understood their mandate to be global rather than national” and actively sought to embed themselves abroad in immigrant communities.\(^{41}\) In the United States, the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act encouraged migration of skilled labor to fill the demand for technical roles. Over the following eleven years, “83 percent entered under the occupational category of professional and technical workers”\(^{42}\) with many others constituting a “slowly growing community of petty-bourgeois merchants”\(^{43}\) Attracted to the Indian American diaspora’s burgeoning capital and legitimacy, this segment of the Hindu diaspora became a “priority target of the Sangh Parivar’s fundraisers”, with “political entrepreneurs from the mainland fueling nationalist vocations among the diaspora.”\(^{44}\) In the early 1970s, the Sangh Parivar mobilized Indians in the United States to create the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA), and today the VHPA remains among the most active branches of the Sangh Parivar among the diaspora. Later in 1989, the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, the global counterpart to the RSS, formed a branch in the United States. As the Sangh Parivar duplicated its structure abroad, it incorporated “some ideological and operational changes in order to take into

\(^{42}\) Prashad, 126-127.
\(^{43}\) Prashad, 212.
account the newly Westernized sensibilities of the diaspora.”45 It is through these interventions by the Hindu nationalist Sangh Parivar, “first developed in the motherland and then methodically spread around the world to serve ideological and strategic purposes”, that Hindutva ideology in the United States began to prosper.46

Hindu nationalist ideology continued to proliferate across various domains, “such as temples and homes, but notably through the Internet.”47 With the ability to navigate across time and space, the Internet became the “perfect communicative glue between the diaspora and its imaginary, imagined homeland.”48 With the advent of social media, the Internet has further served as an arena for Hindutva bots, as well as campaigns of targeted and coordinated harassment against critics of Hindutva in India as well as abroad in the United States.

Recent Developments of Hindutva in the United States

Since the election of Modi’s government to national office in India in 2014, the expression of Hindutva in the United States has also heightened. One development in recent years has been in the formation of links between alt-right communities in the United States and supporters of Hindutva, particularly with the “Hindus for Trump” campaign during former President Trump’s 2016 presidential run.49 In addition, various Sangh Parivar organizations in India declared support for Trump, and some such as VHP even “held large public prayer

45 Christophe Jaffrelot and Ingrid Therwath, 51.
46 Christophe Jaffrelot and Ingrid Therwath, 44.
47 Prashad, Karma Of Brown Folk, 224.
ceremonies for Trump.” In 2019, over 50,000 Indian Americans attended an event in Houston titled “Howdy Modi” featuring both Donald Trump and Narendra Modi.

In addition, the Hindutva desire for “the systematic rewriting of history” in California textbooks was renewed once again in 2016 with a broader set of complaints levied against the California Department of Education by the Hindu American Foundation (HAF), once again resulting in a combination of changes being accepted and rejected after a multi-year dispute. HAF, which was founded in 2003, has increasingly received mainstream attention in the 21st century. HAF has been very vocal in defending Hinduism, characterizing most criticisms of Hinduism as examples of “Hinduphobia” (Werleman, 2022).

Caste discrimination has featured as a prominent aspect of Hindutva violence in the United States. Equality Labs, an anti-caste civil rights organization, published a report about the prevalence of caste discrimination among Dalit Americans. The report found that half of Dalit Americans live in fear of their caste being revealed and that 60% have experienced jokes that were discriminatory based on their caste. Additionally, 25% of Dalit Americans have suffered verbal or physical assault due to their caste. The report also revealed that two-thirds of Dalit Americans have experienced unfair treatment at their workplace. In June of 2020, Cisco Systems Inc. was sued by California’s Department of Fair Employment and Housing regulators for discrimination after a Dalit engineer was repeatedly harassed by two of his high-caste Indian

managers.\textsuperscript{54} Since then, lawsuits and legislation against caste discrimination have spread across the United States.\textsuperscript{55} Anti-Muslim Hindutva sentiments have also been expressed in the United States, the Edison bulldozer incident described earlier being a prominent recent example. The Yogi Adityanath poster on the bulldozer was accompanied by a slogan “Baba Bulldozer”, a nickname given to him due to his extensive use of the bulldozer in the demolition of Muslim homes and businesses in Uttar Pradesh. Yogi Adityanath, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh and prominent Hindutva advocate, argues that the bulldozer is used to “crush the mafia who exploited people to build their properties”, but critics argue that it has a “key role in perpetrating discrimination against minority communities in India” for the demolition of homes and business places of religious minority communities including Muslims and Christian.\textsuperscript{56}

Global Hindutva has consistently been met with resistance from various groups, including Ambedkarite anti-caste organizations, diverse faith communities, and leftist activists. The United States has also been a site of resistance against Hindu nationalism among the South Asian diaspora. Organizing against Hindutva has constituted addressing internal contradictions within the diaspora, as well as relating them to struggles abroad in India. However, there has been little systematic examination into the organizational efforts against Hindutva in the United States. In this dissertation, I explore the realm of anti-Hindutva activism within the United States, looking specifically at how the fight against Hindutva in the United States has addressed the manifestations of both religious and caste contradictions among the South Asian American community.

\textsuperscript{54} Arbel, Tali, “California Sues Cisco for Bias Based on Indian Caste System | AP News,” July 1, 2020, https://apnews.com/article/594de601e8eb1a69eea5a625a08d88ecc.
Literature Review

In this literature review, I cover some of the existing literature related to the study of anti-Hindutva activism in the United States. I split this literature review up into two sections, the first covering South Asian/Indian American politics, South Asian/Indian progressive activism in the United States and the second covering anti-Hindutva activism in the United States.

South Asian/Indian Progressive Activism in the United States

Contrary to assumptions made of the political docility of South Asian immigrants, there is a long history of activism and transnational solidarity against oppression among Indian Americans. Contemporary counter-mobilization against Hindu nationalism in the United States is situated in these broader histories of progressive activism among the diaspora. In Colored Cosmopolitanism, Nico Slate discusses the history of shared freedom struggles in India and the United States. These histories include solidarities between Indian Americans and African Americans against discrimination in the United States, as well as the fight for independence from British rule in India. In Echoes of Mutiny, Seema Sohi further discusses the role of Indian Americans in the Indian anti-colonial struggle. A particularly interesting example is the relationship between the Ghadar Movement in the United States to the struggle against British colonialism in India. It is of interest to relate the experience of transnational activism of South Asian Americans in the past century to the contemporary activism against Hindutva today.

The increase in racialized violence against Muslims and the broader South Asian community after 9/11 was also met with significant responses from South Asian organizations. In the book Uncle Swamy, Vijay Prashad talks about the organization South Asian Americans

Leading Together (SAALT) and its responses discrimination facing South Asian Americans. SAALT, formed in 2000, worked on various projects including a documentary about the racialized violence targeting South Asian Americans as well as organizing conferences to connect activists such as Desis Rising. After 9/11 happened soon after, the coalitions formed from these organizing efforts were able to bring awareness to and resist the heightened anti-Muslim discrimination. In a 2015 essay titled “Documenting South Asian American Struggles against Racism: Community Archives in a Post-9/11 World”, Michelle Caswell discusses the specific responses of the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA) regarding the violence against South Asian Americans after 9/11. By documenting progressive South Asian community responses, Caswell argues that SAADA’s archives are a tool for mobilizing South Asian Americans in the current moment and the future towards justice.

Anti-Hindutva Activism in the United States

While there are many aforementioned works which discuss Indian American community organizing for various progressive causes, there are fewer existing works surrounding responses against Hindutva politics in the United States. An important recent paper by Bidisha Biswas discusses various aspects of the opposition to Hindutva among Indian Americans. The November 2022 paper titled “(Re)Imagining the idea of India: Contestations about Hindutva among the Indian American diaspora” mentions the challenge of being a relatively rare voice in the diaspora resisting Hindutva in the United States. The paper described various kinds of organizations and coalitions that have formed, including faith-based groups like Hindus for Human Rights (HfHR)

61 Bidisha Biswas, “(Re)Imagining the Idea of India: Contestations about Hindutva among the Indian American Diaspora,” *Nations and Nationalism* n/a, no. n/a, accessed May 9, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12905.
and Indian American Muslim Council (IAMC), as well as anti-caste organizations like Ambedkar King Study Circle (AKSC). The paper discusses the response of the Seattle City Council in 2019 in passing a resolution criticizing the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in India as a key example of US-based organizations and coalitions opposing Hindutva. While explaining how many groups have been involved in anti-Hindutva activism, Biswas maintains that differences between the groups remain, writing that these differences “can lead to unwieldy and, at times, ideologically inconsistent coalitions.”

I explore some of these ideological contradictions within the anti-Hindutva movement in Chapter 4.

Biswas argues that the anti-Hindutva activism among Indian Americans constitutes an important way in which the community is contesting with the ‘Idea of India’, identifying that some anti-Hindutva activists maintain pride in a democratic vision of India’s national project, which they view Hindutva as obstructing. Biswas does identify that these questions are underexamined, specifically posing “How does the focus on countering Hindutva intersect with awareness of, and a willingness to engage with, the more intricate forms of structural inequality and violence that pervade India? This is a question that merits further examination.”

I attempt to answer this exact question when it comes to the relationship between the anti-Hindutva movement in the United States and the fight against caste. It is in answering this question that I will describe how there has been a rupture from the long-distance nationalist tendencies of the opposition to Hindutva in the United States, especially among the growing number of anti-Hindutva activists emphasizing the connectedness of issues like caste, religion, and class. I also

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63 Iaspora,” Nations and Nationalism n/a, no. n/a, accessed May 9, 2023, 9-10, https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12905.
expand on Biswas’s analysis in Chapter 3, emphasizing how anti-Hindutva activism has more directly confronted the Hindutva manifestations within the United States.

In the 2016 book *Desis Divided*, Sangay Mishra also discusses elements of anti-Hindutva mobilization. Mishra points out that although anti-Hindutva movements have had cosmopolitan characters, the role of minority groups such as Muslim Indians and Christian Indians has still been significant in resistance. Following Modi’s rise to the national government, the Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations (FIACONA) led various motions to lobby the U.S. Congress to act against Hindu nationalism in the United States. Among Muslims, organizations like the American Federation of Muslims of Indian Origin (AFMI) and IAMC have played a significant role in advocating for justice for Muslims in India against Hindutva as well as among the diaspora.

Prema Kurien categorized and enumerated more progressive Indian American organizations in a 2007 paper titled “Who Speaks for Indian Americans? Religion, Ethnicity, and Political Formation”. She classified organizations as South Asian American organizations, Indian Muslim American organizations, Indian Christian American organizations, and American Dalit organizations. Notably, possible progressive Hindu associations are not included in Kurien’s discussion. Since the publication of this paper fifteen years ago, the extent of Hindu nationalism in the United States has developed, with some organizations described by Kurien no longer being present, while other organizations have jumped to the forefront. Kurien’s work also explored the relationships between Indian American organizations and the broader community,

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identifying how the varying agendas of progressive groups makes it difficult to identify certain perspectives as the most authentic or most resonant with the Indian American community.

Some progressive Hindu groups have attempted to navigate the cultural complexity of addressing Hindu nationalist logics while attempting to preserve certain cultural practices. Vijay Prashad describes an example of this in *The Karma of Brown Folk*, where a group of progressive Hindus in the United Kingdom organized events for a secular conception of Diwali with a school program called “Diwali against Communalism”.66 These organizers went to many schools to offer resources against communal violence while also constructing an image of a secular Diwali. This occupies an oppositional yet proximal space to the more frequent celebrations of Diwali by Hindu nationalist organizations in the diaspora. More recently in 2020, Students Against Hindutva Ideology (SAHI) organized a similar “Holi against Hindutva”, described by Audrey Truschke in her article “The Hindu Right in the United States” as another example of using Hindu festivals as a space for anti-Hindutva political commentary.67

**Research Methods**

In this dissertation, I look at the landscape of anti-Hindutva activism of anti-Hindutva activism in the United States, emphasizing the period since Narendra Modi’s election as Prime Minister in 2014. The research involves historical, ethnographic, and case research methods. From a historical perspective, the study seeks to describe the contemporary history of organizational responses against Hindutva in the United States. From an ethnographic perspective, the study aims to learn more about the spaces and organizations involved in

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66 Prashad, *Karma Of Brown Folk*.
organizing against Hindutva in the United States. Data is collected from semi-structured interviews, contextual observations, and reports and documents shared by organizations. A few case studies of anti-Hindutva actions in the United States also serve as rich reference points to examine organizational responses to Hindutva forces under specific contexts.

