



Audrey Truschke

Truschke-nāma or The Tales of Truschke

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Introduction

Audrey Truschke, a well-known public intellectual, academic and social media activist, is an Associate Professor of early modern and modern Indian history at Rutgers University. She has authored three books, *Culture of Encounters* (2016, Columbia University Press), *Aurangzeb: The Life and Legacy of India's Most Controversial King* (2017, Stanford University Press) and *The Language of History: Sanskrit Narratives of Indo-Muslim Rule* (2021, Columbia University Press).¹ Her works on Mughal history have been widely cited, including, in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*.² She is also a vocal political commentator and, as a prominent South Asian scholar activist, she ostensibly espouses progressive and inclusive politics, in order to counter Right-wing forces, especially 'Hindu supremacy'.³ A member of the American Institute of Pakistan Studies,⁴ she is a key driver in the polemical *Hindutva Harassment Field Manual*, which claims to be "a resource guide" to help deal with "Hindutva attack."⁵ A popular figure in the Left-Liberal literary scene in India (Jaipur Literature Festival), as well as in Pakistan (Lahore Literary Festival), Truschke is a frequent commentator on various socio-political issues in many Left-leaning platforms, like *The Caravan*,⁶ *Scroll* and *The Wire*.⁸ Her current areas of research include developing a single volume history of India, and investigation of US-based Hindu Right-wing movement.⁹ A recipient of

numerous literary awards and grants, she has been lauded for her “invaluable contribution to the field of South Asian studies.”¹⁰

While Truschke has received praise for her scholarship and activism, she has also earned the ire of academics and non-specialists alike, on both sides of the political spectrum, for her provocative and often controversial statements which are more akin to polemics than unbiased scholarship. For example, Robert Goldman, Professor of Sanskrit at the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, refers to her interpretation of Hindu epic *Rāmāyaṇa* as “extremely disturbing”, “inappropriate” and “vulgar.”¹¹ In 2021, the Hindu American Foundation filed a lawsuit in US District Court for the District of Columbia against Audrey Truschke (among others) for defamation – a purported fight-back against “coordinated attacks against Hindu Americans in the public space” by the defendants.¹² She has received the support of Indian American Muslim council,¹³ a group with ties to radical Islam, and sympathy for Kashmir separatism and Taliban government in Afghanistan.¹⁴ She is on the advisory board of Students Against Hindutva Ideology (SAHI)¹⁵ which is associated with Stand With Kashmir,¹⁶ a group with links to the Islamist organization Jamaat-e-Islami, through its American proxy, the Islamic Circle of North America.¹⁷ There have also been serious national security concerns that through her scholarship and activism, which purports to paint India as a Hindu majoritarian state with scant regards for human rights, she is actually serving the interest of the Pakistan ‘deep-state’ in India, a charge which she has denied.¹⁸

Truschke is therefore, an important public intellectual, whose work has consequences for studies on India and her past, especially in the university setting. She has received many accolades and grants for her contribution to South Asian cultural and intellectual history. For example, in 2021 she won one of the twenty-five National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Public Scholars grants in the US – such grants are intended to “support well-researched books in the humanities aimed at a broad public audience.”¹⁹ At the same time, there are allegations that through her scholarship and activism she perpetuates blatant Hinduphobia. Truschke, however, dismisses the concerns of her critics

as ‘trolling’, and insists that it is she who is the victim – she claims to have received vicious threats and abuse, including anti-Semitic slurs on her various social media profiles, as well as, being targeted by Hindus for belonging to “the wrong colour and the wrong sex.”²⁰

In other words, Truschke is a polarizing figure in the area of South Asian studies, Hinduism and politics. In this essay, we offer a clear-eyed perspective on the public debate over Truschke and her scholarship. We analyze in-depth, some of her key positions on Mughal history, Aurangzeb, Hinduism, Hindutva and modern India. We show how she is part of a larger ecosystem of academics and activists who are uncomfortable with the idea of a strong Indian state as well as the Dharmic underpinnings of Indian society.

Revisionism and Negationism

Revisiting historical sources with a fresh perspective and incorporating newer evidence, like DNA or public release of archived documents or fresh archaeological discovery, to better understand the past, is an essential part of the discipline of history. By and large, such research can have a positive impact, often leading to a re-interpretation of historical accounts and challenging established views held by scholars. Revisionism, an idea which has its roots in Marxist thoughts, has proven useful in challenging mainstream narratives and popular misconceptions – for example, in the studies about indigenous people in former colonies like America and Australia.²¹ However, when politically motivated or taken to an extreme, revisionism often seems to border on ‘negationism’, where its proponents employ methods ranging from casting doubt on the authenticity of genuine documents, deliberately mistranslating texts and deriving questionable conclusions. For example, politically-motivated revisionists have looked for various ways to deny horrific events like Armenian genocide,²² genocide of Native Americans in North America²³ and the Jewish holocaust.²⁴ In India, revisionism has unfortunately been the bedrock of Leftist interpretation of history for the last few decades, and, as some scholars have pointed out, a systematic attempt has been made to ‘doctor’ history textbooks and pervert India’s historical narrative.²⁵

As shown in this essay, Truschke not only carries forward this tradition of negationism but also propagates an alternate history of India where the religious persecutors are shown as blameless and often benevolent, and victims of persecution are blamed for the ills facing society today. She goes all out in denying the inherent violence of India's Islamic rule, a position no different from that of an influential section of Indian intelligentsia which is constantly trying to wipe out "from Hindu memory the history of their persecution by the swordsmen of Islam."²⁶ Truschke instead, sees *realpolitik* motivation behind many of the actions of Muslim rulers like temple destruction, iconoclasm and religion-specific taxation.²⁷ Not only does she dismiss all claims of religious excesses of Muslim rulers as figments of Hindutva imagination, she in fact, blames modern Hindu politicians of propagating this falsehood of Mughal tyranny, so as to persecute Muslims in present-day India. She also insists that not only did Muslim rulers not destroy many Hindu temples, but also that they picked up the practices of temple destruction from Hindus themselves. In the rest of this essay, we will examine her assertions and provide responses to, and challenge some of her bizarre claims.

Temple Destruction

According to Truschke, the view that Muslim rulers destroyed numerous Hindu temples, especially for religious reasons, is a pernicious myth. She makes two claims in this regard:

1. That the actual number of temples destroyed during Aurangzeb's reign is probably a few dozens in number – "There are numerous gaping holes in the proposition that Aurangzeb razed temples because he hated Hindus, however. Most glaringly, Aurangzeb counted thousands of Hindu temples within his domains and yet destroyed, at most, a few dozen."²⁸ She bases her thesis primarily on the work of Richard Eaton and concurs with his view that "the evidence is almost always fragmentary, incomplete, or even contradictory."²⁹

2. That temple desecration was a well-known political practice among Hindu kings and Muslims merely continued this old custom.³⁰

Truschke sets the stage by insisting that it is a fool's errand to focus on the number of temples destroyed in pre-colonial India. According to her, Aurangzeb was an even-handed ruler who occasionally carried out targeted destruction of certain temples which he deemed to be involved in seditious or immoral activities, and that this number was not more than a few dozens. Not only is there no evidence of large-scale temple destruction under Aurangzeb's rule, she insists that Aurangzeb granted Mughal state protection to Hindu and Jain temples which dotted his kingdom. The false view of large-scale religiously sanctioned temple destruction, she says, has its roots in colonial-era scholarship "where positing timeless Hindu-Muslim animosity embodied the British strategy of divide and conquer."³¹

Her views, however, contradict that of a very important Persian work *Maasir-i Alamgiri*, a chronicle of the life and times of Aurangzeb. Written by Muhammad Saqi Mustaid Khan, it was completed in 1710, three years after the death of Aurangzeb, at the behest of Aurangzeb's secretary Inayetullah Khan Kashmiri, who made the state archives and records available to the author to complete his work.³² This work details many temple destructions carried out during Aurangzeb's reign. For example, in the list below from the year 1680, the author, provides very specific dates, location and the exact number of temples destroyed in each of these regions.

- 24th January, 1680 (2nd of Muharram, 1091 AH) – 3 temples on the banks of Udaisagar lake to be razed.³³
- 29th January, 1680 (7th of Muharram, 1091 AH) – Destruction of the temple situated in the palace of Rana, and 172 more in the neighboring districts³⁴
- 22nd February 1680 (1st Safar, 1091 AH) – Destruction of 63 temples at Chitor³⁵

The dates and locations in these instances are too specific to be the figments of someone's imagination. Truschke, however, dismisses the credibility of the entire work, and claims that the author "has a noted tendency to exaggerate the number of temples" and that he changes facts to suit his taste and hence his work must be cited with "extreme caution."³⁶ She, however, does not give any reason or evidence in support of why she thinks thus. As is evident from the data presented above, there is nothing fragmentary, incomplete or contradictory in the information provided, as Truschke would have us believe. We see clear evidence of systematic temple destruction and not the "dark curtain drawn across an unknown past" as she so poetically writes.³⁷ It is hard to believe that the author Khan, who not only had royal patronage but also access to the state archives, made up stories, especially such very specific incidents with places, dates and numbers. As Sarkar points out, while the Mughal era writings were often replete with fulsome, and often, nauseating praise of their rulers, it was, however, "more a defect of manner than one of fact."³⁸

What this means is that, in a span of two months, under Aurangzeb, two hundred and thirty-eight (238) temples were destroyed in just a handful of localities, which is far greater than the few dozen temple destruction in four decades, as Truschke posits. The interesting thing to be noted is that, while Truschke summarily dismisses the book, she also picks up from the very same book, a statement describing the 1670 destruction of Mathura's Keshava Deva Temple as "a rare and impossible event that came into being seemingly from nowhere."³⁹ From this single statement, she reaches the conclusion that temple destructions were rather rare and unusual in Aurangzeb's India. It is clear that Truschke selectively chooses evidence which suits her narrative of a benevolent Aurangzeb, and ignores all evidences which go against her thesis.

