



## **Anti-Hindu Sentiments on Campus: Voices from the Ground.**

Over recent weeks, anecdotes have begun to surface from educational institutions, across the world, of students facing discrimination on the grounds of their Hindu faith, from both fellow students and authority figures alike. On the 31st March 2021, the National Hindu Students' Forum (UK) hosted a webinar, inviting University Vice Chancellors, community leaders and students to come together and bring attention to this pertinent matter: Anti-Hindu sentiments on campus.

With Hindu students becoming targets of bigotry on the basis of their beliefs and identity, our first speaker and former NHSF (UK) president, Janhavi Dadarkar Ji, quite aptly said, "the word Hindu is synonymous with being a seeker of Truth."

Jahnavi Ji harkened back to the very origins of the NHSF (UK), 30 years ago, when there was a need to have a safe space for Hindus on campuses. From a time where misinformation was being deliberately distributed in the form of pamphlets and leaflets, so as to coerce young Hindus to shame and abandon their identity; from a time where the simple act of holding an Aarti at universities was met with retaliation and abuse from peers, and even derision from fellow Hindus. Thenceforth, NHSF (UK) became clear of its mission: to Protect, Preserve, Practice and Promote Hindu Dharma.

Now, in 2021, NHSF (UK) took responsibility, as the largest Hindu student movement outside of Bharat, to stand up and bring the conversation back to the table. As we begin our 30th year of celebrations, we cannot help but draw parallels between the difficulties surrounding our beginnings and the challenges faced by our students today.

Our host Vipasha Surange Ji recalled stories from the ground, of students who shared instances of when they had been met with discrimination because of their faith. One case particularly stood out where Hindu students at the University of Westminster escalated matters to the Students' Union and to the police, of the hate they encountered on a fresher's group chat.

Another case involved that of an elected Students' Union president at the University of Oxford, who after stepping down from her role, was faced with vicious attacks by a postdoctoral fellow from the university, on the mere grounds of the student being Hindu. The academic questioned whether the student's Hindu identity made them fit for the role, followed by posting highly inflammatory and offensive content on his social media about smashing Saraswati Murtis, essentially projecting and encouraging such hateful actions.

Our evening then saw Vipasha Ji in discussion with Dr Jagannadha Pawan Tamvada Ji, an Associate Professor at the Southampton Business School, to explore how university institutions are pursuing the course of justice by protecting their Hindu students and denouncing acts of discrimination. Professor Tamvada gave insight into how Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committees are in place to rise up to the occasion in becoming the bedrock for offering sustainable solutions, and how the NHSF (UK) Hindu Societies on campuses should speak up, playing the role of supporting and spearheading the voices of Hindu students. He proposed that universities offer diversity modules on their courses to earnestly and effectively put forth Hindu voices on the academic front.





For the final segment of the webinar, we were joined by the Councillor for Chigwell Parish Council and another former NHSF (UK) president, Pranav Bhanot Ji. Pranav Ji iterated the role that our Hindu community at large must play in order to prevent our youth from being silenced, beginning from our families first before it manifests on campuses. He added that if Hindus will not show up to be in positions of representation, we will not be able to address and tackle issues of negative biases and perceptions.

As our webinar highlighted, anti-Hindu sentiments on campuses are real. We as NHSF (UK) stand in full solidarity with all those who have faced hate simply for being Hindu, and we will continue to raise our voice in support of those who live in a reality where their Hindu beliefs are not respected. We urge anyone who has faced such discrimination to report it to your University and Students' Union. Your local Hindu society, as well as our national body, is always a place where you can find support and strength in community.

We are fortunate to receive heartening and reassuring responses of support from Vice Chancellors across our affiliated universities, who recognise the grievances of our students and aim to build pragmatic dialogues. We want to encourage our Hindu societies to continue having positive relationships with their Students' Unions, Vice Chancellors and Chancellors. NHSF (UK) is here to facilitate and nurture that cherished relationship, to help guide the understanding of what it means to be a Hindu student. We look forward to continuing the engagement with every important stakeholder, so that we can, together, alleviate any hardships that Hindu students face on the ground, simply for being Hindu.

We have opened up a portal to collect stories and anecdotes from all over the country. If you have stories you would like to share about anti-Hindu sentiments you have faced as a student, then please [do write to us](#).

As we move forward in working with students and institutions to squarely take up the cause against anti-Hindu sentiments, we are grateful to the wider community for their continued support in enabling our work towards creating harmonious university campuses, where diversity can be understood, championed and celebrated.