The primary organizations that I study are Ambedkar King Study Circle (AKSC), Hindus for Human Rights (HfHR), and Indian American Muslim Council (IAMC). The intent of focusing on a few important organizations is to allow for a more meaningful understanding of the work of these organizations, their internal dynamics, and inter-organizational relationships. By focusing on studying a few select organizations within the larger space of organizations combating Hindutva in the United States, I am able to explore the work of those organizations in more detail. A deeper exploration of these organizations reveals more about their work in anti-Hindutva activism, some inter-organizational dynamics, and the relevance to the overall spaces of Indian American activism, South Asian American activism, Asian American activism, and progressive activism more broadly.

A major component of the project’s methodologies is the analysis of semi-structured interviews. The interviews aim to expand the understanding of the organizational landscape of responses to Hindutva politics in the United States based on the thoughts and perspectives of representatives from the organizations. In addition, I aimed to learn more about several incidents of response coordinated by organizations. The discussion will be mostly framed to be based on the organization’s perspectives, rather than just the members’ thoughts by themselves. However, invariably participants can intertwine their own perspectives in a way that goes beyond the scope of their organizational positions, and therefore analysis of these perspectives are carefully contextualized to ensure that the organizational positions are appropriately described.
### General Questions about the Organization

- What ideological positions does the organization have?
- What is the history of the organization?
- What kind of members belong to the organization?
- How will the organization change in the immediate and near future?

### Questions about Organizational Relationships

- What kinds of relationships does the organization have with other organizations in the United States?
- What kinds of relationships does the organization have with other organizations in India / South Asia?
- What kind of relationship does the organization have with the Indian American community?

### Questions about Rise of Hindutva

- How does the organization see the challenge of Hindutva?
- How have Hindutva politics developed in the United States over time?
- How has the organization responded to Hindutva politics in India and in the United States?
- Are there differences in how the issue of Hindutva manifests in the United States diaspora versus in India itself?

### Questions about Caste and Hindutva

- How does the organization characterize the influence of Brahmanism and caste in South Asian / Indian communities in the US?
- How does the organization see the role of caste in relation to Hindutva?
- How has the organization responded to casteism in India and in the United States?

### Questions about Specific Incidents of Interest

- How has the organization responded to the Edison bulldozer incident?
- How has the organization responded to the Seattle ordinance against caste discrimination incident?
- Are there other incidents in recent years that your organization has engaged with?

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The subjects of these interviews are representatives from the aforementioned organizations. Initial organizational participants were reached via contacting organizations by their social media or email. Most of the interviews were audio-recorded using an electronic
device, but in some cases, I took notes during the conversation and compiled detailed interview notes after the conversation. When referencing the conversations with organizational representatives, I do not refer to any specific names, maintaining only the name of the organizations they belong to. When referring to quotes from interviews, I describe the speaker as a representative of the organization. Figure 1.1 contains some of the questions that guide the conversations.

Due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, the questions are not followed exactly during the course of the interviews. Instead, they are used to prompt participants as needed but participants are also permitted to talk freely and guide the direction of the conversation. Some of the interviews were conducted virtually through phone calls and Zoom meetings. Other interviews are conducted in person in California. Each interview lasted between one and two hours.

In addition to semi-structured interviews, information is also collected via broader observations through interactions with organizational spaces and organization members. These interactions included visits to organizations and attending events and actions organized by organizations including AKSC, HfHR, and IAMC. Data from these interactions constitutes embedded contextual observations that are used for a small ethnographic analysis of the dynamics of the organizational landscape in opposition to Brahmanical Hindutva.

In addition to the semi-structured interview, the study also collects and interprets various documents by and about organizations fighting Hindutva. These constitute materials shared by the organizations as well as materials that mention these organizations. These documents are a combination of websites, reports, articles and social media pages. These materials are all retrieved from Internet sources. Many of the organizations have websites hosting information
about topics like organizational history, press release documents, links to readings, and more. Interpretation will consist of textual content analysis of the contents of various of these documents, as well as an analysis of what kind of information is shared on digital platforms and possible omissions.

I briefly explore a few cases involving response against Hindutva as useful points of reference to illustrate solidarities between organizations and different forms of organizational resistance. The first two cases that I look at involve incidents in India, the passing of the Citizenship Amendment Act in 2019, and the Bhima Koregaon Violence in 2018. Both incidents also involved actions of resistance by organizations in the United States, including marches, public statements, and the dispersion of educational materials. Documents involving these incidents are studied, as well as interviews which discuss their context with organizations.

Two additional cases include responses against Hindutva’s manifestations in the United States. The first of these case studies is about the Edison bulldozer float incident from August 2022 and its ongoing consequences. Both public digital documents about the Edison incident, including municipal council documents, as well as references from interviews will be used in the analysis of the case study. The second of these cases is the Seattle ordinance against caste discrimination from early 2023. Public digital documents about the Seattle ordinance against caste discrimination, including Seattle City Council documents, as well as interview discussions about the movement, will be used in this case research analysis.

These methodologies present several limitations. Firstly, not all the anti-Hindutva movement is captured through a study that focuses on the contributions of a few organizations. There are many individual actors, activists, and deeper community relations that cannot be fully ascertained through merely examining organizational outlooks. Within the landscape of anti-
Hindutva organizations, this methodology focuses on the perspectives of a select few organizations, which also limits the extent to which the landscape of organization is painted. There are many organizations across the United States which have done significant anti-Hindutva organizing work, of which only some examples get mentioned here. In addition, while I try to add historical context where applicable, I do focus on a relatively narrow window of time regarding the recent moment and contemporary movements, which leaves out some context about the historical development of these organizations and other organizations preceding them. The time period of my observations is also limited to just a few months, so that also limits the scope of those observations in describing the entire movement.

Within the study of these organizations, the interviews only emphasize the perspectives of organizations instead of considering the specific perspectives of different individuals within the organizations. These organizations are composed of individuals with varying personal views and stories, and consequently are not a monolith. Therefore, the official political lines of organizations are not necessarily consistent, nor do they necessarily represent the views of all the members of an organization. These nuances make it difficult to complete a generalized analysis of different organizations. Nonetheless, there are certain overarching themes which characterize anti-Hindutva organizations that are ascertained from the basic interviews and observations of this project. In addition, by trying to talk to leaders and official representatives of organizations, more authoritative information about their perspectives can be expressed.

The remainder of this dissertation follows the following format. In Chapter 2, I briefly sketch the landscape of anti-Hindutva activism in the United States, primarily describing Ambedkar King Study Circle, Hindus for Human Rights, and Indian American Muslim Council. In Chapter 3, I then describe how anti-Hindutva activism has not only involved protests against
Hindutva actions in India, but also against the contemporary manifestations of caste and religious violence in the United States. In Chapter 4, I follow this with a closer examination of what constitutes the struggle against Hindutva, with a focus on the relationship between caste and Hindutva. I also argue how anti-Hindutva activism has been increasingly connected with other struggles for liberation, from the fight against class oppression to the fight against racism.

Altogether, this dissertation is an effort to make sense of the activism against Hindutva at its current moment, which hopefully can inform how the struggle will develop in the future as well.
Chapter 2: Sketching the Landscape of Resistance

There are many voices against Hindutva in the United States, and these voices are getting louder. Organizations play a large role in social movements, in advocating for causes, coordinating actions, and mobilizing people. In the recent years since Modi’s 2014 election in India, several organizations have been involved in the struggle against Hindutva in the United States. In this chapter, I paint a partial picture of the landscape of organizational resistance against Hindutva. While I don’t cover the list of anti-Hindutva organizations exhaustively, I mention some of the key types of organizations involved in the struggle against Hindutva in the United States. I then introduce a few anti-Hindutva organizations in a little more detail, specifically Ambedkar King Study Circle (AKSC), Hindus for Human Rights (HfHR) and Indian American Muslim Council (IAMC). Afterwards, I identify a few relevant features of anti-Hindutva organizing in the United States. I discuss the importance of digital activism for combatting Hindutva in the United States.

The current realm of organizations in the United States taking actions against Hindutva is diverse. Since Hindutva constitutes many different elements, resistance against Hindutva takes heterogeneous forms. Much of the resistance against Hindutva politics in the United States addresses the religious and caste-based violence central to Hindutva. In some cases, organizing against specific Hindutva-related issues is not labeled by organizations as anti-Hindutva work; however, I include these types of activism as falling under the umbrella as resisting Hindutva, and consequently as a form of anti-Hindutva activism. This includes the fight against caste discrimination, which is not always described as activism against Hindutva, but as I argue later in Chapter 4, the fight against caste has become intimately connected to the fight against Hindutva in the United States. There are many anti-Hindutva activists in the United States.
Consequently, the enumeration of multiple of these organizations does not imply that they form boundaries that activists do not cross; instead, as the anti-Hindutva content of organizational work overlaps, so too do the communities and individuals engage in activism.

There are many faith-based organizations with explicit anti-Hindutva politics, including Hindus for Human Rights (HfHR), Indian American Muslim Council (IAMC), and Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations (FIACONA). In addition, there are many organizations that focus on anti-caste politics, including Equality Labs (EL), Ambedkar King Study Circle (AKSC), Ambedkar International Center (AIC), Ambedkar Association of North America (AANA), and Dalit Solidarity Forum (DSF). These organizations have generally drawn from Ambedkarite politics; their critiques of Hindutva often emphasize the fight against caste violence. There are also South Asian organizations that deal with a wider range of issues which include anti-Hindutva work, such Alliance for South Asians Taking Action (ASATA) and South Asian Solidarity Initiative (SASI). Many organizations consisting of a sizable proportion of non-South Asians have also been involved in the struggle against Hindutva, including National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Anakbayan (AB), Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), and Jewish Voices for Peace (JVP).

For the remainder of this section, I will describe three other organizations in more detail: Ambedkar King Study Circle (AKSC), Hindus for Human Rights (HfHR), Indian American Muslim Council (IAMC). There are other organizations that have been crucial players in various aspects of the anti-Hindutva movement in the United States.

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68 Later in Chapter 4, I will speak more about how connections between different struggles have led to more organizations getting involved in anti-Hindutva activism.
Ambedkar King Study Circle

Ambedkar King Study Circle (AKSC) was founded in 2016 by a group of Indian Americans in the Bay Area, California.⁶⁹ As the name indicates, AKSC draws from the political legacies of B.R. Ambedkar in India and Martin Luther King Jr. in the United States to connect the social justice struggles against caste and race. More broadly, the organization’s official aim is “challenging caste, class, race, gender and religious oppressions and oppressors on ideological, political and social fronts.”⁷⁰ AKSC opposes the caste system and Hindutva politics, subscribing to more progressive and leftist politics. AKSC is a membership-based organization, with additional volunteers who assist with events. Most AKSC members are from the Bay Area, but there are also members from other parts of the country. While AKSC’s membership is substantially composed of Dalits and other people from caste-oppressed backgrounds, there are also many dominant-caste people in AKSC. An AKSC representative described this as follows: “We have a position that we will not do any identity-based membership. Membership is open to all, in fact, we have a couple of Brahmins in our membership, and they are in our executive committee.” Almost all members of AKSC are second-generation immigrants, with many working in the tech sector in the Bay Area.⁷¹

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⁷¹ Interview with organizational representative from Ambedkar King Study Circle, February 18, 2023.
AKSC organizes a regular reading circle, featuring regular discussions of political and historical texts among members. A representative from AKSC described the importance of the reading circle, especially during the early, formative years of the organization: “In the beginning, it was our bloodline. without the reading circle, we would not have been able to come to an understanding. The reading circle sharpens our understanding of the issues and has helped us advance our theorization.” Books covered in the reading circle have included works by anti-caste works like *Annihilation of Caste* by B. R. Ambedkar and *Republic of Caste* by Anand Teltumbde and anti-racist works like *Black Lives Matter to Black Liberation* by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor and *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* by Martin Luther King Jr. Other books on political history and theory that the reading circle has covered include Vladimir Lenin’s *State and Revolution*, Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States*, and Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Political education within AKSC’s community
thus forms a major part of the organization’s political work. AKSC has been involved with many kinds of political actions, from collecting testimonies on caste discrimination, to hosting events with progressive speakers, to organizing their annual AKSC conference.