She cites Eaton's work on temple destruction to buttress her claim that "the number of confirmed temple destructions during Aurangzeb's rule at just over a dozen, with fewer tied to the emperor's direct commands."⁴⁰ Therefore, it is important to examine Eaton's work, since Truschke considers him "the leading authority on the subject."⁴¹ Eaton

in his paper, *Temple desecration and Indo-Muslim states*, provides a list of eighty instances of temple desecration by Islamic emperors, sultans, governors, commanders and crown princes, between 1192 to 1760, a period of over five hundred years, of which five temple desecrations have been attributed to Aurangzeb directly.⁴² This low number has been accepted as sacrosanct by many historians and popular writers who parrot this figure without seeing the need for any further investigation.⁴³ Translated in terms of rate, this would mean that Muslim rulers destroyed one temple every seven years. This is a far cry from thousands of temple destructions recorded by Muslim biographers themselves, as well as, the cultural memory of Hindus and their understanding of the land's Islamic past (as well as present).

This idea can be illustrated by a couple of recent examples. In Pakistan since the 1990s, over a period of thirty years, 408 temples were destroyed to make way for commercial properties and houses,⁴⁴ which works out to around ninety temples destruction in seven years. Similarly, in Bangladesh, over a period of eight years from 2013 to 2021, there were more than 1,670 cases of Hindu temple vandalism and desecration.⁴⁵ There is no reason to suggest that Muslims today are more extreme in temple destruction than medieval Muslim kings. Therefore, the view that there were very few actual temple desecrations must be examined closely – why is there such a huge gap between their thesis and that of the lived reality of Hindus engaging with Muslims for centuries?

One reason for this mismatch, as Elst suggests, is that the figure eighty is not exhaustive. Each item on the list, he says, may not necessarily refer to one temple – for example in Benares (which is listed as item six in Eaton's list), contemporary Muslim sources indicate that almost one thousand temples were destroyed by Muhammad Ghori's army in 1194. Therefore, the eighty instances “still amount to thousands of individual temples forcibly replaced by mosques.”⁴⁶

Another reason for the mismatch could be on account of differing interpretation of Persian verses by various historians. Jadunath Sarkar whose *History of Aurangzib* (5 Vols., 1912-1958) is still considered one of

the most authoritative works on Aurangzeb, translates one of the passages from *Maasir-I-'Alamgiri* for 8th April 1669, as:

“...in the provinces of Tatta, Multan and especially at Benares, the Brahman misbelievers used to teach their false books in their established schools, and that admirers and students both Hindu and Muslim, used to come from great distances to these misguided men in order to acquire this vile learning. His Majesty, eager to establish Islam, issued orders to the governors of all provinces to demolish the schools and temples of the infidels and with utmost urgency put down the teaching and the public practice of the religion of these misbelievers.” (Sarkar 1947:51-52)

Truschke as well as Eaton, however, choose to translate the same passage differently. Truschke writes:

“In Thatta, Multan, and especially at Benares, deviant Brahmins were teaching false books at their established schools. Curious seekers—Hindu and Muslim alike— traveled great distances to gain depraved knowledge from them.” (Truschke 2017:Ch. 6, Destroyer of Temples, para. 13)

Eaton translates the rest of the text as:

“Orders respecting Islamic affairs were issued to the governors of all the provinces that the schools and places of worship of the irreligious be subject to demolition and that with the utmost urgency the manner of teaching and the public practices of the sects of these misbelievers be suppressed.” (Eaton 2001:74)

Sarkar prefers the usage “Brahman misbelievers” whereas, Truschke refers to them as “deviant Brahmins”, thereby shifting the sense of the passage away from a religious one, and bringing in a casteist angle. Eaton claims that the royal order in question did not state that temples and schools ought to be demolished outright, but rather be subject to demolition, which according to him implies that local authorities would have undertaken an investigation before proceeding.⁴⁷ In other words, even if an order demanded the razing down of all temples, the number of

temples actually destroyed could have been much lower than the total number of temples in existence once investigations were completed, a view which Truschke accepts and endorses since according to her, Aurangzeb targeted “specific Hindu temples while leaving the vast majority untouched.”⁴⁸

One may also note, the use of the word ‘irreligious’ instead of ‘infidel’ which Sarkar uses. ‘Infidel’ is a pejorative term used by certain religions to describe the “Other”, those who do not abide by their faith. For a Muslim, a Hindu is an infidel because he does not accept Allah as the one and only God and Mohammed as the last prophet. ‘Irreligious’ on the other hand, is a non-controversial term which simply means someone who does not subscribe to a religion and includes atheists, scientists and agnostics, and has nothing to do with the concept of ‘Chosen People’. Eaton also prefers to use the word ‘sect’ instead of ‘religion’, and thereby establish that rather than being an imperial order to destroy all schools and temples, the order “was targeted at investigating those institutions where a certain kind of teaching had been taking place.”⁴⁹ What is to be noted further is that, that this entire thesis of investigation is conjectural, with no actual evidence from any cited investigation. Instead of a blind acceptance of Eaton’s claims, the burden of proof lies with him to supply evidence, without which his number must be rejected. It is additionally telling of Truschke’s research abilities, that instead of probing the basis of Eaton’s work, she eagerly grounds her entire work on such shaky material and her thesis collapses for want of evidence.

Evidence from contemporary sources of large-scale temple destruction during the Islamic period is in fact so profuse, that one is left flabbergasted at the blatant misrepresentation of facts by Truschke and her mentor, Eaton. Historian Sitaram Goel in his analysis of eighty historical works spanning a period of more than twelve hundred years, lists 154 localities in the Indian subcontinent, where temples were destroyed by sixty-one kings, sixty-three military commanders and fourteen Sufis.⁵⁰ It is reasonable to expect that each locality had a number of temples, especially those in the heartland or major socio-economic regions. For example, even in the outlying and very sparsely populated

Gilgit and Baltistan region, 15th century Shia-Sufi preacher Shamsuddin Araki organized the demolition of more than eighty temples.⁵¹ In other words, as per Islamic sources themselves, more temples were destroyed in one of the least populated areas in a very short period of time, than what Truschke and Eaton would have us believe is the total number of temples razed by Muslim rulers during six centuries of Islamic rule. Extrapolating based on the Gilgit and Baltistan data cited earlier, the true number of temples destroyed would probably have been, at least two orders of magnitude more than what is acceptable in the Marxist circles. Goel, for example, published a list of two thousand Hindu, Buddhist and Jain temples which were demolished and Muslim monuments built on their sites.⁵²

Truschke dismisses a contemporary source which lists a large number of temple destruction as unreliable, but then picks a single line from the very same source and uses it to buttress her thesis that temple desecration was an anomaly rather than the norm. Instead of examining all available facts and arriving at a conclusion, she cherry-picks and chooses ideas, and even phrases, which suit her narrative and uses the work of Eaton to support her claim. The assertion that most temples located within Mughal domain “still stood at the end of Aurangzeb’s reign”⁵³ does not point to Mughal magnanimity, but rather, if true, implies that the temples survived *despite* a discriminatory Mughal reign.

The second part of the equation considers iconoclasm as a pre-existing Indian custom and that Muslim rulers merely continued it as part of statecraft and political administration, which we study below.

Iconoclasm

Truschke maintains that temples in India were widely understood to be political in nature and hence, they were subject to “politically motivated destructions.”⁵⁴ From 7th century CE, Hindu kings, she says, regularly looted and defiled images of Durga, Ganesha, Vishnu and other deities. They destroyed each other’s temples and “even commissioned Sanskrit poetry to celebrate and memorialize such actions.”⁵⁵ This became the basis of the Muslim practice of iconoclasm, which did not necessarily

have religious motivation. Aurangzeb's demolition of Hindu temples like the Keshava Deva temple in Mathura in 1670, must be seen in this light. The Gyanvapi mosque which was built in its place by recycling the existing temple's stones for purpose of convenience, was meant as a stern warning to his political opponents.

