



Ash Regan MSP
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

CC: Colin Beattie MSP, Stephanie Callaghan MSP, Bill Kidd MSP, Stuart McMillan MSP, Kevin Stewart MSP

16th May 2025

Dear Ash Regan MSP

RE Motion S6M-17089: Free speech and caste discrimination concerns

We, the undersigned, are concerned that you have recently backed a motion (S6M-17089) in the Scottish Parliament supporting a report by the Gandhian Peace Society entitled “Hinduphobia in Scotland”. While we agree that it is important to tackle hatred and discrimination against all groups in society, including Hindus, we believe this report advocates the wrong approach. Conflating criticism of caste-based inequality and majoritarian political ideologies with hatred of Hindus risks suppressing legitimate democratic discourse—particularly around caste discrimination and Hindutva, a political project that promotes an exclusionary and essentialist vision of ‘Hindu’ identity.

The report recommends “legal reforms” for “strengthened hate crime legislation that addresses explicitly religious-based crimes, ensuring robust penalties for those involved in hate crimes against Hindus”. However, an example of such “hate crimes” given in the report include a Scottish university lecturer who was “criticised for using derogatory and offensive terms to describe Hindu gods and goddesses in his course materials”. We were unable to find further details about this incident, as the citation provided in the report curiously does not make any reference to it. However, it is clear no one should be criminalised for speech which offends religious sentiments. This would amount to the return of a blasphemy law, which was abolished in Scotland last year.

Another example given in the report of “hate crimes” is that of a couple in Aberdeen who were refused a marriage certificate by a registrar who said their Hindu wedding ceremony was not valid. Again, we know nothing further about this incident because no citation is provided. But whether a marriage is legally recognised is determined by many factors. A registrar should not face accusation of a hate crime because they believe a ceremony, religious or not, does not constitute a legal wedding.

Furthermore, the report includes examples of “Hinduphobic words” which, if censored, could undermine the ability to criticise aspects of Hinduism.

One of these words, “Hindutvavadi”, refers to those who support Hindutva. Proscribing this word as “Hinduphobic” would seriously affect the ability to criticise Hindutva, particularly among those within the British-Indian community.



The report also describes the words “Brahmanism” and “savarna” as “Hinduphobic”. These terms are widely used to describe caste-based hierarchies and upper-caste privilege that persist across religious, agnostic, and secular spaces in India. Labelling them as hate speech undermines efforts to address caste discrimination and silences marginalised voices seeking justice. Forbidding people to use these words, and therefore talk about upper castes, would inhibit members of oppressed castes from speaking about their oppression. We note there are many derogatory words for members of oppressed castes, but none of these have been listed as “Hinduphobic” alongside the upper caste terms.

It should be noted that many Hindu organisations have resisted attempts to tackle, or even talk about, caste discrimination in the UK. A ‘Hindu manifesto’ published by a coalition of Hindu groups last year suggested it is ‘Hinduphobic’ to link caste with Hinduism¹. Groups including the Hindu Council of Britain have opposed legislation to protect members of oppressed castes from discrimination². The Hindu Council even threatened a group hosting an event on caste discrimination with police action in 2023³.

Scotland has robust laws against hate crime and discrimination against people of all religions and beliefs via the Equality Act 2010 and the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021. The latter includes vital free speech protections which ensure expressions of “antipathy, dislike, ridicule or insult towards” religion are not considered hate crimes in themselves. Adopting the Gandhian Peace Society’s recommendations would be incompatible with these protections and would silence those who wish to speak out against caste discrimination, Hindutva or any other controversial topics related to Hinduism.

We therefore urge you, and all other MSPs who have backed the motion, to withdraw your support from motion S6M-17089.

Thank you for your time on this matter. We look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Megan Manson

Head of Campaigns, National Secular Society

Santosh Dass MBE

Chair, Anti Caste Discrimination Alliance

Professor Meena Dhanda

University of Wolverhampton

Dr Elizabeth Joy

Director, Dalit Solidarity Network UK

Sat Pal Muman

Chair, Caste Watch UK

India Labour Solidarity

¹ <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2024/06/hindu-manifesto-demands-would-silence-human-rights-groups-nss-warns>

² <https://www.hindu counciluk.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/cir416-Hindu%20Council%20UK%20letter%20Caste%20Legislation.pdf>

³ <https://www.hindu counciluk.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/cir416-Hindu%20Council%20UK%20letter%20Caste%20Legislation.pdf>