Through their meetings, conferences, and their reading circles, AKSC has also done significant work in theorizing the nature of caste oppression in the United States, emphasizing the Brahmanical nature of Hindutva. Speaking on these theorizations briefly, a representative of AKSC said “we [AKSC] theorized that the Indians in the US have caste consciousness, but they cannot practice caste so freely in discriminating against others without Hindutva organizational support.”

AKSC writes more about their anti-Hindutva perspective in a section titled “Hindutva Extremism and Violence against Minorities” from the resolutions of their first General Body Meeting in 2017, writing “AKSC will propagate about violence against Adivasis and Dalits, Muslims and other minorities through social media campaign, hall meetings, audio/video conferences and public demonstration to send a clear message to the government of India and to the respective Indian state government.” This message generally describes the ways in which AKSC has involved itself in anti-Hindutva community organizing in the years since its inception.

**Hindus for Human Rights**

Hindus for Human Rights (HfHR) was founded as a nonprofit organization in 2019 by a group of Indian Americans including activists Raju Rajagopal and Sunita Viswanathan in response to the growing mobilization of Hindutva in India as well as the United States. Hindus for Human Rights describes itself as a faith-based and progressive advocacy organization. It is

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75 Interview with organizational representative from Ambedkar King Study Circle, February 18, 2023.
not a membership-based organization, rather, the organizational structure consists of a Board of Directors, an Advisory Board, staff, and volunteers. Hindus for Huma. HfHR describes its mission as “rooted in the values of our faith: shanti (peace), nyaya (justice) and satya (truth)”.

HfHR has a small team of staff belonging across North America and particularly the United States. Demographically, HfHR is an intergenerational organization, composed primarily of first- and second-generation Indian Americans.

Figure 2.2: Hindus for Human Rights’ Logo. This features a candle lamp, which are common in the Hindu ‘Arti’ ritual, in the style of a lotus.

As an organization of self-identifying progressive Hindus, HfHR places anti-Hindutva at the center of their organizational work. This is detailed on their website’s “Frequently Asked Questions FAQ” page, with the following statement written in boldface: “We are Hindus who completely reject Hindutva for what it stands for and what it has wrought.”

A lot of HfHR’s work emphasizes policy, and consequently the organization is involved in communicating with the government through venues such as congressional briefings. In addition, HfHR has put forth

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several projects, including a podcast series called “Ganesha’s Tusk”\(^{80}\) which is an initiative to share progressive Hindu stories, as well as “#UltiPultiBaat”\(^{81}\), a joint project with People's Association in Grassroots Action and Movement (PAIGAM) for the creation of videoscountering Hindutva propaganda. Most recently, HfHR has initiated the Desh Videsh Conversation Series, in order to foster dialogue on difficult conversations within the Indian American community. As of May 2023, there have been events on the CAA and UAPA, Liberation in Kashmir, and caste reservations and discrimination as part of the Desh Videsh Conversation Series.

**Indian American Muslim Council**

The Indian American Muslim Council (IAMC) is a non-profit organization of Indian American Muslims. Founded in 2002, IAMC’s work has included responding to Islamophobia in the United States as well as the heightened anti-Muslim sentiments in India. Their mission is described as “empowerment through strategic advocacy for peace, pluralism and social justice.”\(^{82}\) As a faith-based organization, IAMC is composed primarily of first-generation Muslims in the Indian American community. An IAMC representative described the demographics of the organization as follows: “We have people from all age groups. About 60% of our staff is women. Most of them are persons of color. Almost all of them are also young, between 20 and 45. As far as our volunteers [and other people in support] are concerned, the demographics range from as young as 19 to as old as 90 to 95. We have a huge diversity.”\(^{83}\)

\(^{83}\)Interview with organizational representative from Indian American Muslim Council, February 27, 2023.
Like HfHR, IAMC does not have a membership structure; instead, it has a national team which organizes larger-scale projects and plans more general organizational directions, as well as several locally staffed chapters across the country.

Figure 2.3: Indian American Muslim Council’s logo. It includes imagery of the flags of the United States and India, along with three key values of IAMC: peace, justice, and pluralism.84

As an advocacy organization for Indian American Muslims, IAMC emphasizes the role of Hindutva politics in violence against religious minority groups in India. IAMC has published several reports about Hindutva violence in India. More recently, IAMC’s work has focused on the presence of Hindutva politics in the United States. Ideologically, IAMC’s critique of Hindutva advocates for the liberal values of “peace, justice, and pluralism”85, emphasizing communal harmony, or peaceful coexistence of Hindus, Muslims, and other religious groups. Similar to HfHR, IAMC has been involved in policy work and congressional briefings in order to influence US foreign policy to distance themselves from Hindutva. One of IAMC’s continuous projects has been a video news series titled “India Genocide News”, which covers weekly updates of Hindutva violence in India.86 The organization has also published a series of reports

85 Indian American Muslim Council, “About Us - IAMC.”
on the status of religious minorities in India, highlighting the persecution of Muslims. While historically the work of IAMC has focused more on advocating against Hindutva in India, they have more recently been addressing the rise of Hindutva politics within the United States as well, speaking up about incidents involving discrimination against Muslims and against caste discrimination. Some of these examples will be discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 3: Resisting Hindutva ‘Across the Shore’ and ‘Next Door’

How close is Hindutva to people in the United States? It turns out that we don’t have to look far - Hindutva politics have concretely manifested within the Indian American community in several ways, leading to religious and caste discrimination. Consequently, resistance against Hindutva has opposed the Hindutva government in India, but has also opposed pro-Hindutva sentiments in the United States. In this chapter, I explore how communities in the United States are not only protesting against Hindutva in India, but they are also resisting its manifestation within the United States. I look at how these struggles differ, and how they are connected. I characterize examples of actions of anti-Hindutva organizations in the United States to reveal different aspects of the progressive movement against a global Hindutva, emphasizing the role of organizational solidarities in transnational protest and action against Hindutva politics.

Figure 3.1 characterizes anti-Hindutva activism in the United States into two main types - activism against Hindutva politics in India, and activism against Hindutva in the United States. A main distinction between these two categories is the geographic location of the specific incidents that the activism involves. More specifically, activism against Hindutva politics in India involves resisting actions taken by the nationalist Modi government in India. I discuss a few examples in detail, specifically protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), known as anti-CAA protests, as well as protests against arrests made of left-wing anti-Hindutva activists under the enforcement of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Act, 2019. Meanwhile, the category of activism against Hindutva politics in the United States involves responses to the manifestation of Hindutva politics within the United States. For example, I will consider responses to a 2022 march in Edison, NJ involving anti-Muslim and Hindutva imagery, as well as resistance against Brahmanical caste politics in the United States.
Altogether, there are multiple unifying features between the different strands of anti-Hindutva activism in the United States. Firstly, all forms of anti-Hindutva activism in the United States inherit a transnational element. Hindutva itself has become a transnational ideology, in which its logics have extended beyond the boundaries of the Indian nation-state. The major vector of this globalization of Hindutva politics has been Indian Americans, through which the Sangh Parivar in India has formed extensive transnational networks to strengthen the nationalist project in India and to generally popularize the ideology. Thus, anti-Hindutva activists face Hindutva politics not just in India, but also in the United States. I argue that these recent anti-Hindutva actions addressing the manifestation of Hindutva within the United States represent an important development in anti-Hindutva activism as a whole. Internal contradictions within the
South Asian American community are being more thoroughly examined through conflicts between Hindutva and anti-Hindutva activists in the United States. Anti-caste justice has particularly become a major source of mobilization as part of the anti-Hindutva fight in the United States.

**Resisting India’s Hindutva**

The current Hindutva movement in India, spearheaded by the BJP government led by Prime Minister Modi, has been marked by multiple incidents involving Hindutva violence. Two major incidents have been the passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in 2019, and the Bhima Koregaon Violence of 2018.

The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) was passed by the Parliament of India in December of 2019, providing a pathway to citizenship for non-Muslim immigrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. The specific exclusion of Muslims in the passage of the CAA led to widespread protests across India, with students, civil society groups, and opposition parties taking to the streets to express their opposition to the law. In addition to the CAA, many protesters also have opposed the National Register of Citizens (NRC), which documents legal citizens in India. The government responded to anti-CAA and anti-NRC protests with a heavy-handed crackdown, with police using tear gas, water cannons, and batons to disperse crowds. Thousands of protesters were arrested, with multiple killed, and some

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87 Chapter 1’s Background section describes these incidents in more detail.
charged with sedition and other serious offenses. The law is still officially in effect, though many states have refused to implement it, with the national government requesting six more months to frame its rules as recently as January of 2023.

The Bhima Koregaon violence refers to Hindutva attacks on several Dalit groups in India who were celebrating the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Bhima Koregaon, leading to one death and several injuries. In the aftermath of the violence, many Dalit and leftist activists were arrested under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) for involvement in the Bhima Koregaon violence. There have been protests across India against both the Bhima Koregaon violence against Dalits as well as the subsequent arrests of activists. The Shaurya Din Prerana Abhiyan, which consists of 250 Dalit organizations in India, organized protests in the following days against the violence. As arrests under the UAPA were continued to be made in the following years, such as that of activists Anand Teltumbde and Stan Swamy in 2020 under accusations of being involved with the Maoist movement, protests have also continued.

The passage of the CAA and the Bhima Koregaon incident demonstrate both the religious violence and caste violence at the heart of Hindutva politics. These incidents have been met with protest not just in India, but also by anti-Hindutva organizations in the United States. Protest has involved demonstrations, legislative battles, and dissemination of educational information. I discuss these themes in detail in the remainder of this section.

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93 Stan Swamy passed away later in 2021 while imprisoned.
Protesting Against the CAA

Thousands participated in nationwide anti-CAA protests and marches on January 26, 2020, organized by the members of the Coalition to Stop Genocide (CSGI) and other coalitions of organizations like Alliance for Justice and Accountability (AJA). CSGI was formed in early 2020 after the CAA was passed “to preserve democracy and rule of law, and stop the genocide that is being planned in India by the Hindutva movement”, consisting of over fifteen organizations including Indian American Muslim Council (IAMC), Hindus for Human Rights (HfHR), and Equality Labs (EL).94 Regarding these protests, former IAMC President Ahsan Khan commented that “Indian Americans and people of conscience in the US are seeking accountability from the Hindu nationalist regime that wants to turn Indian Muslims into foreigners and render them stateless”.95 Khan notably identifies Indian Americans and “people of conscience” as participating in these protests, which reflects the wide range of organizations participating in these demonstrations. Commenting on participation in the demonstrations, HfHR released a statement “Hindus for Human Rights (HfHR) is proud to participate in the rallies against CAA/NPR/NRC on January 26, 2020, the 70th anniversary of the Indian Secular Republic, in several cities across the U.S. Please join us and numerous other organizations that have come together to register our voice against Hindutva’s ugly face and reclaim Indian Democracy for future generations.”96 HfHR’s statement frames the fight against CAA as a task to save India from Hindutva. In response to Hindutva’s attempts to single out Muslim Indians,
both IAMC and HfHR’s statements reflect the desire to reclaim a vision of a secular India with Indian Muslims and without Hindutva.

Anti-CAA activism in the United States also involved efforts to pass legislative resolutions condemning the act. The first city to do so was Seattle, with a resolution passing in February of 2020. Kshama Sawant, the Indian American Seattle city councilmember who proposed the resolution, wrote in comments before it was passed that “international attention can be powerful when it can bolster local movements against oppression, and I hope that this resolution will set a precedent that will inspire activists in other cities to demand their own local government take a stand. The BJP government recognizes that, which is why we have seen such

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97 ATLRejectsCAA [@ATLAgainstCAA], “#JaiBhim #USrejctsCAA #atlrejctscaa https://t.co/tbxuUbgNZE,” Tweet, Twitter, January 26, 2020, https://twitter.com/ATLAgainstCAA/status/1221549296283197446. [Image attached]
push back from India’s Consul General, and other parts of India’s BJP political establishment abroad.⁹⁸ This hope indeed came true, with at least six other cities passing similar resolutions during the course of 2020, including St. Paul, Cambridge, San Francisco, and Alameda.⁹⁹ Sawant’s statement also mentioned the opposition to the resolution from Indian government-based actors such as India’s Consul General in San Francisco, whose statement Sawant contributed to spooking other councilmembers. This influence of BJP-affiliated organizations demonstrates that the Hindutva government in India does in fact measure a certain influence on the Indian American community and the legislation in the United States. However, through the mobilization of progressive organizations in favor of the resolution and many testimonies given to the city council, the resolution came to be passed.