“Indo-Muslim rulers, such as Aurangzeb, followed suit in considering Hindu temples legitimate targets of punitive state action. ... Mosques were erected on the former sites of both the Vishvanatha and Keshava Deva Temples, although they were built under different circumstances. The Gyanvapi Masjid still stands today in Benares with part of the ruined temple's wall incorporated into the building. This reuse may have been a religiously clothed statement about the dire consequences of opposing Mughal authority.” (Truschke 2017:Ch. 6, Destroyer of Temples, para. 7,8,9,10)

She wonders why Aurangzeb targeted certain temples and left others intact, and surmises that it was probably an action against errant Brahmins, whom she refers to as ‘charlatans.’ Truschke maintains that Aurangzeb (and in general, Mughal rulers) feared that Brahmins were misrepresenting Hinduism to lower castes, deceiving common Hindus about their own religion, misguiding Muslims and teaching false books at their schools and in temples.⁵⁶ In other words, the very idea of Islamic iconoclasm, or religiously motivated idol destruction is false, and that it was the deceit and fraudulent practices of Brahmins, which made Aurangzeb do what he did.

Her thesis on Islamic iconoclasm speaks more about herself, than it tells one about Aurangzeb. Her characterization of Brahmins as being greedy and arrogant, charlatans, who preyed upon ordinary folks, as well charges against Brahmins themselves, which incidentally are not backed by any evidence, reveal her innate Brahminphobia. Based on the opinion of one French traveler Jean de Thevenot, and her belief of how she thinks Aurangzeb may have felt vis-à-vis the “dubious practices” of Brahmins, she cleverly puts the entire blame of temple destruction on Hindus themselves. This is a classic example of victim-blaming where the affected party is held partially, if not entirely responsible for the harm that befell

them. This is no different from anti-Semitic imagery in Europe which portrayed Jews as being greedy, cunning and scheming.⁵⁷ She cites an example of how Benares was teeming with greedy Brahmins looking to make quick money—how is this pejorative characterization any different from early Jewish ghetto portrayal being likened to rats swarming in a sewer?⁵⁸

Even if one makes allowances for her personal views on Hinduism, the primary issue is that she has not presented a single piece of evidence to back up her claim that Aurangzeb's motives in destroying temples had anything to do with 'scheming' Brahmins deceiving common Hindus, and of Aurangzeb ordering Mughal officials to investigate such matters. It is rather difficult to imagine Aurangzeb, a self-confessed pious Muslim, being so distressed at the plight of common Hindus being hoodwinked by their own (the Brahmins) being taught wrong Hinduism and deviant practices, that he ordered the destruction of temples to save Hindus from themselves. Such theorization by Truschke only reveals her abysmal research abilities.

Let us consider the evidence provided by her on Hindu kings destroying each other's temples and how, later Muslim rulers merely adopted the said practice as part of state policy. Scholar Girish Shahane, a regular contributor to far-Left web portal *Scroll*, a vocal critic of the Hindu Right⁵⁹ and Modi,⁶⁰ and a supporter of Aryan Migration Theory⁶¹ like Truschke, lambasts her for basing her entire thesis on exactly one example, which upon further investigation turns out to be "a fictive incident created by misunderstanding a bit of verse."⁶² Moreover, as Shahane points out, Hindu kings did take away deities, especially those considered powerful, but instead of destroying them, they had them consecrated and installed within their own kingdoms, "the precise opposite of the idol smashing of Islamic iconoclasm."⁶³ Elst also points out the same. When early 9th century Pandyan king Shrimara Shrivallabha invaded Sri Lanka and took away the statue of the Buddha, the deity itself was not touched, but rather preserved. In fact, the Lankan army was later able to retrieve and restore the idol.⁶⁴ Equating this with Islamic iconoclasm is an example of shoddy scholarship on the part of Truschke. Elst writes:

“In Islamic iconoclasm, the whole idea was not to preserve but to destroy the idols; and more fundamentally, to destroy the religion embodied in the idols. ... it artfully blurs the distinction between looting, i.e. carrying away as a prized good, done by a victorious king who shared the idolatrous tradition of his defeated opponent and continued it; and destruction, i.e. an act of contempt and hate for the idolatrous religion and meant to terminate it.” (Elst 2011:27)

Moreover, there is no evidence to show that Islamic iconoclasm was a continuation of an earlier Hindu practice. Goel in his work, lists numerous instances of Muslims justifying iconoclasm with reference to the Prophet’s example, but was not able to locate a single example of anyone claiming that their actions were based on a Hindu precedent. In fact, the sixth sultan of the Shah Miri dynasty of Kashmir from 1389 to 1413, Sikandar Shah Miri, was epithetized ‘Butshikan’, which literally means “idol-breaker.”⁶⁵ As Shahane points out, Truschke’s portrayal of Aurangzeb as a misunderstood personality, is full of holes, and he suggests that the latter “was a bigot not just by our standards but by those of his predecessors and peers.”⁶⁶

Incidentally, this also sheds light on one of her other major claims, regarding the attack and looting of the Somnath temple by Mahmud of Ghazni in 1025. How is it that an event that is alleged to be cataclysmic in modern Hindutva debates has not been touched upon by contemporary Brahmin thinkers, she wonders and remarkably concludes:

“Perhaps the event was unremarkable to local Brahmins who were accustomed to temple raids from Indian kings across the board.”⁶⁷

As demonstrated, there is scant evidence of the alleged Hindu iconoclasm; hence, it is very unlikely that Brahmins were already accustomed to temple raids by Indian kings. The fact that Hindus did not write about certain events does not mean that the incident did not happen. Quite a few Muslim historians have waxed eloquent about Ghaznavids and Mahmud’s raid of Somnath.⁶⁸ It is more likely, that the few survivors and the victims of horrific Ghaznavid attacks, were not in a position to sit and write Sanskrit prose. Below is an excerpt of a typical fort takeover

from *Tarikhu-s Subuktigin*, a history of the house of Ghazni up to 451 H., 1059 CE:

“The Brahmans and other higher men were slain, and their women and children were carried away captive and all the treasure which was found was divided amongst the army.”⁶⁹

It seems to be the standard practice of historians to ignore the mountains of Islamic literary evidence, contemporary as well as otherwise, which unapologetically and often gleefully describe the pillaging, and plunder and gruesome death of the ‘infidels’. Instead, historians demand evidence from Hindus, who are clearly the victims as per Islamic records. This brings us to a large issue of Truschke’s views on Hinduism and Hindutva, especially, given her stated anti-Hindutva activism.

Truschke on Hindutva and AI/MT

Audrey Truschke is a vocal critic of ‘Hindutva’, which she characterizes as a violent and fascist ideology, based on ideas of Nazi-sympathizers.⁷⁰ She defines Hindutva or Hindu Nationalism as “a political ideology that advocates Hindu supremacy, specifically over Muslims.”⁷¹ Proponents of Hindutva, she says, claim that ancient India had internet, aeronautics and modern medicine. Their thesis, that this golden age of scientific progress came to a halt with Muslim invasion is nothing short of a political ploy to demonize Muslims.⁷² Supporters of Hindutva are inherently misogynistic and she claims that she has been subjected to virulent attacks by Hindu nationalists.⁷³ Further she says that she has evidence that Hindu nationalist groups recruit and attempt to radicalize students on US university campuses.⁷⁴

Hindutva ideologues, according to her, reject cultural change as a desirable process and instead embrace the position that India and Indians possess a timeless and unchanging essence. In other words, they posit a flat history without change, and react to anything contradictory as a major threat. She finds it shocking that Hindutva supporters reject the “ironclad linguistic evidence” (which she does not cite with sources as in any scholarly exchange) of an Aryan migration into India some 4000

to 3500 years ago.⁷⁵ With regards to pre-modern Indian history, Hindu nationalists are determined to purge Mughals and their heritage from the Indian psyche. Thus, on the one hand, there is a frenzy of renaming cities and streets, while on the other hand, Mughal monuments are being neglected. History books are being rewritten so as to remove all references to the Mughals.⁷⁶ Hindu nationalists are busy rewriting Mughal history by inventing atrocities, so that they can justify “the oppression and violence they wield against Muslim communities today.”⁷⁷ In this dystopian India – she refers to it, as Modi’s India – where the Hindu nationalist state is busy with its ‘anti-Muslim exertions’, scholarly debate has taken a backseat and instead, dishonesty and academic hooliganism rules the roost.⁷⁸

“When Hindu nationalists are not marginalising the Mughals, they villainise these long-dead kings as proxies for modern-day Indian Muslims.” (Truschke 2018a)

According to her, another myth perpetuated by Hindutva ideologues is the phenomenon of ‘love jihad’, which is yet another weapon in the arsenal of the Hindu Right to target Indian Muslims. Truschke says:

“It underlines their vicious Islamophobia, investment in controlling female sexuality, and a preference for religious segregation. It also speaks to their projected fragility and desire to maintain social dominance, including by inventing a persecution story.” (Truschke 2021)

There are a number of issues, factual and otherwise, with her statements and positions. First of course, is her disparaging characterization of India as ‘Modi’s India’. India does not belong to Narendra Modi, or the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) or to those who are vehemently opposed to Modi and his policies. It is a land of Indians, and whether she likes it or not, Indians which include Hindus, Muslims and Christians alike have decided, not once but twice, to give BJP the opportunity to form a government at the Center under the leadership of Narendra Modi, in a democratic, independently-monitored electoral exercise. Truschke

represents the quintessential colonial Western thinking, which assumes imaginary authority and non-existent *locus standi* on anything related to democracy and finds situations which go against their ideologies, even when backed by people's mandates, to be dismissed with aspersions and strange accusations. By referring to India as 'Modi's India', she is accusing the entire nation of being proponents of her understanding of Hindutva, which is that of anti-science, anti-reason, misogynist, fascist and racist individuals baying for the blood of Muslims.

This characterization allows her the opportunity to paint all her critics with the same brush stroke – Hindutva 'trolls'. Anyone who opposes her views or criticizes her scholarship must be an adherent of Hindutva, and hence, to be disparaged at a personal level and dubbed a 'troll'. It does not matter if the person does not subscribe to her definition of Hindutva or if they are *bona fide* scholars providing genuine critique. Truschke trivializes India's immense contribution to Indian science and technology by sensationalizing the absurd and making it appear as if a few bizarre claims constitute the bulk of Indian science. By associating science in India with Hindutva, she is perhaps trying to make the case, that since supporters of Hindutva are anti-science, whatever science India has is of foreign origin, that India never had any scientific prowess and that current Indian science is an area dominated by crackpot theorists. This is an absurd claim, and there is enough literature on India's immense contribution to mathematics, medicine, mind sciences, astronomy and other areas.⁷⁹ Truschke's wholesale dismissals and accusations though, manage to achieve with their shrill tone and absurd claims, the need to engage in any rational and intellectual exchange with scholarship which proves her claims wrong.

Instead, Truschke uses her academic credentials and strident charging, to wade into commentaries on issues related to India about which she knows very little but has the need to make clamoring statements such as for instance, on 'love jihad'.⁸⁰ She incorrectly, but conveniently defines it as a phenomena where "Hindu girls are claimed to be at risk of corruption and Hinduism itself at risk of extinction due to interreligious marriages that result in forced conversions to Islam."⁸¹

Most practitioners of Hinduism understand ‘love jihad’ as a strategy where Muslim men pretending to be Hindus, entrap Hindu women into a relationship or abduct them and then force them to convert to Islam. Truschke of course, deigns not to touch upon this point of pretension and entrapment, and instead obfuscates the issue by painting the entire matter as Hindu opposition to interreligious marriage. ‘Love jihad’ is neither a product of someone’s imagination nor a Hindutva problem nor a solely Indian problem. In 2014, the Akal Takht, the highest temporal seat of Sikhism in UK, expressed grave concern over reports of Sikh girls falling victim to Pakistani youths attempting to seduce and convert them to Islam as part of ‘jihadi’ efforts.⁸² In 2017, Mathews Gregorios, the Bishop of the Syrian Independent Orthodox Church, announced that ‘love jihad’ was a reality and Christian youth ought to stand up and fight this evil.⁸³ In the same year, Ladakhi officials said that there were reports of young Buddhist girls, lured into marriage by Muslims pretending to be Buddhists.⁸⁴ As recent as 2021, Mar Joseph Kallarangatt, Bishop of Palai, openly accused a section of the Muslim community of targeting Christians through ‘love jihad’.⁸⁵ Whether ‘love jihad’ actually exists or not, and to what extent, is a matter for the police and the courts to investigate, however, it is clear that Christians, Buddhist, Sikhs and Hindus alike, do see ‘love jihad’ as a cultural threat. What is clearly apparent, meanwhile, through the issue, is Truschke’s need to wade into every issue related to Hinduism, whether she has any understanding or not, and expressly manifest her Hinduphobia.

It comes as no surprise, that Truschke off-hand dismisses an entire school of thought called the “Out of India” theory (to be discussed later), and dubs their proponents, which incidentally include many European and American scholars, as Hindu Nationalists resorting “to specious arguments and even fraud”⁸⁶. Among several of the damaging consequences of colonial scholarship in India, the perpetuation of the Aryan invasion/migration theories (AI/MT) particularly stands out. The theory has gone through several stages – from being a tool to create false identities for people, to using the same to fester divisions among Indians. One of the most interesting aspects of it is also the manner in which it reveals biases in scholarship, especially seen in the case of

Truschke's work. AI/MT has been discredited conclusively through the works of several scholars, from different fields such as linguistics and various branches of archaeology. But, Truschke, in her typical research style of making assertions without any basis, claims that the theory needs no bolstering and attributes it to "scholarly consensus."⁸⁷ Instead of addressing specific questions which challenge her beliefs in the validity of AI/MT, such as, the absence of even a mention of any invasion/migration in the huge corpus of texts of India, or the archaeological excavations at Sanauli, Rakhigarh and numerous other IVC sites, or the findings of the Sarasvati river paleo channels and their implications for the chronology of India, or the numerous reports from peer reviewed, scientific findings of Archaeological Survey of India and individual researchers; Truschke, in her quintessential manner, resorts to bashing up Hindutva and accusing Hindus of "rewriting history."⁸⁸ The arrogance and lack of self-awareness in her article is so glaring, that one wonders at her *adhikāra*⁸⁹ in calling herself a scholar, while her entire defense of her beliefs in AI/MT contains one paltry reference to a 1991 paper by John Hawley and quoting from Tony Joseph's work.⁹⁰ What serves Truschke's agenda well though, is the use of AI/MT to perpetuate the Marxist lens of Indian history, rooted in deep Hinduphobia.

Truschke on Hinduism

Truschke does not consider many Sanskrit texts, including the Upaniṣad-s and Purāṇa-s as "Hindu scriptures."⁹¹ She also insists that the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* are not Hindu texts per se. During Akbar's reign, all eighteen books of *Mahābhārata* were translated to Persian. However, the translation team, which apparently also included many Brahmins of repute, did not consider the *Mahābhārata* a Hindu work, but rather a "purported history (*tarikh* in Persian) of pre-Islamic India."⁹² In fact, the Persian adaptation of *Razmnamah* played an important role "in the politico-cultural fashioning of Akbar's court, whereby the Mughals developed a new type of Indo-Persian imperial aesthetic."⁹³ The Persian translators (which also included Brahmins) did not apparently consider even the *Rāmāyaṇa* as a Hindu religious text, but rather as an epic romance with "martial narratives" and "love sagas."⁹⁴ The *Bhagavad*

Gīta, in the same vein is “hardly uniquely Hindu”⁹⁵ but rather a text which attempts to address the moral dilemma of a war “by way of a philosophically dense discourse.”⁹⁶

“Few if any saw it as the central, unique text of Hinduism.” (Truschke 2015:4)

This depiction reflects Truschke’s lack of understanding and intentional ignoring of copious literature from the canon by practicing Hindus. For example, in the Vedānta school of Hindu philosophy, there is a concept of *prasthānatrayī*, which refers to three canonical texts with epistemic authority – the Upaniṣad-s, the Brahma Sūtra-s and the *Bhagavad Gīta*. It may be noted that Vedānta is perhaps the most prominent school of Hinduism, and Vedāntic traditions have led to the development or heavily influenced many spiritual movements and *sampradāyas* all across India, including Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva and Śakti traditions.⁹⁷

“The Hindu religious sects, the common faith of the Indian populace, looked to Vedānta philosophy for the theoretical foundations for their theology. The influence of Vedānta is prominent in the sacred literatures of Hinduism, such as the various Puranas, Samhitas, Agamas and Tantras ...” (Nakamura 2004:3)

By classifying two out of three of these sources, namely, the Upaniṣad-s and the *Bhagavad Gīta* as not being Hindu, Truschke is clearly denying the legitimacy of Vedānta and by extension, Hinduism.

Regarding the antiquity of Hinduism, Truschke says that the word ‘Hinduism’ has been in use only for a few hundred years and is a Western idea.⁹⁸ The term ‘Hindu’ itself is a Perso-Arabic invention used in India for a thousand years, and mostly in a geographic rather than a religious sense.⁹⁹ She remarks that sometimes the term was used in a narrow sense and limited to upper classes, especially Brahmins.¹⁰⁰ If Hinduism is to be judged by the concept of a Holy Book, then the oldest layers of the Veda-s are not more than 3500 years old, she says.¹⁰¹ However, in terms of practices, she says that “most Hindus worship different gods now than Vedic people did 3,500 years ago, and in quite different ways.”¹⁰² If the

Bhagavad Gīta is to be considered the primary book of the Hindus, then Hinduism is not more than two thousand years old,¹⁰³ while ‘Bhakti’ came only in the post-Christian era.

What her statements seem to indicate is the view that Hinduism is neither a religion nor is it ancient. It is a rather, a recent artificial construct of Western origin, and the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* were Indian cultural artefacts appropriated by Hindus. She is careful to avoid the use of the words ‘Hindu’ and ‘philosophy’ together, and instead refers to ‘dharma’ and ‘karma’ as “Indian philosophical concepts.”¹⁰⁴ By highlighting the fact that Indo-Persian thinkers also included Brahmins, Truschke tries to peddle the idea that this was a view that even Brahmins of the Mughal era accepted and endorsed. The implications are two-fold: If a practicing Hindu were to criticize the Mughal socio-political order, this would be akin to denigrating the *Mahābhārata* (and by extension Hinduism), since the epic was an important part of Mughal rule. The second is that the Mughals are as Indian as anyone else in India, given that their rule was premised on the *Mahābhārata*. Thus, a criticism of Mughal rule is a criticism of the *Mahabharata* and hence, of Indian-ness.