There has also been significant dissemination of educational information about the CAA protests. The seventh and most recent episode of HfHR’s video series #UltiPultiBaat was released in September of 2022, titled “(Conditional) Citizenship Amendment Act: Muslims Need Not Apply”.¹⁰⁰ This episode discusses the recent developments of the CAA, highlighting resurgence of anti-CAA protests in the Indian state of Assam. The video follows the format of a discussion between someone who supports the CAA, and someone who is against it. It is through this dialogue in the video that the problems of CAA are discussed, and the Hindutva myths are dispelled. IAMC also shares information on CAA publicly; their website features a page specifically dedicated to “coverage about the widespread protests by various groups against CAA

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¹⁰⁰ #UltiPultiBaat Episode 7: (Conditional) Citizenship Amendment Act: Muslims Need Not Apply, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DgTC1CVzSzc.
and NRC across India and abroad”. The website contains summaries and links to various articles discussing the CAA and NRC. These articles re-posted and shared by IAMC constitute a form of educational information being shared about the issue as well as the protests. The IAMC website also has pages noting the resolutions against the CAA passed in cities like Seattle and St. Paul.

Protesting Against the Bhima Koregaon Violence and the UAPA

Anti-Hindutva activists in the United States have also protested against the Bhima Koregaon violence and the arrests of activists. Like anti-CAA protests, resistance to Bhima Koregaon violence and arrests has been in the form of demonstrations, community events, and educational materials. Unlike the anti-CAA protests, there has not been a similar push in the legal arena to pass legislation in the United States condemning the UAPA and Bhima Koregaon violence.

Ambedkar King Study Circle (AKSC) published an article on their website highlighting the various demonstrations and protests about the Bhima Koregaon violence across the United States. In this article, AKSC describes the context of the violence and shares pictures of protests from different places in the US and the world. The article explains the importance of commemorating the Battle of Bhima Koregaon for Dalits, writing in boldface that it “symbolize[s] the victory of strength and courage to overcome the injustice, social inequality,

inhumane treatment and forceful denial of opportunities to live a respectful and peaceful life”.

Pictures of protests from San Jose, New York, Seattle, Atlanta, Chicago, Boston, and Detroit are shown in this article. AKSC themselves organized a demonstration “against the attack at a peaceful rally by Dalits at Bhima Koregaon by Hindutva forces and illegal arrest of Dalits by Maharashtra BJP government”. The poster for this event, depicted in Figure 3.3, contains many notable features. In the background of the poster is an image of people visiting the ‘Jaystambh’ monument in Bhima Koregaon that commemorates the Dalit Mahar fighters. In the upper right corner is a photograph of B.R. Ambedkar, and the demonstration took place in front of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library in San Jose - together Ambedkar and King constitute the namesake of AKSC. At the bottom of the poster is a list of organizations involved in the event, which mentions AKSC as well as IAMC. In addition, other Ambedkarite organizations of AIC and AANA are listed, as well as the San Jose Peace and Justice Center. Dozens of people attended the demonstration in San Jose hosted by AKSC.
Anti-Hindutva activists have also organized community events discussing the Bhima Koregaon violence and UAPA. In January 2023, HfHR inaugurated a conversation series titled “Desh-Videsh”, with the self-described goal of “Civil dialogue on difficult topics affecting the Indian American community”. The first event of the series was dedicated to the UAPA, with one of the speakers being a lawyer representing some of the activists arrested after the Bhima Koregaon violence. Relating some of the conversation, a HfHR representative said “We had very competent lawyers who were representing [the arrested Bhima Koregaon activists]. Two of them were online, and they talked about what difficulties they're facing in bringing justice to the people. For example, they talked about how the UAPA says they have to file charges within six months, during which time there is no chance of a bail.” The presence of these conversations as recently as 2023, over five years after the Bhima Koregaon violence, reflects the continuous efforts by anti-Hindutva activists to raise awareness about these issues in the United States.

IAMC also has pages on their website sharing articles and news reports about the Bhima Koregaon incident and the UAPA arrests. IAMC has also commented on a U.S. Congressional Briefing from 2021 that identified the Bhima Koregaon violence as an example of India’s deteriorating democracy. In 2021, IAMC published a status report titled “Crushing Dissent”, which discusses extensively the impact of the UAPA on crushing activists in India. The report

105 Ambedkar King Study Circle, “Worldwide Protest on Violence on Dalits at Bhima Koregaon, India,” [Image on Website]
107 Interview with organizational representative from Hindus for Human Rights, March 9, 2023.
includes multiple examples of the UAPA being used in arrests related to the Bhima Koregaon violence, stating “[The UAPA] used to falsely implicate and arrest scholars, academicians, social activities, authors in the Elgar Parishad [Bhima Koregaon] case.” In addition, a full page of the report displayed a picture of Indian Catholic activist Stan Swamy who was among those arrested in the aftermath of the Bhima Koregaon violence. Stan Swamy passed away in 2021, while still incarcerated.110

Resisting United States’ Hindutva

India may be far from the United States, but Hindutva is not. As Hindutva has globalized, the struggle against Hindutva in the United States takes upon the second challenge of resisting its manifestations within the United States. As Indian Americans have migrated to the United States, the political sentiments of that region have arrived in the United States as well. This has included discriminatory attitudes against religious minorities, especially Muslims, as well as the continuation of casteism. In this section, I show how anti-Hindutva activists and organizations have responded to the anti-Muslim sentiments and casteism that is propagated by Hindutva forces in the United States. I highlight how the fight against caste discrimination has been a particularly large component in this fight.

It is important to mention that casteist sentiments have existed in the United States prior to the arrival of Hindutva politics. Most of the early South Asian immigrants to the United States in the late 19th century to early 20th century were caste-oppressed or non-Hindus.111 Later in the landmark 1923 Supreme Court Case United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind, a caste-based

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argument was made to argue for citizenship for dominant-caste South Asian Americans, placing them in proximity with whiteness and away from caste-oppressed South Asian Americans. The recent proliferation of Hindutva ideology has thus heightened caste contradictions which have existed for over a century in the United States. Anti-Muslim sentiments also have existed in the United States independent of Hindutva. Islamophobia has particularly intensified in the United States after the 9/11 attacks; consequently, Muslims in the United States have been subject to discrimination and profiling across American society. Therefore for Muslim Indians in the United States, the rise of Hindutva has created yet another source of anti-Muslim sentiments.

In the remainder of this section, I look more closely at responses to two incidents: an anti-Muslim incident in 2022 involving the display of a bulldozer at a parade, as well as the action to ban caste discrimination in Seattle in 2023. I examine some key elements of anti-Hindutva actions during these incidents; I identify organizational statements of solidarity and public testimonies against Hindutva as a major source of the successful mobilizations.

Protesting Against the Edison Bulldozer Incident

On August 14, 2022, the Indian Business Association organized a rally in Edison, NJ to celebrate India’s Independence Day. Edison, also known as ‘Little India’, is home to the highest concentration of Indian Americans in the United States, many of whom originate from Gujarat. Many members of the Indian American community, as well as other community

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112 “UNITED STATES v. BHAGAT SINGH THIND.,” LII / Legal Information Institute, accessed May 9, 2023, https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/261/204.
representatives including the mayor of Edison, attended this rally. Controversy emerged when a bulldozer, a symbol of anti-Muslim violence in India, was included as part of the parade, decorated with a picture of Narendra Modi, along with a poster of Hindutva Chief Minister of the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath.

![Bulldozer at Edison rally](image_url)

Figure 3.4: An image of the bulldozer at the rally in Edison. A poster featuring Yogi Adityanath is attached to the body of the bulldozer, with a “Baba Bulldozer” written in Hindi. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s face also features on the end of the bulldozer.

The presence of the Hindutva bulldozer imagery in the Edison rally was quickly met with protest by community activists and organizations. Responses included public statements issued by anti-Hindutva organizations, meetings organized with government officials, as well as public comments at the following Edison Municipal Council meeting.

On August 16th, IAMC issued a joint statement with the Council on Islamic-American relations (CAIR), in which they condemned the appearance of the bulldozer in the rally and

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called on holders of local political offices to condemn the incident. In this statement, IAMC president Mohammed Jawad (2022) said, “We need to contextualize what it means to march with bulldozers emblazoned with the images of two openly Hindu supremacist leaders”.

Soon after the incident, HfHR also shared a letter addressed to the mayor of Edison and the Edison Township city council members, writing “As the only progressive Hindu American organization in the United States dedicated to fighting Hindu nationalism, we stand against the infiltration of such hate into our communities, and we urge all of you to use your platforms as elected officials and respected community leaders to forcefully condemn the brazen hatred that was on display at this march.”

This statement once again reflects a common theme in a lot of HfHR’s work - speaking out as self-identifying Hindus on Hindu violence in the United States. In this case, HfHR spoke against the anti-Muslim sentiments in Edison, and called for the local government to respond.

On August 24, 2022, several members of the Edison community gave public comments at the Edison Municipal Council meeting. According to the minutes of the meeting “Several residents expressed their opinions on the bulldozer in the Indian Day Parade along with giving some history on India. Several residents came out to speak about the display of hate they felt from the bulldozer in the Indian Day Parade.”

All the council members also spoke in disapproval of the appearance of the bulldozer, except one named Ajay Patil. Some of the public


118 Hindus for Human Rights [@Hindus4HR], “We Just Contacted @EdisonNJ Mayor @SamipJoshi and the Edison Township Council to Express Our Disgust at the Recent Parade by Hindu Nationalists in Edison, and Urging Them to Publicly Condemn This Brazen Display of Hate. Read Our Full Letter below: Https://T.co/PHqjOYAr0Y,” Tweet, Twitter, August 16, 2022, https://twitter.com/Hindus4HR/status/1559589055687528449.

commenters specifically expressed disagreement with Patil, arguing that the bulldozer was a symbol of hate.

IAMC also met with local elected officials and law enforcement to explain the situation. An IAMC representative described these communications as follows:

“We reached out to the government officials locally. And then we also felt like it also decided that we would also have to bring it at a little bit of federal level too. And we felt like the Department of Homeland Security was the right approach in that regard. We had to give them a context about what is happening in India, on why the Indian Muslims feel intimidated with the use of bulldozers.”

According to IAMC, a prerequisite of local officials taking action was making sure that they understood what the bulldozer actually symbolized. Thus, education directed towards government officials was a major component of the response to the bulldozer incident.

By the end of August, both the Edison mayor and the Woodbridge (neighboring town) mayor had denounced the bulldozer's appearance. In addition, the Indian Business Association eventually released a statement condemning the incident as well. A HfHR representative described the success of the response as follows: “It was a really good educational moment for other folks in New Jersey and elected officials and even in Congress. We were bringing this incident into meetings that we were having with other congressional offices to show how [Hindutva] is really showing up on the ground in the U.S.”

While the presence of the bulldozer float represented the influence of Hindutva politics in the region, the educational effect of the

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120 Interview with organizational representative from Indian American Muslim Council, March 9, 2023.
121 Kymal, “The Bulldozer Becomes A Red Flag Of Hate.”
122 Interview with organizational representative from Hindus for Human Rights, February 18, 2023.
response represented the organizing power of anti-Hindutva organizations in effectively calling for the harms of the act to be recognized.

Protest Against Caste Discrimination in Seattle

As of 2023, the struggle against Hindutva within the United States is perhaps most concretely evident in the fight against caste discrimination. Anti-caste activism has demonstrated how the movement against Hindutva in the United States has also become a movement against Brahmanical structure of caste. The pushback against caste protections from Hindutva groups has simultaneously demonstrated the entrenchment of caste in South Asian American communities, as well as the central role of caste in Hindutva politics. This fight against caste discrimination has taken place in workplaces, with the 2020 Cisco lawsuit; it has also taken place in institutions of higher education, with all California State Universities adding caste to anti-discrimination policy.123

In January 2023, this fight came to Seattle, when Seattle city councilmember Kshama Sawant124 introduced legislation to ban caste discrimination in the city and add caste as a protected category in the city’s discrimination law. Various anti-Hindutva and anti-caste activists and organizations rallied behind this case to express their support for the ordinance, despite significant opposition from Hindutva groups in the United States like the Hindu American

On February 21, the ordinance was passed, making it the first jurisdiction to pass such a law against caste discrimination outside of South Asia.

As was the case in the response to the Edison bulldozer incident, statements of solidarity and public comments played a major role in this legislative success for the anti-caste movement. Over a hundred people gave passionate public comments at Seattle city council meetings, the vast majority being in favor of the ordinance. Many others also expressed support for the ordinance via phone calls and emails to the offices of the council members. Several anti-caste organizations helped to lead the efforts in coordinating these responses, including Ambedkar King Study Circle (AKSC), Equality Labs, and the Coalition of Seattle Indian Americans (CSIA).

When it comes to the fight against caste discrimination, the Seattle case was not the first to feature the collection of testimonies. In June 2020, California's Department of Fair Employment and Housing filed a lawsuit against Cisco Systems for alleged discrimination against a Dalit engineer by two of his upper-caste supervisors. The lawsuit claims that the discriminatory practices of the caste system were imported into the team and workplace at Cisco by these supervisors and co-workers. In response to this lawsuit and the issue of caste discrimination in the workplace, Ambedkar King Study Circle (AKSC) asked for testimonies from Indian Americans regarding caste discrimination, circulating a Google Form asking people to describe caste discrimination they had experienced. Excerpts of collected testimonies were compiled on the AKSC website, organized into several categories including ‘Segregation and


127 Arbel, Tali, “California Sues Cisco for Bias Based on Indian Caste System | AP News.”

These testimonies collected by AKSC were cited later during the movement to add caste protections in Seattle in a document sent to Seattle councilmembers titled “Organizational Statement in Support of Ordinance Banning Caste-Based Discrimination”, which says “Testimonies collected by Ambedkar King Study Circle further demonstrate that people from the "lower castes" face bias, discrimination, segregation, and harassment based on their caste in the workplace, housing, employment, and beyond.”129 The long-term impact of these testimonies demonstrates ways in which the anti-caste movement in the United States has strengthened from previous projects and experiences.

The same document contained over 150 organizational signatures in solidarity, educational information describing the issue of caste discrimination, organizational support statements, and individual support statements. HfHR and IAMC, while not being organizations composed of Dalits or caste-oppressed communities, still emphasized their solidarity in the fight against caste discrimination in Seattle in this letter. In their organizational support statement included in the letter, IAMC included a quote from its representative Javed Sikander, who said at a Seattle city council meeting that “We stand as allies with the Dalit community, which has tirelessly worked to raise awareness on the issue of caste discrimination here in the United

States, as well as to protect the people who battle this pervasive form of oppression on a daily basis.”

HfHR also expressed a similar sentiment in their statement of solidarity, writing “We stand with anti-caste groups, including Equality Labs, the Ambedkar International Circle, the Ambedkar Association of North America, the Ambedkar King Study Circle, Coalition of Seattle Indian-Americans who have led this push to formally include caste as a protected category in the city of Seattle.” This notion of being an organization that represents a progressive Hindu voice of support is echoed in a comment made about this case in an interview with a HfHR representative: “We always said 'You [anti-caste organizations] take the lead, and we will follow, because this is your fight’. This reflects HfHR’s attempts to be part of the anti-caste fight in the United States while not taking the front-seat.

After the ordinance was passed, AKSC Secretary S. Karthikeyan shared the following statement:

“The oppressed have a fear of their caste identity being outed by members of the dominant caste, and this typically leads to social exclusion and/or retaliation. This fear, especially of retaliation, is deeply embedded in the psyche of the oppressed. It is a spectre that casts a dark shadow on their dreams and dampens their hopes. This ordinance will help the oppressed unshackle their dreams, unleash their talents and live up to their full potential. The whole world stands to benefit from this blossoming of talent previously stifled.”

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130 “Organizational Statement in Support of Ordinance Banning Caste-Based Discrimination.”
131 “Organizational Statement in Support of Ordinance Banning Caste-Based Discrimination.”
132 Interview with organizational representative from Hindus for Human Rights, March 9, 2023.
S. Karthikeyan’s statement reflects the joy in this movement for justice. Unmasking the massive amount of caste violence across the world is an arduous process, but one that the anti-Hindutva movement cannot do without. Through invoking the impact of the Seattle case on the whole world, this statement also suggests Seattle as setting a precedent for similar movements elsewhere. This prediction is already coming true - the California State Senate Bill SB403 was introduced soon after in April of 2023; just as Seattle became the first city to ban caste discrimination, California could become the first state to do the same. However, Seattle is not the origin point of the movement; instead, the successful anti-caste organizing in Seattle also emerged from precedents for protections against caste discrimination in workplaces and universities. In this sense, the momentum of the anti-caste movement in the United States is a reflection of consistent organizing by anti-caste and anti-Hindutva groups towards the ultimate goal of removing caste discrimination altogether.

**Features of Resistance**

In this section, I summarize and synthesize some of the key features of anti-Hindutva actions in the United States. Firstly, I argue that anti-Hindutva activism that targets incidents in India represents a certain historical continuity from earlier transnational forms of activism among South Asian Americans. Meanwhile, anti-Hindutva activism that is focused on the manifestations of Hindutva within the United States has been more unique in its emphasis on the internal contradictions within the diaspora. Second, I argue how contestations with the Hindutva opposition have been significant in the development of strategies of resistance.

**Historical Continuity and Rupture**

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The transnational nature of protests against Hindutva violence in India, such as in responses to the CAA and the Bhima Koregaon violence that were discussed earlier in this chapter, reflect a continuation of a longer history of US-based groups fighting for liberation in India. One of the earliest examples of Indian American transnational activism can be traced to the Ghadar Party, a political organization founded in 1913 by Indian immigrants in the United States who were opposed to British colonial rule in India and sought to establish independence through revolution. In November 1913, the Ghadar Party launched its newspaper *The Ghadar* within the United States, writing “today there begins in foreign lands, but in our country's language, a war against the English Raj . . . What is our name? Ghadar. What is our work? Ghadar. Our name and our work are identical.” They worked to encourage Indian Americans to support armed struggle in India, mobilizing thousands to travel to India to support the revolution.

Today’s context of the anti-Hindutva movement in the United States is remarkably different from the Ghadar Party’s battle against British India. Most notably, the tactics used were different - armed struggle is currently not in the vocabulary of the anti-Hindutva movement in the United States. However, the common thread that can be drawn that connects formations like the Ghadar Party to modern anti-Hindutva organizations in the United States is the goal of mobilizing Indian Americans to combat oppression in India. The continuity is in the transnational resistance of Indian Americans, connecting the liberation of India to their own existence in the United States.

However, with the heightening of the fight against Hindutva’s manifestations within the United States, the dynamics of transnational progressive activism among South Asians has

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shifted. The current battles against caste discrimination and religious discrimination within South Asian American communities represents a historical rupture from the past forms of transnational activism. The Edison bulldozer incident and Seattle ordinance against caste show that anti-Hindutva activism in the United States has turned more attention towards the internal contradictions of caste and religion within the South Asian American community. This activism has remained transnational, involving a critical examination of how Hindutva violence has been transported to the United States. However, the emphasis in this category of activism has been on looking within the immigrant community’s contradictions.

In contrast to the first strand of transnational anti-Hindutva activism, these recent examples of anti-Hindutva actions in the United States reflect the evolving challenges of combating the global and transnational Hindutva force. While transnational protests such as marches against the CAA and against Bhima Koregaon violence can be traced back to a history of transnational resistance centering liberation efforts in India, I believe that the dynamics of anti-Hindutva struggle reflected in this section demonstrate a challenge that is unique to this contemporary moment. Anti-Hindutva politics in the United States has increasingly meant the contention between segments of the Indian American community. Both the Edison bulldozer incident and the Seattle ordinance against caste discrimination showcased the Indian American community being put head-to-head, with the political differences brought to the forefront.

Contestations with the Opposition

In all the anti-Hindutva actions discussed in this chapter, activists were opposed by pro-Hindutva groups in the United States. This has been the case for the CAA, with multiple protests carried out in favor of the CAA by Indian Americans supporting Hindutva politics. However, the diasporic Hindu chauvinism has been most visible in actions against Hindutva within the United
States. Two of the most prominent groups that have consistently advocated for Hindutva politics in the United States have been Hindu American Foundation (HAF) and the Coalition of Hindus of North America (CoHNA).

In the Edison bulldozer incident, the explicit reference to the bulldozer as a symbol of demolition of Muslim homes and buildings created outrage, yet it was also diminished by the Hindu American Foundation, who instead complained that “Hindu Americans were cruelly demonized” by the responses to the bulldozer float.\textsuperscript{136} CoHNA argued similarly in a statement condemning a resolution criticizing the bulldozer, expressing that these were efforts to “demonize the entire Hindu community, their activities, their beliefs, and their political participation in New Jersey.”\textsuperscript{137}

During the movement to ban caste discrimination in Seattle, both HAF and CoHNA also participated in mobilizing against the ordinance. CoHNA shared a letter with over 100 organizations urging the council members to vote “no” for the ordinance.\textsuperscript{138} The letter specifically characterizes Equality Labs as a “hate group” and criticizes Ambedkar King Study Circle’s collection of testimonies as “heavily dependent on faulty data”. The letter also expressed opposition to the lawsuit against caste discrimination in Cisco, and the addition of caste protections in universities like California State University. HAF has also been extensively involved in opposing the ordinance in Seattle. On their website, HAF shared the contents of two emails they sent to the Seattle City Council, on February 15 and February 20. In the February 15

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email, HAF writes “Equality Labs and supporters of Councilmember Sawant have frequently sought to demonize common Hindu cultural and religious practices and traditions, such as vegetarianism, celebration of holidays like Diwali and Holi, or even simply worshiping at a Hindu temple as casteist practices.”\textsuperscript{139} In this sentence, HAF directly attacks the anti-caste organization Equality Labs for being anti-Hindu.\textsuperscript{140} In the end, these directed responses by Hindutva organizations were unsuccessful, and the ordinance in Seattle successfully passed.

These visible conflicts between anti-Hindutva and pro-Hindutva groups also featured prominently in the public comments given at council meetings for both the Edison bulldozer incident and the Seattle city council meeting. While most of the public commenters urged council members to vote in favor of the ordinance, there were several individuals who passionately opposed the ordinance. One speaker at the February 21, 2023, Council meeting in Seattle named “Monty K” shared the following statement which reveals the impact of these contestations:

“I am a caste oppressed individual. I urge the council to unanimously vote ‘Yes’ on this ordinance and implement it without any delay. The dominant caste, right-wing opponents for this ordinance are fabricating fear and confusion to silence this justice for victims. CoHNA and [Vishwa Hindu Parishad] strongly supported CAA and NRC, which the [Seattle] City Council voted unanimously [to condemn it]. Listen to the voices of the oppressed, and consider the material presented by the experts with ample evidence.”\textsuperscript{141}

\textsuperscript{139} HSuhag A. Shukla, Samir Kalra, Nikhil Joshi, “HAF Has ‘Serious Concerns’ about Addition of Caste to Seattle Non-Discrimination Policy, City Council Told.”

\textsuperscript{140} Chapter 4 looks more closely at how anti-Hindutva organizations have responded to accusations of “Hinduphobia”.

The speaker in this statement directly identifies the role of Hindutva groups like CoHNA in upholding their dominant caste privilege. This statement also connects the fight against caste discrimination in Seattle to another action against Hindutva taken by the Seattle City Council when they passed a resolution against the CAA three years earlier in February 2020. When the lines between those Hindutva attacks are drawn, the connections between the anti-Hindutva nature of the anti-CAA protests and the fight against caste discrimination also become more apparent.

There have also been efforts to put Hindutva supporters in touch with anti-Hindutva speakers in the United States. Platforms like the Desh Videsh Series created by Hindus for Human Rights are a good example of this. Describing some of the motivation behind this project, a representative from HfHR said: “We all have the tendency to speak to our own echo chambers. As progressive Hindus, we told ourselves that we have to be the one to break that barrier and speak directly to Hindus who may be completely in the Hindutva arena. But until we try, we will never know how many are fence sitters, as right now there is no reliable data.” As both Hindutva and anti-Hindutva groups continue to mobilize in the United States, these opportunities for discourse and communication between the sides may become more frequent. Altogether, as the push for Hindutva in the United States moves forward, so too will the fight against it.