There is of course nothing new in this thesis of Neo-Hinduism, espoused by many in the Left-Liberal establishment, where Hinduism is claimed to have no coherent self-understanding of its distinctiveness or similarity to other religious traditions. Neo-Hinduism was constructed artificially by trying to forcefully integrate pre-existing native traditions, many of which are inherently irreconcilable.¹⁰⁵ Hinduism is denigrated as some kind of fragmented and incoherent admixture of ideas, without any central authority or ecclesiastical structure or sacred texts.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, for Truschke, the Veda-s are replete with “animal sacrifice, sexual practices, spells” and merely an inducement to sleep, given the large number of hymns present in them.¹⁰⁷ *Indra’s Net* by Rajiv Malhotra offers a systematic rejoinder to such views by articulating Hindu dharma’s innate self-understanding which is coherent as well as multi-dimensional, and premised on a unified open architecture which allows continuous evolution.¹⁰⁸

Hindutva = Hinduism?

An objective analysis of Truschke’s work reveals that there have been instances where Truschke points out that ‘Hindutva’ and ‘Hinduism’ are not the same. The “Dismantling Global Hindutva” conference held from September 10-12, 2021 and endorsed by Audrey Truschke,¹⁰⁹ clearly says that Hindutva is not Hinduism.¹¹⁰ According to the *Hindutva Harassment Field Manual* that she helped develop, proponents of Hindutva often hide their narrow, biased and extremist politics by claiming to represent Hinduism. Such a move causes great harm to the inherent diversity of Hinduism, and many within the Hindu fold oppose such a view:

“Hindutva and Hinduism are distinct. Hindutva is a narrow political ideology whereas Hinduism is a broad-based religious tradition. Many Hindus oppose Hindutva ideology, both in India and in the US-based diaspora, and it is offensive to conflate the two”.¹¹¹

Thus, it would appear that Truschke is perhaps sympathetic to Hinduism, but inimical to Hindu Nationalism. A clearer examination though, summarizes some of the key takeaways of Truschke’s views on Hinduism and Hindutva, based on the preceding sections:

- Hinduism is neither a genuine religion, nor is it old – historically it was a geographic identifier and perhaps in a narrow sense a religious identifier of upper classes, especially Brahmins.
- Hindutva is an anti-science, misogynist, fascist, racist and supremacist ideology advocating Hindu supremacy over Muslims.

In other words, she is sympathetic to neither Hinduism nor Hindutva. Consider for instance, her claims that ‘Hindutva Rama’ is different from ‘devotional Rama’, more aggressive than standard depictions, and then extending this to associate Rama with Hindu supremacy and slaughter of Muslims.

“In August 2020, the BJP and other Hindu nationalist groups celebrated breaking ground for a new temple to the Hindutva Ram, known popularly as Ram Mandir, in Ayodhya ... The new Ram Mandir in Ayodhya celebrates this violent exercise of Hindu supremacy, in which a modern myth about the past can justify the mass slaughter of Muslims.” (Truschke 2020:para. 17)

These are rather bizarre and serious claims, where she seems to question the very independence of the Indian judiciary. While it is true that Hindu deities have many different iconographies, Hindu practitioners do not distinguish between ‘Hindutva Rama’ and ‘devotional Rama’. This is clearly an attempt to obfuscate her disdain for the Hindu deity by throwing a ‘Hindutva’ versus ‘devotional’ red herring. Moreover, by associating Ram Mandir with Hindu supremacy and slaughter of Muslims, it is evident that she does not see any difference between ‘Hinduism’ and ‘Hindutva’, although she may publicly say otherwise. Again, one of the positions held by the “Dismantling Global Hindutva Conference” was that Hindutva was merely “political Hinduism, not a distortion of an older tradition but a continuation of it.”¹¹² In fact, Truschke seems to associate the (largely Hindu) Indian diaspora with Hindutva. She writes:

“In US society, Hindutva hate is pretty mild. That’s because the Indian diaspora is still a minority here. Indian Americans form about 1% of all Americans – that’s not a huge number, but that’s obviously not insignificant”. (Prakash 2021)

The above statements show that her attacks on Hindutva are in fact attacks on Hinduism. Thus, when she says Hindutva proponents are primitive, racist and misogynist, these charges are equally applicable to all Hindus. She is neither the first Hinduphobic scholar, nor will she be the last. Truschke in fact, denies the very existence of Hinduphobia and says there is no evidence to support either Hinduphobia or that Hindus faced persecution under foreign rule. Considering the very poor evidences she presents to bolster any of her theses, it appears farcical when Truschke claims to work only with evidence and thus, dismisses any Hinduphobia:

“I think the charges lack substance, I don’t think that there’s any evidence behind them. And as academics, we work in a world of evidence.” (Venkataramakrishnan 2021)

One of her counter-arguments is since nobody can claim to speak on behalf of all Hindus, the entire idea of a Hindu identity is contentious.¹¹³ And if there is no Hindu identity, then how can there be Hinduphobia? *Academic Hinduphobia* by Rajiv Malhotra provides a good framework to understand the evolution of such Hinduphobic scholarship in Western academia. Setting aside any consideration for the actual victims, Truschke in fact, milks the matter to play the victim card and alleges that educated outspoken women (like her?) are abused. She also uses this opportunity to associate Hindutva, and by extension Hinduism, with Talibanism,¹¹⁴ an extremist Islamic fundamentalist and militant ideology. She truly has the ability to relate anything under the sun to Hindutva and cast herself as the victim.

Truschke on the Ayodhya Judgment

Truschke has authored an article on the Supreme Court of India’s judgment following the ‘Ram Janmabhoomi’ case at Ayodhya. Showing scant understanding of the independence of the Indian judiciary or of the history of the case, Truschke casts serious aspersions on the judges of India’s Supreme Court when she paints them as participants in what she sees as a Hindutva rewriting and remarks that the judgment is devoid of “history before the nineteenth century” and “misstates the precolonial past.”¹¹⁵ Despite a link to the actual judgment copy in her article, it is astonishing that Truschke has not even followed the case enough to understand the evidences unearthed and the careful arguments presented over the years at various stages, at both the Allahabad High Court and the Supreme Court of India.

Despite an academic background and supposed knowledge of Hinduism and Sanskrit (e.g. of the significance of the *avatāra*, *garbha griha* and *parikrama*), for she has no obvious *locus standi* or expertise to comment on the matter, Truschke charges that Lord Rāma is not even a historical figure to begin with and the onus falls on the Hindus to first

show his historical existence in a court of law – “It criticises the Muslim plaintiffs for failing to provide “evidence of the offering of namaz in the mosque, over this period [1528-1856/7].”¹¹⁶ Yet, in over nine hundred pages, the judgment never asks either of the two Hindu defendants for proof that Ram’s birth constituted a historical event.” What Truschke seems to not have read in those 900 pages, are entire sections considering verses from various sources including the *Skanda Purana* and *Ayodhya Mahatmya* which build on the association of the place under dispute in Ayodhya with the birth of Lord Rama.¹¹⁷ Truschke’s scholarship in pre-modernity is further called into doubt, while making her scorn for Hinduism and its practitioners obvious, when she remarks that most Hindus “did not much care about Ram’s birthplace, an apathy indicated by the sheer lack of attention to this issue in premodern texts.”¹¹⁸

Truschke’s analysis in the article is at times infantile, exemplified with her pointing at one place that the Supreme Court judgment mentions the Hindus 299 times in its text while speaking of the Muslims relatively lesser 174 times. Even as she comes up with such silly barometers for what constitutes judicial fairness, she remarks that the court has not defined either group, which apparently shocks her deeply. Truschke attempts to school the Indian Supreme Court on Oriental prejudice and legality, “The assumption of a static, homogenous group of “the Hindus” reeks of the Orientalist prejudice that Indians and India exist outside of historical change. For the court, this fiction of timelessness served the bid to make a relatively recent article of faith—Ram’s precise birthplace—a legal basis for action.”¹¹⁹ The SC judgment nowhere paints a picture of treating the Hindus as a static group outside of historical change. In fact, it has sections considering evidence, from various sources including foreigners traveling to India and accounts of invaders, of relevant material before 1528, from 1528-1858, 1859-1947, and post-Independence. It becomes clear that Truschke’s issue is not with whether or not the SC has defined Hindus or Muslims, but with the fact that history of Hindus and India, as defined by a group of biased and motivated distortionists such as herself, increasingly no longer find currency today.