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142 Interview with organizational representative from Hindus for Human Rights, March 9, 2023.
Chapter 4: Unity, Struggle, and Transformation

In her 2004 memoir titled *Passing It On*, the late Japanese American activist and titan of the Asian American movement Yuri Kochiyami writes about her hopes for the future:

I hope that the movement becomes more intertwined in working with other people of color and progressive whites. I also hope that the Asian American movement, with its many mutual objectives, becomes more international and supports liberation struggles around the world. We must be clear what we are struggling for and what we are struggling against. We must see that the struggle consists of both race and class, and works in concert with all those who are fighting for a more humane and just world.

(Kochiyama, 2004).

Yuri Kochiyama explains the importance of determining the contents of the struggle, as she writes: “We must be clear what we are struggling for and what we are struggling against.”

Within the anti-Hindutva movement in the United States, the question of determining what is being struggled *against* can be answered in simple terms: the movement is a struggle against Hindutva, both in India and beyond. However, there are multiple political perspectives on what being anti-Hindutva constitutes. The primary source of contradiction within the anti-Hindutva movement’s determination of what to struggle against is the relationship between caste, Hindutva and Hinduism. Despite differences in how organizations talk about this relationship, it is also of interest to note that anti-Hindutva organizations have continued to collaborate on important anti-Hindutva actions. There is struggle within the movement for constructing the appropriate critique, yet there also remains unity within this struggle against the pro-Hindutva forces.
The question of determining what is being struggled for is a connected issue that can be answered similarly: for a global world free from the force of Hindutva. However, what does such a world look like, and what does a struggle to get to that world include? Kochiyama’s quote gives some answers that apply directly to the anti-Hindutva movement - it is a world that is liberated not just from Hindutva, but other forces of oppression. Consequently, I argue that as the anti-Hindutva movement in the United States has grown, it has become increasingly linked to struggles against racial and class oppression, connections with international liberation struggles, and solidarities across progressive communities.

On “Hinduphobia”: Struggling against Hindutva or Hinduism?

In early September 2021, an online academic conference titled “Dismantling Global Hindutva” was held, co-sponsored by over 70 departments from more than 50 universities in the United States. The conference features several panels on topics such as the political economy of Hindutva, caste and Hindutva, and digital Hindutva propaganda. From its announcement, the conference organizers and attendees were subject to intense criticism and backlash from Hindu nationalist groups, who accused them of spreading anti-Hindu sentiments. These attacks were especially prevalent on digital platforms like Twitter, with over 60,000 unique tweets targeting the conference. US-based Hindutva groups like Hindu American Foundation (HAF), Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA), and the Coalition of Hindus in North America (CoHNA),

campaigned extensively against the conference, organizing over a million emails in protest to the conference.\textsuperscript{145}

Many Hindutva critics of the conference proliferated the notion of “Hinduphobia” to describe the contents of the conference’s critique of Hindutva, including Hindu American Foundation (HAF), which published an article titled “5 ways the Dismantling Global Hindutva conference is Hinduphobic”.\textsuperscript{146} In this article, Hinduphobia is described by HAF as “a set of antagonistic, destructive, and derogatory attitudes and behaviors towards Sanatana Dharma (Hinduism) and Hindus that may manifest as prejudice, fear, or hatred.” Through invoking the term ‘Hinduphobia’, Hindutva groups in the United States have made clear their position that speaking out against Hindutva politics is equivalent to speaking out against Hinduism.

Firstly, anti-Hindutva activists have questioned the motivation behind using the term “Hinduphobia”. In a statement of support for the aforementioned conference, the South Asia Scholar Activist Circle, a group of academics studying South Asia, described Hinduphobia as “a term deployed by Hindutva forces in the west to silence critiques of casteism, Islamophobia, sexism, anti-Semitism, racism, and other forms of supremacist ideologies at the heart of Hindutva”. Raju Rajagopal and Sunita Viswanath, the co-founders of Hindus for Human Rights, also responded to the backlash against the Dismantling Global Hindutva Conference with a letter on August 23, 2021. In this letter, they write “It is unfortunate that Hindu American advocacy groups … are attempting to lump all forms of discrimination into ‘Hinduphobia,’ a convenient


way to distract us from the terrible religious rights situation in India.”

Figure 4.1 is an image shared by IAMC on Twitter, depicting two protestors holding up signs saying “Islamophobia” and “3000 years of caste oppression.” In response, a supporter of Hindutva is standing in front of the media, accusing them of Hinduphobia. This image also represents how the accusation of “Hinduphobia” is used towards people protesting actual discrimination. The bulldozer demolishing the mosque and the lynchings in the background demonstrate how “Hinduphobia” is being used as political cover to deflect from the violence of Hindutva in India and across the world.

While anti-Hindutva activists have agreed in critiquing the notion of “Hinduphobia”, the accusation does bring out an important point of difference within the anti-Hindutva movement

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149 Indian American Muslim Council [@IAMCouncil], “’Hinduphobia’ Defined in One Frame! Https://T.Co/JcISZb25NF,” Tweet, Twitter, April 5, 2023, https://twitter.com/IAMCouncil/status/1643478995214778368. [Image Attached]
on what the anti-Hindutva struggle constitutes. Specifically, the following question emerges: does being against Hindutva mean being against Hinduism? On this important point, there are two main perspectives. The first political line stresses the distinction between Hindutva and Hinduism, attacking the former as an oppressive ideology while actively defending the latter as a religion worthy of celebration. The second perspective emphasizes that the fight against Hindutva is incomplete without a thorough critique of Brahmanical structure of caste, and consequently does not shy away from more direct critiques of Hindu theology itself and its relationship to caste supremacy. The juncture between these two perspectives is the treatment of caste and determining how important it is to oppose Brahmanism in the fight against Hindutva.

The Dismantling Global Hindutva Conference officially shared the first of these perspectives, with a document shared on the conference website titled “Hindutva is not Hinduism”, writing that “To equate Hinduism and Hindutva is to fall into the narrow, bigoted, and reductionist fiction that instrumentalizes Hinduism by erasing the diverse practices of the religion, the debates within the fold, as well as its conversations with other faiths.” The document reiterates that the Hindutva is a cultural and political force that is not identical to the broader practices of Hinduism. HfHR expressed a similar sentiment in their letter of support for the conference, writing “We understand that some Hindu American groups, purporting to speak for all Hindus, are opposing the conference, labeling it as ‘anti-India’ and ‘anti-Hindu.’ Such a characterization clearly betrays a deliberate conflation of Hindutva ideology with Hinduism, perhaps in an attempt to co-opt the community into falsely believing that the conference is

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directed against Hinduism.”\textsuperscript{151} Both these statements are critical of Hindutva and defensive of Hinduism - HfHR, like the organizers of the conference, want to make sure that their critiques of Hindutva are not interpreted to blend into critiques of Hinduism.

As an organization of self-identifying Hindus, HfHR further distinguishes Hindutva from Hinduism by placing them in ideological opposition. The organization’s perspective is that not only is Hinduism separate from Hindutva, but a genuine Hinduism is actually anti-Hindutva. HfHR gave examples on this in a document attached to the aforementioned letter with the title “Hindutva is not Hinduism”.\textsuperscript{152} The document begins in poem format:

“Hinduism abounds in stories of kindness and compassion vs. Hindutva propagates fear, insecurity, exclusiveness, and hatred. Hinduism welcomes other faiths and traditions vs. Hindutva’s very foundation is disdain for Islam and Christianity. Progressive Hinduism owns up to the ugly and shameful legacy of caste discrimination and works for its annihilation vs. Hindutva is desperate to distance Hinduism from caste, with no meaningful action on the ground to end caste bigotry.”

The first line of this excerpt juxtaposes the values of Hinduism with Hindutva. The second line refutes that Hinduism is anti-Muslim or anti-Christian, rather claiming that it is accepting of these beliefs. The third line presents Hinduism in active opposition to caste, whereas Hindutva is described as trying to escape from caste without trying to end its violence. Interestingly, HfHR adds “progressive” as a descriptor of Hinduism in this third case. This decision recognizes that


\textsuperscript{152} Hindus for Human Rights, “HfHR Writes in Support of the ‘Dismantling Global Hindutva’ Conference — Hindus for Human Rights.”. The poem at the bottom of the page.
Hinduism, even without the presence of Hindutva, still has involved intense caste violence. However, HfHR maintains that it is possible to construct such a progressive Hinduism that no longer accepts the caste system.

HfHR writes more about this on their website’s Frequently Asked Questions page in response to the question “Isn’t this just ‘Soft Hindutva’?” They write, “Caste, or jaati, varna, etc., are constitutive of many aspects of the Hindu experience and philosophy. While the lived experience has varied over the millennia, in today’s world caste is an invidious and cruel system, and we reject it totally”. The first sentence of this quote acknowledges the way caste is related to the practice of Hinduism. The second sentence in that quote, which appears in boldface on the website, recognizes the harm of caste and rejects it. However, it does include the preface that the experience of caste has varied over time. This suggests that while identifying that caste must be struggled against today, HfHR’s defense of Hinduism is accompanied by a reluctance to outright reject it from its roots, holding out the possibility that caste was not always as cruel in the past as it is in today’s world. Altogether, HfHR envisions a casteless society that is compatible with Hinduism, and thus positions itself as a Hindu reformist movement that seeks to sever Hindutva while preserving a Hindu belief system.

Indian American Muslim Council, like HfHR, similarly focuses on critiques of Hindutva and argues that Hinduism is in fact fundamentally different. A representative from IAMC described this as follows:

“Hinduism is different from Hindutva, let's be very clear about it. It is about time that the majority community of India can stand up to speak and say, you know, ‘we reject this

ideology. This [Hindutva] is not Hinduism.’ IAMC as an organization has been trying our best to bring awareness and education, mostly on this side of the world.”\textsuperscript{154}

In this statement, IAMC not only differentiates Hindutva from Hinduism, but also calls for the Hindu majority to also do the same and reject Hindutva. In general, while IAMC emphasizes critique of Hindutva and Hindu extremism and Hindu supremacists, the organization makes sure to separate those critiques from that of Hinduism.

IAMC focuses its critiques of Hindutva on the anti-Muslim religious violence, but their website shares links to various news articles and blogposts written by others that do talk about caste discrimination. However, IAMC has historically avoided commenting in detail about the issue of caste. In an interview, a representative of IAMC described their position as follows: “From an IAMC perspective, we try to stay away from discussing caste too much. But we understand the pain and we stand in solidarity with them”.\textsuperscript{155} As this response demonstrates, IAMC does have a position on caste, but they do not target critiques towards it. A reason for this may be the difficulty of facing attacks from Hindutva if an organization of Muslim Americans pointed a more direct criticism of something deeply related to Hinduism such as caste. With accusations of “Hinduphobia” being tossed around so easily, organizations like IAMC have to be careful with how they approach conversations about Hinduism and caste. In addition, Indian Muslims are impacted not just by caste contradictions, but also by religious contradictions. While caste impacts Muslims in India as well, the effects of anti-Muslim discrimination may be more salient within the United States. That being said, IAMC has consistently supported anti-caste organizations in their lead to fight against caste discrimination in the United States.

\textsuperscript{154} Interview with organizational representative from Indian American Muslim Council, February 27, 2023.
\textsuperscript{155} Interview with organizational representative from Indian American Muslim Council, February 27, 2023.
When it comes to the legal battle against caste discrimination in the United States, both Hindus for Human Rights and Indian American Muslim Council have demonstrated their support through direct involvement, including organizational statements of support.\textsuperscript{156} In a tweet after the ordinance against caste discrimination in Seattle was passed, HfHR wrote in a tweet (2023), “We are so proud of the HfHR community for mobilizing and fighting for this victory. The first duty of progressive Hindus is to dismantle caste and caste oppression”.\textsuperscript{157} Here, HfHR once again clarifies their perspective as progressive Hindus who still advocate against caste discrimination. IAMC also was directly involved with the movement to ban caste discrimination in Seattle and commended its success in a press release. The press release includes the following quote from Javed Sikander, IAMC Seattle chapter member: “This legislation sends a strong message to the Hindu far-right that believes in Hindu supremacy that Seattle is committed to promoting diversity, inclusion, and respect for all communities.”\textsuperscript{158} Sikander identifies the proponents of caste as the Hindu far-right and Hindu supremacists, which essentially refer to Hindutva in this context.

However, not all organizations have emphasized this distinction in the same way. In particular, anti-caste organizations like AKSC argue that it is essential to highlight the Brahmanical nature of Hindutva in order to effectively combat it. That is, the struggle against Hindutva must be a struggle against Brahmanism, the ideology of caste supremacy. The critique of Brahmanism is one that attacks caste violence at its Brahmanical roots. Highlighting the importance of the fight against the caste system does not mean ignoring Hindutva’s religious

\textsuperscript{156} Chapter 3 describes these organizational statements of support in more detail. 
\textsuperscript{157} Hindus for Human Rights [@Hindus4HR], “A Massive Thank You to @SeattleCouncil for Making History and Making Caste a Protected Category. A Special Thanks to @cmkshama and All Our Anti-Caste Allies for Their Leadership. Finally, a Path of Justice to Fight Casteism in Seattle! Https://T.co/CwuVbR5za5,” Tweet, Twitter, February 22, 2023, https://twitter.com/Hindus4HR/status/1628189993448382464. 
\textsuperscript{158} Indian American Muslim Council, “Seattle’s Ban on Caste Discrimination Created History.”
majoritarianism. In fact, B.R. Ambedkar speaks to the relationship between caste violence and religious violence in *Annihilation of Caste*, writing that “Hindu Society as such does not exist. It is only a collection of castes. … A caste has no feeling that it is affiliated to other castes, except when there is a Hindu-Muslim riot.”\(^{159}\) For Ambedkar and for AKSC, Hindu-Muslim violence is not separate from caste violence - in fact, it is through the violence against Muslims is enacted that the central contradiction of caste in Indian society is managed. AKSC does not equate Hindutva with Hinduism - rather, they avoid positioning Hinduism as the opposite of Hindutva, instead examining the ways in which Hindu understandings of caste contribute to the Brahmanical character of Hindutva.

AKSC elaborated on the theoretical link between the anti-Brahmanical struggle and the anti-Hindutva struggle in the resolutions from their conference in 2022. The conference’s theme was “resisting Brahminism/Hindutva in the United States”, and its mission was outlined as to “mobilize, in large numbers, people committed to challenging caste in order to counter the attempts by Hindutva organizations to institutionalize Brahminism in the name of religious freedom.”\(^{160}\) In a conference document titled “Hindutva and Brahminism” published on their website, AKSC described how Hindutva “has clearly identified Muslims (and other Abrahamic religious populations) as the ‘enemy’ and cast them as ‘outsiders’ to India”\(^{161}\), which reflects their analysis of the religious contradiction in relation to the Hindutva project. In addition, AKSC emphasized the role of caste in mobilizing the Hindutva project, as they write in the same document: “[Brahmanism] is the primary ideology that allows Hindutva to operate against Dalits


since it legitimizes caste within the house of Hinduism.” The document ends with the following quote: “Any opposition to Hindutva therefore needs to be anti-Brahmanical.” This encapsulates the perspective of anti-caste organizations like AKSC which argue for the need to dig deeper in the critique of Brahmanical Hindutva.

If a major goal of the anti-Hindutva struggle is to dethrone Hindutva in India, then what will replace it? HfHR and IAMC both draw from the memory of a secular India of the past before Hindutva. In response to a question in HfHR’s F.A.Q. page titled “Hasn’t ‘Secularism’ outlived its relevance in India?”, HfHR writes that “‘Secularism’ - i.e. peaceful co-existence, respect and equal treatment of all faiths by the state, etc. - is more important to India’s future than ever.”\(^{162}\) IAMC has also spoke of the need for secularism, particularly referencing the secularism of India’s past, describing in a recent report titled “State of Religious Minorities in India” that “the current BJP administration has strayed from the Nehruvian values of secularism”.\(^{163}\) While HfHR and IAMC defend religious pluralism in India, they maintain their opposition to caste in their vision of a future secularism. For anti-caste organizations, the vision of a nominally, secular India is less satisfying if it doesn’t address that even secular India was rampant with caste violence. Moreover, while Hindutva has relied on the preservation of caste, the ideology of Brahmanism predates the popularization of Hindutva. Instead, by emphasizing the anti-Brahmanical nature of the anti-Hindutva struggle, organizations like AKSC see a just future as one free from all forms of oppression, including caste. This future applies not just to India, but also to the now-global community of Indians and South Asians, including those who have made their way all the way to the United States.

\(^{162}\) Hindus for Human Rights, “FAQs.”
Organizational Solidarities

Despite the certain differences in how Hindutva and Hinduism are distinguished, there are profound solidarities across the anti-Hindutva organizational landscape in the United States. This is largely demonstrated by many of the experiences of protest and mobilization explored in Chapter 3. From anti-CAA protests to the fight against caste discrimination in Seattle, organizational solidarities have featured prominently. On both Hindutva issues of caste violence and religious violence, organizations like AKSC, HfHR, and IAMC have consistently worked together to host events, coordinate responses, and fight for justice.

HfHR and IAMC are also close partner organizations. Both organizations have ideological similarities in the approach to anti-Hindutva work, and they have many shared experiences of organizing against Hindutva in the United States. Co-founder of HfHR Sunita Viswanath dedicated an entire blogpost titled “Standing By Each Other” to this relationship, writing “IAMC and HfHR are faith-based organizations striving to mobilize our respective communities to stand for truth and justice, Since both organizations wish to see Hindu-Muslim unity, we help each other, we uplift each other's projects, we often collaborate, and we each have volunteers who come from the ‘other’ faith community”.164 IAMC also spoke very highly of their work with HfHR. A representative shared: “IAMC sees hope when we see organizations like Hindus for Human Rights who come and stand with their Muslim brothers and their Hindu brothers… We need organizations like Hindus for Human Rights.”165 As these statements show, despite being faith-based organizations for two different faiths, HfHR and IAMC have enjoyed a close relationship in the anti-Hindutva movement.

165 Interview with organizational representative from Indian American Muslim Council, February 27, 2023.
AKSC has also worked closely with both HfHR and IAMC. An AKSC representative described their relationship with HfHR as follows: “We work with HfHR, we discussed this a long time back. This is tactical, and wherever there is an overlap for the cause, we will work together. Their social base is progressive Hindus. Our social base is anti-caste people.”

AKSC explains their collaboration with progressive Hindu organizations like HFHR as a tactical choice, recognizing that beyond their differences in social bases, they are ultimately both against the massive organizational forces of Hindutva. HfHR has worked consistently to prove that it is a worthwhile partner for anti-caste organizations like AKSC. A representative from HfHR described the organizations efforts as follows: “We have worked hard to form partnerships with Dalit organizations who are beginning to trust us; and that we aren't just another privileged group that pays lip service to casteism. As dalit organizations take the lead in fighting casteism in the diaspora, we follow their lead. Ultimately, we are all victims of the caste system.”

IAMC also spoke highly of their relationship with organizations like AKSC, with an IAMC representative sharing that “Our Dalit community partners like Ambedkar King Study Circle and Equality Labs are doing a wonderful job.”

Solidarities have also been a major feature in the joint hosting of events. An event responding to multiple Hindutva programs titled “Repeal Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)! Repeal Anti-Farmer Laws!” was held at Harvard Square, organized by five organizations collectively, including IAMC, HfHR, and Ambedkar King Study Circle (AKSC). The demands listed in the description of the event included to “release all anti-CAA activists and Political

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166 Interview with organizational representative from Ambedkar King Study Circle, February 18, 2023.
167 Interview with organizational representative from Hindus for Human Rights, March 9, 2023.
168 Interview with organizational representative from Indian American Muslim Council, February 27, 2023.
Prisoners, including Bhima Koregaon 16.” The organization of this event is a useful example of anti-Hindutva organizational collaboration in response to the expression of Hindutva politics in India.

On March 4, 2022, Ambedkar King Study Circle organized a public screening of *The Modi Question* at the Roosevelt Community Center in San Jose, California, co-sponsored by several organizations including HfHR and IAMC. The Hindutva Indian government has banned the screening of this documentary, describing it as “hostile propaganda and anti-India garbage”. Figure 4.2 depicts a poster publicizing the event, featuring the photo of Imran Dawood, a survivor of the Gujarat riots who spoke at the event after the film screening. Several anti-Hindutva and local organizations were co-sponsors of the event, and over 200 people (including myself) attended the event. After the screening, representatives from many organizations including Hindus for Human Rights and Indian American Muslim Council shared statements of solidarity in the struggle against Hindutva. According to AKSC’s press release on the event, Javed Ali, president of IAMC’s Bay Area chapter, “implored the audience to condemn Hindutva ideology wherever it arises, including in California.” HfHR representative Prabodh Jamwal “described how Hindu nationalism poses a clear and present danger to Indian and US democracies.” The press release ends with the following statement: “AKSC invites all people of conscience to join its fight against Hindutva. Jai Bhim!” Altogether, the statements of solidarity from all three of these organizations reflected the pressing need to combat Hindutva not just in India, but also in the United States.

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172 “Jai Bhim” is a common slogan among anti-caste supporters of B.R. Ambedkar.
Another example of anti-Hindutva organizational solidarity features connections between Hindus for Human Rights and People's Association in Grassroots Action and Movement (PAIGAM), an anti-Hindutva organization based in India. A notable collaboration project is an educational video created by HfHR and PAIGAM about the Bhima Koregaon protests from 2018. The four-minute video in Hindi describes the history of the Battle of Bhima Koregaon and the recent violence associated with the movement, with the goal of spreading media awareness about the issue. This is a notable example of how anti-Hindutva networks of collaboration have been forming across the world.

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173 Ambedkar King Study Circle, USA [@akscsfba], “India: The Modi Question (BBC Documentary) and Public Discussion with Mr. Imran Dawood, Survivor of the 2002 Gujarat Genocide Sat, Mar 04, 4:00 PM, San Jose

174 Hindus for Human Rights, “Voices of Peace,” accessed May 8, 2023,
https://www.hindusforhumanrights.org/voicesofpeace.
As Chairman Mao Zedong described in his 1957 essay “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among People”, contradictions can be antagonistic or non-antagonistic. As the solidarities between various anti-Hindutva organizations have shown, the ideological contradictions between them have remained non-antagonistic. Meanwhile, the contradictions between pro-Hindutva organizations like HAF and anti-Hindutva organizations have been of a different kind, forming a severe antagonism. Through distinguishing between these two types of contradictions, the anti-Hindutva movement has formed a strategic, critical unity that has allowed for the successful protests and actions in recent years. That being said, reality remains in flux, and as these dialectical conflicts continue to develop, the nature of these many contradictions may evolve as well. Nonetheless, the contemporary anti-Hindutva movement constitutes a powerful example of solidarity among a variety of organizations with differing perspectives, who have demonstrated the capacity and desire to unite on the important battle of combatting Hindutva in the United States.

**Connecting Struggles for Liberation**

A major recent development in the anti-Hindutva movement in the United States is in the stronger relationships the movement has made with other social justice struggles. As an AKSC representative explained when describing their ideological position: “Our understanding is that any oppression is interlinked. There is racial oppression, caste, oppression, gender, it is all interlinked. Only by waging a united struggle can we liberate all of the oppressed.” Consequently, not only have organizational solidarities been formed within the anti-Hindutva movement, but there are also meaningful relationships being developed between different

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175 Mao Tse-Tung, *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People*, 1957.
176 Interview with organizational representative from Ambedkar King Study Circle, February 18, 2023.
liberation struggles in the United States. As Yuri Kochiyama suggested in the quote that started this chapter, “We must see that the struggle consists of both race and class, and works in concert with all those who are fighting for a more humane and just world.” I argue indeed that these wider connections with other liberation movements is the direction of the anti-Hindutva movement in the United States.

Connections between caste discrimination and the class struggle were a significant feature of the 2023 movement to add caste protections in the city Seattle. As Figure 4.3 depicts, many of the people in the Seattle City Hall on February 21, 2023, held signs that read “Fight Oppression, Fight Capitalism”. Kshama Sawant, the councilmember who introduced the caste ordinance, is a member of the Socialist Alternative, a political organization advocating for a working-class movement in the United States.177 In her statement introducing the legislation, Sawant wrote:

“Beyond winning reforms such as this one, working people in our city, nationally, and internationally need to unite and build mass movements to fight for a socialist society. Because as long as an exploitative and rapacious system like capitalism exists, oppression will be endemic. The only way to end caste, racial, gender, and other oppressions is for the working class to fight for a different kind of world.”178

Here, Sawant orients the importance of the anti-caste ordinance towards the broader struggles for liberation not just in the United States, but also internationally.