The Supreme Court judgment considers evidence unearthed by the Archaeological Survey of India and consequently presented in its 2003 report and while doing so, accords lesser significance to the 1991 report by R.S. Sharma et al, as newer material evidence was absent in forming the conclusions of the historians' work in 1991. The unearthing of the pillars of a previously existing Hindu temple, the machinations of the Leftist historians to try and pass the evidence off as belonging to a Buddhist place – none of these are considered by Truschke, and instead, she disparages the ASI as an organization whose work has little standing within and outside the country, with an additional lesson on what constitutes historical method. Instead of the admission that the material evidence unearthed clearly points to the existence of a temple, as what is expected in an unmotivated and honest scholarship, Truschke accuses the Hindus, of 'sophistry'. "But Hindutva ideologues think differently. They commonly brandish some new piece of evidence favorable to a preconceived idea, regardless of its source or merit, as invalidating all prior academic work. This is a fine tactic as sophistry, but it carries no intellectual weight."¹²⁰ Truschke's work further shows that she has not even understood the concept of an avatāra,¹²¹ but tries, very unsuccessfully, to frame the arguments against a backdrop of historicity. Rehashing notions from colonial scholarship, despite seemingly claiming to criticize it, she perpetuates the ideas of the *Rāmāyana*, at best, being an imaginary work and thus, "by modern legal standards, the Hindu claimants have no compelling evidence regarding Ram's life and birthplace."¹²²

Truschke and Mistranslating Sanskrit Intentionally

Audrey Truschke has a long record of translating words from Sanskrit to present a colorful tone of passages from key Hindu texts, and in some case, even manufacturing what she wants to read into a text. Despite her claimed expertise in Sanskrit, the numerous examples of Truschke's translations call into question not only her ability, but demonstrate a prejudiced gaze. Consider for instance, the 2018 episode of Truschke 'translating' passages from the *Rāmāyana* to attribute to devi Sita, lines

which were a complete fabrication and not present in the original Vālmiki text. Referring to supposed lines 6.102-106, Truschke claims to use Robert Goldman's translation and says Sita, "loosely" called Bhagawan Rama a "misogynist pig and uncouth"; when challenged by many to produce the exact lines from the text to back up her claims, Truschke cited Goldman's translation.¹²³

When a concerned reader reached out to the Sanskritist Robert Goldman himself with Truschke's claims, Goldman wrote back clearly refuting any such interpretation of the text in his work and said, "I find it extremely disturbing but perhaps not unexpected to learn that AT (Audrey Trushcke) has used such inappropriate language and passed it off as coming from Valmiki. Neither the great poet nor we used anything like such a vulgar diction and certainly Sita would never have used such language to her husband even in the midst of emotional distress. Nowhere in our translation of the passage do we use words such as you mention AT as using."¹²⁴ What Truschke had done, was 'translate' the text in ways that suited her agenda and attributed it to the authority of Goldman's work for credibility. Despite Dr. Goldman's clear rebuttal, neither did Truschke issue a withdrawal of her statements, nor a correction. Nityananda Misra, the Sanskritist, has also provided a detailed analysis of the episode.¹²⁵ Truschke's tweets remain on her account to this day.

Instead, Truschke's response was a sinuous attempt at portraying herself as a victim of hatred and abuse from Hindus for apparently writing about the truth. Writing in *The Wire*, Truschke does not address specifically the origin of her translations or her sleight of hand in passing off her own translations as that of Dr. Goldman's. Instead, she comes across as being proud of the controversy, and shockingly, and one wonders at her delusions, tries to compare the situation to the original in the text and she being in a place similar to devi Sita!

"I did not and do not endorse Sita's criticism of Rama, but many – including Professor Goldman – thought they glimpsed my own views within the translation. Upon seeing such blunt language, many got angry. In this sense, however, perhaps my translation was at least

partially successful. In Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Sita's words at the agnipariksha evoke anger, sparking a strong reaction from Lakshmana (6.104.20). The difference is that Lakshmana directed his wrath at Rama (briefly, before he calmed down), whereas, in the last few days, my critics have villainised the interpreter of the story, namely, me." (Truschke 2018b)

Truschke's frequent resorts to victimhood has become such a predictable part of her *modus operandi*, that it begs the question if it is a part of a strategy to garner more reportage and eye-balls.¹²⁶

Hinduism and Hinduphobia

Having considered the above material, an interesting question to ponder upon is, why is Audrey Truschke Hinduphobic? What drives her rabid Hinduphobia disguised as objective scholarship? Some have posited that her deep-seated hatred of Hinduism could stem from her loyalty towards her family which is closely associated with a Christian missionary organization, First Baptist Church of Monterey¹²⁷ (which once had an allied movement "To Win India For Christ"¹²⁸), or her close ties with Pakistan, an Islamic nation with constitutionally sanctioned discrimination against Hindus.¹²⁹ It could also be the influence of her mentor, Sheldon Pollock, whose Neo-Orientalist school is perhaps, the most important Left-wing, post-Marxist, post-modernist school today that influences almost all discourse about India both within the country and around the world.¹³⁰ Whatever be the reasons, we are now in a better position to understand many of her statements on Hinduism, India and politics in general.

In a 2017 tweet (now deleted), Truschke expresses her shock at the "forceful inclusion" of Sikhism in Hinduism.¹³¹ She also does not consider "tribal religions" as part of Hinduism.¹³² As shown earlier, she insists that the term 'Hindu' was historically a term with regional connotations and religious in a very narrow sense. She insists that Indian groups target minorities and Dalits under the charge of "forced religious conversion."¹³³ In effect, Hinduism for her is an elitist enterprise of a few upper castes only, and Sikhs, tribals and Dalits are not part of it. She, of

course, is not alone in making such claims, as she is in the hallowed company of firebrand Christian activist Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd. Being entitled to one's opinions is a fundamental right in India but does not necessarily mean that one is correct, logical or rational. There are many people who still believe in ideas like Immaculate Conception or flat earth, and they have every right to do so. The legal definition of Hinduism, however, is very concise and unambiguous. A Hindu is:

- One who is a Hindu by religion in any of its forms or developments, including a Virashaiva, Lingayat, Brahmo Samaji, Prarthana Samaji as well as Arya Samaji
- One who is Buddhist, Jain or Sikh by religion
- Anyone else who is not a Muslim, Christian, Parsi or Jew by religion¹³⁴

Conclusion

The article has considered a few important themes which constitute the main body of Audrey Truschke's work, while focusing on specifics of her research methodology. The key features of her *modus operandi* that emerge, as shown, include her proclivity to back her research with little verifiable and factual evidence, and tendency to actively blur the lines between objective scholarship and her manifest Hinduphobia. She cherry-picks data to suit her thesis, and shows a complete lack of objective and professional engagement with scholars whose work challenges her own, and frequently casts herself as a victim in situations which expose her lack of knowledge and bias.

Considering the nature of the scholarship that emerges in this profile, subjecting Truschke's work to a rigorous examination to check the veracity of her translations of Sanskrit texts becomes an important potential line of further study. The instance of her mistranslations and even outright fabrications of the verses from the *Rāmāyaṇa* raises important questions regarding the veracity of most of her work. *Sanskrit Non-Translatables* makes an excellent case for the need to retain words from the language as is,¹³⁵ to retain fidelity and prevent digestion and

distortion of Hindu concepts. This paradigm becomes especially important while studying the work of scholars such as Truschke, whose work is riddled with poor evidence and careless mistranslations.

Truschke's missionary zeal in criticising scholars who do not subscribe to her ideologies, as seen in the recent exchange between her and the historian Vikram Sampath, regarding the latter's book on Savarkar, is another instance of her overreaching activities. Truschke's claim of over seventy-five signatories to a letter criticizing Sampath was shown to be fake, with many supposed signatories, such as Ramchandra Guha, saying they have not even seen the letter, let alone sign it.¹³⁶ The Delhi High Court's intervention, asking Twitter to delete the defamatory tweets¹³⁷ and the author's recourse to judicial actions point to interesting pushback against Truschke's endless propaganda.

In Indian socio-moral and ethical thought, it is the concept of 'dharma' that distinguishes civilization and human evolution from barbarism and anarchy. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* says that nothing is higher than dharma and that dharma and truth are the same.¹³⁸ Dharma manifests in many ways, through steadiness, forgiveness, self-control, purity, discernment, knowledge and truthfulness at all times.¹³⁹ By implication 'adharma' is associated with untruthfulness and falsehood all things which are harmful for humanity and detrimental to the progress of human civilization. Rama is thus a representation of all that is dharmic while Ravana represents the side of adharma. Ravana may have been an intellectual giant and a great spiritual person, but his propensity to tread the path of adharma is what eventually lead to his downfall. Similar to Ravana, Truschke is an influential public intellectual who has decided to follow the path of adharma in academia. We hope that she be held accountable for her inflammatory, and irresponsible remarks and her propaganda under the guise of scholarship.

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Notes

1. (Rutgers University n.d.)
2. See: "The Mughal Empire." Oxford Research Encyclopedias: Asian History. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.013.357>).
3. See: "Hindutva's threat to academic freedom." Religion News Service. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (<https://religionnews.com/2021/07/07/hindutvas-threat-to-academic-freedom>).
4. See: "AIPS Member Publishes Book." American Institute of Pakistan Studies. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (<http://www.pakistanstudies-aips.org/content/aips-member-publishes-book-0>).

5. See: "Identifying an Attack." Hindutva Harassment Field Manual. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (<https://www.hindutvaharassmentfieldmanual.org/targets>).
6. See: "AUDREY TRUSCHKE." The Caravan. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (<https://caravanmagazine.in/author/1128>).
7. See: "Stories written by Audrey Truschke." Scroll.in. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (<https://scroll.in/author/10495>).
8. See: "Audrey Truschke." The Wire. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (<https://thewire.in/author/audrey-truschke>).
9. (Rutgers University n.d.)
10. (Fani 2019)
11. (Vardhan 2018)
12. (Hindu American Foundation 2021)
13. (Rajagopal and Viswanath 2021)
14. (Baird 2021)
15. See: "About Us." SAHI. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (<https://www.studentsagainsthindutvaideology.org/about-us>).
16. (Singh 2020)
17. (Lee 2020)
18. (Mishra 2021)
19. (Lerner 2021)
20. (Kanga 2021)
21. In Marxism, revisionism is used pejoratively to describe deviations from Marx's core ideas. In a political context, the term has abusive connotations especially when it pertains to relations between two communist regimes. See: "revisionism." Oxford Reference. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110810105729649>).
22. The Armenian genocide was the state sanctioned destruction of the (Christian) Armenian people and identity through robbery, rape, and ethnic cleansing in the (Muslim) Turkish Ottoman Empire in 1915 during World War I. See: (Hovannisian 2015) to understand how this genocide

has been systematically denied for almost a century using sophisticated research methods and critical-thinking techniques.

23. See: (Whitt and Clarke 2019)
24. See: (Wistrich 2012)
25. For a comprehensive treatment of this subject see: (Shourie 2014)
26. From the cover of (Elst 2014). The book has a detailed treatment on how many Indian historians, journalists and politicians confidently deny that there ever was a Hindu-Muslim conflict, and ridicule the very idea of Hindu persecution during India's Islamic rule.
27. See: (Truschke 2017:Ch. 6, Destroyer of Temples)
28. (Truschke 2017:Ch. 6, Protector of Temples, para. 3)
29. (Truschke 2017:Ch. 6, Destroyer of Temples, para. 3)
30. (Truschke 2017:Ch. 6, Destroyer of Temples, para. 7)
31. (Truschke 2017:Ch. 6, Protector of Temples, para. 3,4,5)
32. (Sarkar 1947:v)
33. (Sarkar 1947:116)
34. (Sarkar 1947:116-117)
35. (Sarkar 1947:117)
36. (Truschke 2017:Ch. 6, Destroyer of Temples, para. 4)
37. (Truschke 2017:Ch. 6, Destroyer of Temples, para. 3)
38. (Sarkar 1947:iv)
39. (Truschke 2017:Ch. 6, Destroyer of Temples, para. 4)
40. (Truschke 2017:Ch. 6, Destroyer of Temples, para. 3)
41. (Truschke 2017:Ch. 6, Destroyer of Temples, para. 3)
42. (Eaton 2001:73)
43. For example see: (An-Na'im 2008:146). See also (Jha 2018): "They, relentlessly propagate canard that 60,000 Hindu temples were demolished during Muslim rule, though there is hardly any credible evidence for the destruction of more than 80 of them."
44. (Chaubey 2021)

45. This was accompanied by arson targeting houses, shops and businesses of Hindus, sexual assault and rapes, and murder of Hindus (Bose 2021).
46. (Elst 2011:24-25)
47. (Eaton 2001:74)
48. (Truschke 2017:Ch. 6, Destroyer of Temples, para. 5)
49. (Eaton 2001:74-75)
50. (Goel 2012:Ch. 8, para. 1)
51. (Elst 2011:24-25)
52. (Goel 2012:Appendix 4 - Questionnaire for the Marxist Professors, II, para. 15)
53. (Truschke 2017:Ch. 6, Destroyer of Temples, para. 2)
54. (Truschke 2017:Ch. 6, Destroyer of Temples, para. 7)
55. (Truschke 2017:Ch. 6, Destroyer of Temples, para. 7)
56. (Truschke 2017:Ch. 6, Destroyer of Temples, para. 13, 14, 15)
57. Who can forget Shylock the greedy and vengeful moneylender in William Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice* (c. 1600 CE)?
58. See: "Antisemitism Explained." Philadelphia Holocaust Remembrance Foundation/Horwitz-Wasserman Holocaust Memorial Plaza. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (<https://www.philaholocaustmemorial.org/antisemitism-explained>).
59. (Shahane 2019a)
60. (Shahane 2018)
61. (Shahane 2019b)
62. (Shahane 2017)
63. (Shahane 2017)
64. (Elst 2011:26)
65. See: "Explained: A short history of Kashmir before the Mughals." *The Indian Express*. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-a-short-history-of-kashmir-before-the-mughals-5886523>).

66. (Shahane 2017)
67. (Truschke 2021:Ch. 1, Brahmin Silence As the Exception, para. 1)
68. See: Asaru-l Bilad of Zakari'ya Al Kazwini (b. in Kazwin, Persia; written c. 1270 CE), *Tarikh-i Alfî*. Maulânâ Ahmad et al., eds 1582 CE and Kamilu-t Tawarikh of Ibn Asir (b. 555 H., 1160 CE)
69. See: "Tarikhu-s Subuktigin of Abu-l Fazl al Baihaki (b. 388 H., 995 CE; d. 470 H., 1077 CE). A history of Ghaznivites up to 451 H. (1059 CE)." Infinity Foundation. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (https://www.infinityfoundation.com/mandala/h_es/h_es_tarikhu_frameset.htm).
70. (Kanga 2021)
71. (Truschke 2020)
72. (Truschke 2020)
73. (Kanga 2021)
74. (Kanga 2021)
75. (Truschke 2020)
76. (Truschke 2018a)
77. (Kanga 2021)
78. (Truschke 2018a)
79. IIT Bombay, India's premier technology and research institute has a full online course on the development of mathematics in India from ancient times to the present. See: "Mathematics in India – From Vedic Period to Modern Times." NPTEL. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (<https://nptel.ac.in/courses/111/101/111101080>).

Infinity Foundation has published fourteen volumes on the history of Indian science and technology by authors who are experts in their respective fields, and covering domains like the prowess of Indian society in the fields of agriculture, architecture, iron smelting and refining, zinc metallurgy, animal husbandry, water management, hydraulic engineering, bead technology, and various allied technologies. See: "History of Indian Science and Technology | Infinity Foundation Series." Amazon. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (<https://www.amazon.com/History-of-Indian-Science-and-Technology-%257C-Infinity-Foundation-Series-12-book-series/dp/B08NCXRBC8>).

80. The term jihad refers to religious war undertaken by Muslims as their belief or duty. See: "jihad." Merriam Webster. Retrieved on March 15, 2022 (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/jihad>).
81. (Truschke 2021)
82. (Hindustan Times 2014)
83. (Nair 2017)
84. (Pandit 2017)
85. (Unnikrishnan 2021)
86. (Truschke 2020)
87. See: "Scholars discarded the Aryan Invasion Theory before I was born. Hindu nationalists alone keep beating that dead horse. Why? Their own politics and hang-ups. The Aryan Migration Theory is scholarly consensus; the evidence is extraordinarily strong." Twitter. Retrieved on March 15, 2022 (<https://twitter.com/AudreyTruschke/status/1477625885616488454>).
88. (Truschke 2020)
89. For the full range of meanings see: "adhikāra." Kosha.Sanskrit.Today. Retrieved on March 15, 2022 (<https://kosha.sanskrit.today/word/sa/adhikAraH?q=adhik%C4%81ra>).
90. (Sastry and Kalyanasundaram 2022)
91. (Truschke 2015:1)
92. (Truschke 2015:4)
93. (Truschke 2011:507)
94. (Truschke 2015:4)
95. (Truschke 2015:6)
96. (Truschke 2011:513)
97. For the full range of meanings see: "sampradāya." Kosha.Sanskrit.Today. Retrieved on March 15, 2022 (<https://kosha.sanskrit.today/word/sa/sampradAya?q=samprad%C4%81ya>).
98. "If you want to know: How long have people been using the word "Hinduism"? The answer is: With spelling variants, a few hundred years, max. It's a Western idea." Twitter. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (<https://twitter.com/AudreyTruschke/status/1169669344546172928>).