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Admittedly, there is no clear push within anti-Hindutva activists as a whole on the relationship between Hindutva oppression and the class-based oppression of the capitalist system. Many of the social base of the anti-caste movement in the United States are part of the tech industry and often belong to the professional-managerial class, and hence their proximity to bourgeois society may make envisioning a socialist liberatory politics that connects to the class struggle a cumbersome task. AKSC writes about this challenge in the resolutions to their first General Body Meeting in 2017:

“AKSC is highly concerned about the Dalit middle class who have achieved certain economic independency [and are] not only unable to assert their self-respect, but [are] also helpless when poor Dalits and Adivasis are subjected to denial of basic economic, civil, cultural and social rights and subjected to social discrimination. Only by bringing

179 Kshama Sawant [@cmkshama], “It’s Official: Our Movement Has WON a Historic, First-in-the-Nation Ban on Caste Discrimination in Seattle! Now We Need to Build a Movement to Spread This Victory around the Country 😊 Https://T.Co/1mBJ1W3v6j,” Tweet, Twitter, February 22, 2023, https://twitter.com/cmkshama/status/1628188237301952512.
these middle class through proper orientation and aligning with other social groups who are against and subjected to different form oppressions, [can] the different forms oppressions can be overthrown and overcome.”

Here, the importance of connecting the anti-caste struggle to class politics is reiterated, and proper political education and social alignment are mentioned as remedies for this issue. With the fight against casteism entering more workplaces, as well as the presence of labor movements in the anti-caste fight, point encouragingly towards an anti-Hindutva and anti-caste community in the United States with heightened class consciousness and working class solidarity.

Anti-Hindutva organizations also actively supported Prop 16, a 2020 California ballot proposition that aimed to allow affirmative action based on race and gender in California’s public sector. A joint solidarity statement issued by several organizations including AKSC, HfHR, and IAMC expressed full support for Prop 16, with the statement including: “we urge and request the Indian-American community and the rest of American public to VOTE ‘YES’ on PROP-16 as it is an important step towards social justice.” The statement cited the movement for reservations action in India for caste-oppressed groups as an analogy, writing “The Affirmative Action is similar, though NOT same, to reservations in India as a remedy for the historical and institutionalized discrimination.” While Prop 16 ultimately failed to gain enough votes, the response of anti-Hindutva organizations reflects their efforts to not only connect the struggles of caste and race, but to advocate for equity in the United States.

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180 Ambedkar King Study Circle, “First General Body Meeting.”
Hindus for Human Rights has also recently been broadening the scope of their work to address other non-Hindutva South Asian issues. In describing this effort, a representative from HfHR said:

“We are now broadening it to fighting and confronting hate into South Asian communities as our primary objective. That means we will confront anti-Muslim hate and anti-Christian hate in India, but we would not hesitate to confront anti-Hindu hatred in Pakistan or Bangladesh, and in anti-Tamil sentiments in Sri Lanka. We don't want to be hypocritical, saying we only speak up and Muslims are attacked. So, we are slowly broadening our scope in that direction.”

In these cases, the framework of addressing the rights of minorities is applied to other countries in South Asia other than India. HfHR identifies this broadening of their political work to be an important direction of their organizational development.

Not only have anti-Hindutva organizations been involved with broader social justice struggles, but many non-South Asian progressive organizations have joined the anti-Hindutva struggle. A significant yet important component in popularizing the anti-Hindutva struggle beyond South Asian Americans has been educational outreach efforts. In fact, many Americans are only recently gaining familiarity with Hindutva politics, especially as their presence grows more proximal and heightened in the United States context. Former IAMC president Minhaj Khan of the NJ chapter described the challenges that IAMC had in communicating the significance of the bulldozer in the Edison rally to the broader community:

“People in America really did not understand the concept of bulldozers. And sure enough, we had to explain to them what it means. Then they started researching about it,
and it took them a bit of time to understand the concept and know where it's all coming from. We pulled together a lot of reports from the media about the idea of the bulldozer. There was a learning curve there.”

The learning curve that IAMC encountered when trying to interface with other community organizations is one that can make capturing the nuances of Hindutva symbolism difficult for the broader public. This is especially complicated by the presence of pro-Hindutva organizations who spread significant misinformation about Hindutva politics in India and the United States. Nonetheless, there have been many notable experiences of progressive non-South Asian organizations getting involved with anti-Hindutva activism. In particular, the struggle against racism and anti-Blackness has been increasingly linked to the movement against Hindutva in the United States, especially towards caste violence. For AKSC, the relationship with Black liberation is evident in the very name of the organization, which joins the names of B. R. Ambedkar and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. A representative from Ambedkar King Study Circle described this as follows:

“What Indians claim as a model minority is that they work hard and that’s why they come up in life and progress. Then, they think that other people like Black people are not working hard, which is not the case. We felt that the same argument is what casteist people are propagating in India. We felt that in America, the true friends for equality are Black people. That is the very reason we named our organization Ambedkar King Study Circle.183

AKSC’s understanding of the Black liberation struggle’s relationship to the anti-caste struggle has a meaningful impact on their organizational work. In June 2020, AKSC shared a statement

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183 Interview with organizational representative from Ambedkar King Study Circle, February 18, 2023.
condemning the killing of George Floyd. In the statement, AKSC writes: “The horrific and often fatal brutalities faced by the Dalits, the most oppressed caste in India at the hands of the privileged-caste Brahminical Indian state, parallels the fatal violence faced by the Black people in the United States. AKSC is resolute in standing in solidarity with Black Americans in this tough time of their struggle.” Again, AKSC draws parallels between the anti-caste struggle and the Black liberation struggle. During the height of the Black Lives Matter movement, AKSC members also attended protests, including a larger one in Cupertino.184

Black progressive organizations have also commented on resisting Hindutva. Black American progressive organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the youth group Afro Umoja Political Representation (AFRO-UPRIS) were among groups that co-sponsored the screening of The Modi Question in San Jose in March 2023. After the screening, Elisabeth Kamya from AFRO-UPRIS shared that they “plan to educate and mobilize its members against Hindutva’s hateful agenda.”185 Rev. Jethroe Moore from the NAACP made a similar statement as he “called upon all to stand together, strive together and fight together for justice, everywhere that it is under threat.” the NAACP has also commented on caste discrimination in the United States, passing a resolution in 2021 firmly opposing the practices of the caste system.186

Anti-Hindutva activism has also found a friend in the anti-Zionist struggle in the United States. This development comes in opposition to the fact that Hindutva groups and Zionist groups have formed many ties in the United States (Essa, 2023). Jewish Voices for Peace (JVP),

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184 Personal Communication with member of AKSC.
185 Ambedkar King Study Circle, USA [@akscesba], “180 People Gathered in San Jose and Watched ‘India: The Modi Question’ (BBC Documentary) and Interacted with Mr. Imran Dawood, Survivor of the 2002 Gujarat Genocide. Press Release: Https://Tinyurl.Com/SJModiQuestionScreening Https://T.Co/F6Rw10QXqo.”
a Jewish anti-Zionist organization, was one of the many organizations to endorse Kshama Sawant’s ordinance against caste discrimination in Seattle. JVP was also involved with protests against the CAA. In addition, JVP was among the various progressive organizations to co-sponsor the screening of *The Modi Question* in San Jose in March 2023. After the screening, Wendy Grenfield from JVP “urged building strong bonds of solidarity to thwart divisive forces.”

In the end, the struggle for collective liberation is a long, arduous one - anti-Hindutva activism constitutes a small, and important aspect of this struggle. The anti-Hindutva movement has seen more unity between organizations against Hindutva, as well as unity with other liberation movements altogether. The anti-Hindutva movement has also seen struggle within these solidarities, as individuals and groups contend with their contradictions. Putting these unities and struggles together has led to many overall transformations in the anti-Hindutva movement in just the past decade since Modi and the BJP’s full ascent to national politics in India. Moving forward, these transformations within the movement will invariably continue as the anti-Hindutva movement in the United States keeps advancing.

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Conclusion

While imprisoned for his anti-fascist political activities, Italian Marxist revolutionary Antonio Gramsci wrote in his prison journals, “The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.” 190 Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizek later rendered this quote into the following popular saying: “The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters. 191 Today’s interregnum is a world with oppressors and oppressed, and the dialectical conflict between them is expressed through the struggle for liberation. The rise of global Hindutva has heightened the expression of various forms of oppression, including violence based on caste and religion.

As long as global Hindutva persists, so too will the global movement against Hindutva continue. However, as B.R. Ambedkar said, “For a successful revolution it is not enough that there is discontent. What is required is a profound and thorough conviction of the justice, necessity, and importance of political and social rights.” 192 As I describe in this thesis, the rise of Hindutva has been dialectically opposed by the growing anti-Hindutva movement in the United States, comprised of many activists and organizations fighting against religious and caste-based oppression among South Asian and Indian communities. In this thesis, I refer most often to the work of Ambedkar King Study Circle (AKSC), Hindus for Human Rights (HfHR), and Indian American Muslim Council (IAMC), but the overall landscape of anti-Hindutva activism is

broader and growing. There are many faith-based organizations, anti-caste organizations, and other Indian and South Asian American organizations that participate in anti-Hindutva political actions in the United States.

Anti-Hindutva activism in the United States has taken two main forms. There are actions that respond to Hindutva politics in India, such as protests organized by organizations in the United States against the anti-Muslim Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) passed by the Modi government, as well as demonstrations against the Bhima Koregaon violence and subsequent arrests under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). These types of anti-Hindutva actions represent a continuity of transnational activism among Indian and South Asian Americans that goes back to the period of the Ghadar Party and US-based organizing against British colonialism in India. Then, there are also actions which respond to internal manifestations of Hindutva politics in the United States, especially within the Indian American community. These include responses to anti-Muslim events like the 2022 Edison bulldozer incident, as well as actions against caste discrimination, such as the 2023 ordinance to ban caste discrimination in Seattle. In this second type of anti-Hindutva activism in the United States, we see how the Indian American and broader South Asian American communities are addressing their internal contradictions of caste and religion. In all of these anti-Hindutva actions, organizational solidarities have featured as a significant contributor to successful mobilizations.

When it comes to the details of what the struggle against Hindutva constitutes, there are also certain contradictions or differences within the anti-Hindutva movement in the United States. The primary issue where disagreements arise is whether the content of the critique of Hindutva includes a critique of Hinduism. While many groups emphasize that being critical of Hindutva is not the same as being critical of Hinduism, anti-caste organizations have emphasized
that resisting Hindutva must include combatting the ideology of Brahmanism, which predates Hindutva. The vision for a post-Hindutva world is also affected by this contention - can a global Hinduism free from caste and religious violence be constructed? Will dismantling Hindutva also require criticizing Hinduism directly? This is a question that the anti-Hindutva movement in the United States is currently dealing with. The relevance of questions like these are also impacted by the constant challenges of Hindutva groups in the United States. The dialectical relationship between Hindutva and anti-Hindutva discourse is notable in this case with the rhetoric of “Hinduphobia”, employed by Hindutva supporters to accuse activists of harboring anti-Hindu sentiments, especially in response to anti-caste actions such as the Seattle ordinance against caste discrimination. While anti-Hindutva organizations have consistently questioned the premise of such an accusation and identified the flimsiness of the term “Hinduphobia”, it is in response to these types of accusations that some anti-Hindutva activists have made more significant efforts to distinguish the critique of Hindutva and the critique of Hinduism. Nonetheless, critiques of the Brahmanical structure of caste and its role in Hinduism have remained a vital part of the struggle against Hindutva in the United States. In fact, I argue that the momentum of the fight against caste violence has made it increasingly clear that any anti-Hindutva movement is incomplete without a serious focus on the issue of caste.

Altogether, the growing realm of anti-Hindutva activism against caste and religious violence constitutes just a part of the global movement against Hindutva. Nonetheless, it is clear that the United States will continue to be an important arena for the fight against global Hindutva. As the pro-Hindutva and anti-Hindutva movements continue to develop, so too will the contradictions between them and within them. Altogether, it is the organized struggle of communities against Hindutva that makes it possible to create a world free from its injustices.
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