99. "If you want to loosen up on precise vocabulary and ask: How long have people been using the word "Hindu"? The answer is: A thousand years, maybe a tad more. It's a Perso-Arabic invention. Also, the Perso-Arabic "Hindu" sometimes meant Indian, more geographic than religious." Twitter. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (<https://twitter.com/AudreyTruschke/status/1169669653670612994>).
100. (Venkataramakrishnan 2021)
101. "If you want to ask: How long have people relied upon a Hindu holy book? The answer is: What book are we talking about? Vedas? Gita? Ramayana? We oldest layer of the Vedas gives you 3,500 years at the utmost. But how many modern Hindus read the Vedas, or do Vedic sacrifices?" Twitter. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (<https://twitter.com/AudreyTruschke/status/1169670319327580160>).
102. "Most Hindus worship different gods now than Vedic people did 3,500 years ago, and in quite different ways. Bhakti didn't even come about until the CE era. The four aims of Hindu life? Originally, there were only 3 (moksha was added later)." Twitter. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (<https://twitter.com/AudreyTruschke/status/1169671961930338304>).
103. "We could go with the Gita as a core Hindu holy book, but then date-wise we're only going back 2,000 years roughly. For the Ramayana... If you go for stuff like shadow Sita, Lakshmana rekha, etc... you're in the 2nd millennium CE before a lot of that stuff comes up." Twitter. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (<https://twitter.com/AudreyTruschke/status/1169671082653167616>).
104. (Truschke 2011:514)
105. "Another common charge in the campaign to de-legitimize Hinduism is that it had no self-defined and conscious understanding of its own distinctiveness from other religions. The foundation of neo-Hinduism is said to have been built by distorting prior traditions, which themselves had no unity and were a mishmash of irreconcilable texts and local customs." (Malhotra 2016:36)
106. "Since there is no central authority or ecclesiastical structure in Hinduism, no closed canon or 'Bible' of sacred texts, and since there are no 'creeds' to which members of the faith must subscribe, Westerners tend to denigrate it as random, fragmented, chaotic and without unity." (Malhotra 2016:36)
107. "Honestly, when scholars start telling people, including modern Hindus, what's actually in the Vedas, responses sort of go back and

- forth between people falling asleep (lots of hymns in there) and being utterly shocked at animal sacrifice, sexual practices, spells, etc.” Twitter. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (<https://twitter.com/AudreyTruschke/status/1169670603957329920>).
108. See (Malhotra 2016:29-43) where the Rajiv Malhotra summarize the eight basic assumptions or myths underlying the theory of ‘neo-Hinduism’, with a brief response to each.
109. “Dismantling Hindutva conference September 10-12, virtual, cosponsored by 45+ centers / departments at 40+ universities (including Rutgers). Do consider attending to learn more about the threat and power of #Hindutva in our world.” Twitter. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (<https://twitter.com/audreytruschke/status/1426677197855760387>).
110. See: “Hindutva is not Hinduism.” Dismantling Global Hindutva. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (<https://dismantlinghindutva.com/resources/hindutva-is-not-hinduism>).
111. See: “What is Hindutva?” Hindutva Harassment Field Manual. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (<https://www.hindutvaharassmentfieldmanual.org/defininghindutva>).
112. “I take Hindutva as political Hinduism, not a distortion of an older tradition but a continuation of it.” Twitter. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (<https://twitter.com/dghconference/status/1436394578970546187>).
113. “If you're looking to understand this, a couple of thoughts -- Religious identities are not fixed. When Hindus speak and act, as Hindus, they are contributing to defining their tradition and identity. But nobody speaks for all Hindus. Hence, the identity is often contested.” Twitter. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (<https://twitter.com/AudreyTruschke/status/1451584684631236611>).
114. See: “There is a special place in hell for those using the horrific Taliban takeover of Afghanistan—and what it means for women’s rights—to abuse outspoken, educated women. Hindutvavadis — I’m looking at you.” Twitter. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (<https://twitter.com/audreytruschke/status/1427293023159869449>).
115. (Truschke 2019)
116. (Truschke 2019)

117. See: "IN THE SUPREME COURT OF INDIA CIVIL APPELLATE JURISDICTION Civil Appeal Nos 10866-10867 of 2010." Supreme Court of India. Retrieved on March 15, 2022 (https://www.sci.gov.in/pdf/JUD_2.pdf).
118. (Truschke 2019)
119. (Truschke 2019)
120. (Truschke 2019)
121. For the full range of meanings see: "avatāra." Kosha.Sanskrit.Today. Retrieved on March 15, 2022 (<https://kosha.sanskrit.today/word/en/avataara?q=avat%C4%81ra>).
122. (Truschke 2019)
123. See: "Re #RamayanaGate over here, let me correct the reference for Sita's agnipariksha to 6.102-106; criticism from Sita in 6.104. Given here in the English translation of Goldman. Note, especially, vv. 5, 7, and 14." Twitter. Retrieved on March 15, 2022 (<https://twitter.com/AudreyTruschke/status/987371326884151296>).
124. See: "The Scholar Whom Audrey Truschke Cites Finds Her Tweet 'Shocking'." Swarajya. Retrieved on March 15, 2022 (<https://swarajyamag.com/culture/the-scholar-whom-audrey-truschke-cites-finds-her-tweet-shocking>).
- 125 (Rajiv Malhotra Official 2019). Also see: "Lost And Failed In Translation: Audrey Truschke." Swarajya. Retrieved on March 15, 2022 (<https://swarajyamag.com/ideas/lost-and-failed-in-translation-audrey-truschke>).
126. See: "The secret to Audrey Truschke's success (no, it's not her scholarship)." DailyO. Retrieved on March 15, 2022 (<https://www.dailyo.in/voices/audrey-truschke-historian-aurangzeb-william-dalrymple-hindus/story/1/25995.html>).
127. See: "What we Believe." First Baptist Church of Monterey. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (<https://www.fbcmonterey.org/what-we-believe>).
128. (Sify News 2021)
129. (The Hindu 2019)
130. See: "Vakyartha Sadas." Infinity Foundation India. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (<https://infinityfoundationindia.org/vakyartha-sadas>).

131. See: "I shouldn't be shocked at this, but I am nonetheless that 21st-century folks maintain the forceful inclusion of #Sikhs in #Hinduism." Twitter. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (https://drive.google.com/file/d/1iVZiOFL4khOSeGRAWI7_Q9kg5V8OoC_a).
132. See: "Early Hindutva ideologues especially liked Hitler's treatment of Jews. They saw it as a useful model for how to treat Indian Muslims. Think about that, and let that seep in for a bit." Twitter. Retrieved on March 15, 2022 (<https://twitter.com/audreytruschke/status/1085147401319403520>).
133. See: "How #Indian groups and laws use the charge of 'forced religious conversion' to target #minorities and #Dalits." Twitter. Retrieved on February 15, 2022 (<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jeJN0yYo8jvcP0jw1WCaMUSTbKJVdXSS>).
134. The below four Acts very clearly define the scope of Hinduism.
- "The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955." High Court of Punjab and Haryana. Retrieved October 16, 2021 (https://highcourtchd.gov.in/hclsc/subpages/pdf_files/4.pdf).
 - "The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956." Tripura Commission for Women. Retrieved October 16, 2021 (<http://tcw.nic.in/Acts/Hindu%20adoption%20and%20Maintenance%20Act.pdf>).
 - "Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956." National Commission for Protection of Child Rights. Retrieved October 16, 2021 (http://www.ncpcr.gov.in/view_file.php?fid=423).
 - "The Hindu Succession Act, 1956 (HSA)." National Commission for Women. Retrieved October 16, 2021 (<http://ncwapps.nic.in/acts/TheHinduSuccessionAct1956.pdf>).
135. The theory of Sanskrit Non-Translatables (SNT) first introduced in the book, *Being Different* and later developed into a complete thesis in *Sanskrit Non-Translatables : The Importance of Sanskritizing English*, suggested that Western scholars and Westernized Indians often translate and map dharmic concepts and perspectives onto Western frameworks. This is problematic since Dharmic traditions are compromised and many elements atrophy when the Western substitutes become acceptable, although they may not accurately represent the original Indian idea. This inadequate translation of vocabulary facilitates the cultural digestion of dharma into the West and during this process, often carried out under the guise of modernity

many crucial distinctions and understandings are lost, and important, productive and visionary dimension of dharma are eradicated and relegated to antiquity. The SNT book takes these ideas forward and launches a new movement using Sanskrit Non-Translatables as a device for protecting key ideas from getting distorted, plagiarized, or allowed to become obsolete. See: (Malhotra and Babaji 2020)

136. See: "Ram Guha, Sanjay Raut distance themselves as 'Concerned Scholars' after a letter purportedly signed by them against Vikram Sampath goes viral." OpIndia. Retrieved on March 15, 2022 (<https://www.opindia.com/2022/02/ramchandra-guha-sanjay-raut-vikram-sampath-letter-audrey-truschke-did-not-sign>).

137. See: "Delhi HC bars 3 historians from publishing defamatory material on Vikram Sampath." Times of India. Retrieved on March 15, 2022 (<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/books/features/delhi-hc-bars-3-historians-from-publishing-defamatory-material-on-vikram-sampath/articleshow/89698944.cms>).

138. dharmah̄ tasmāddharmāt paraṃ nāsty atho abaliyān baliyāṃsamāsāmsate dharmeṇa yathā rājñāivam ।

yo vai sa dharmah̄ satyaṃ vai tat tasmātsatyaṃ vadantamāhur dharmam̄ vadatīti dharmam̄ vā vadantaṃ satyaṃ vadatīty etaddhyevaitadubhayaṃ bhavati ॥

Nothing is higher than dharma. The weak overcomes the stronger by dharma, as over a king. Truly that dharma is the Truth (Satya); Therefore, when a man speaks the Truth, they say, "He speaks the Dharma"; and if he speaks Dharma, they say, "He speaks the Truth!" For both are one. — Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 1.4.xiv

139. dhṛtiḥ kṣamā damo'steyaṃ śaucamindriyanigrahaḥ ।

dhīrvidyā satyamakrodho daśakaṃ dharmalakṣaṇam ॥

(1) Steadiness (2) Forgiveness, (3) Self-control, (4) Abstention from unrighteous appropriation, (5) Purity, (6) Control of the Sense-organs, (7) Discrimination, (8) Knowledge, (9) Truthfulness, and (10) Absence of anger,- these are the ten-fold forms of duty. — Manusmriti 6.92