

[Texas Cult Disaster Is a Problem for U.S. Hindus](#)

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## Texas Cult Disaster Is a Problem for U.S. Hindus

### Texas Cult Disaster Is a Problem for U.S. Hindus Christian Group's Suicidal Stand Evokes Suspicion Toward Minority Religions

The ashes of David Koresh's Ranch Apocalypse had barely cooled before small religious groups in the USA were feeling the heat of renewed religious intolerance. At a public hearing on a proposed Hindu temple in New Jersey, no less a figure than the vice-chairperson of the local Democratic Party suggested an investigation be made into the "type of religion" to be practiced in the temple because of what happened in Texas. Another resident called for an investigation into the temple's Bhakti Nidhi Trust and its finances because, "We are living in an age of terrorists." Many local residents opposed the temple, and the meeting "almost turned into street fights," according to newspaper accounts. But why should Hindus get the brunt of the backlash? Koresh was a Christian, not a Hindu, and his actions came from his interpretation of the Christian Bible and Christian theology. His lawless "Branch Davidians" cult, as shocking and embarrassing as it was to mainstream Christians, cannot be wishfully left at another religion's door. Hindus, even in the West, are generally unconcerned about the "cult" issue, rightly believing it doesn't apply to Hindu groups. But in the popular mind and media, "cults" are inextricably connected with "the East." When western Christians and psychologists talk about "cults," they often cite groups which have some sort of origin in Hinduism, even though most cults, like the Branch Davidians, are Christian. Well-known cult expert Prof. Margaret Singer of the University of California lists 14 types of cults in a pamphlet written by the American Family Foundation. The first is "eastern religious." Hinduism Today researched ten sources on "cults" and compiled a list of 120 organizations said to be cults, only seven of which had Hindu origins! The fact is that most "cults" are Christian, not Hindu or Buddhist or eastern. What is a Cult? In its broadest sense, cult is synonymous with sect, and in this sense Hinduism, as do all religions, has various sects. However, in recent decades the meaning of cult has narrowed considerably and now includes claims of such practices as brainwashing, manipulation and isolation. The American Family Foundation, an anti-cult group, offers this extended definition: "A group or movement exhibiting a great or excessive devotion or dedication to some person, idea or thing, and employing unethically manipulative techniques of persuasion and control designed to advance the goals of the group's leaders, to the actual or possible detriment of members, their families or the community." To many Christians the term cult has narrowed even further and refers to groups who stray from traditional Christian belief. Ronald Enroth, a Christian and professor of sociology at Westmont College

states in *The Lure of the Cults*, "Any group, movement or teaching may be considered cultic to the degree it deviates from biblical, orthodox Christianity." By this definition anything Hindu becomes a cult--such as the New Jersey temple--because it is not Christianity. One book, *The New Cults*, actually lists "Hinduism"--the world's oldest religion with 800 million followers--as a cult! Who are the cults? The ten books and pamphlets examined were published by "anti-cult" groups. They included *The Encyclopedic Handbook of Cults in America* by Gordon Melton, *The Kingdom of the Cults* by Walter Martin and *The Lure of the Cults* by Ronald Enroth. While "2,000 or 3,000" cults are claimed to exist, there were only about 120 names actually listed in all these sources [see sidebar for a sample]. Of those 120 organizations, 63 were Christian, and 49 either Jewish, Buddhist, Parsee, Islamic, Satanic, Sikh, Spiritualist, "Mind Science," Theosophical, Wiccan or difficult to classify. Seven had Hindu origins--either their teacher was a Hindu, or the teacher's teacher. They are: Ananda Cooperative Community, Ananda Marga, Hare Krishna, Kripalu Ashram, Siddha Yoga Dham, Self Realization Fellowship and Transcendental Meditation. It is noteworthy that, with the exception of the Hare Krishnas, none of these organizations claim to be Hindu, nor do their followers consider themselves Hindus. So why are Hindus singled out for special scorn in the hunt for cults? High profile visibility is one answer. The easily identifiable Hare Krishnas have been seen by everyone in the West, and they are regularly depicted in movies. A million Americans have studied Transcendental Meditation. The Beatles' and other stars' involvement with Hare Krishna and TM provided worldwide publicity for both movements. The organization founded by Rajneesh, a Jain whose followers never claimed to be Hindus, was blamed upon Hinduism nevertheless. Another answer is that those attacking the cults find it useful to portray cults as a foreign phenomenon, in an effort to focus the public's fear and loathing away from the Christian origins of most cults. Of Messiah, Millennium and Apocalypse The cult phenomenon as it is being experienced in the West is related to specific Christian and Jewish beliefs, which beliefs Hindus do not share. The first is the belief in the Messiah. The Jews rejected Christ and still await the true Messiah. For example, Steven Hassan said, "If [Rev. Sun Myung] Moon is the Messiah, I reasoned, then I will be fulfilling my Jewish heritage by following him." Hassan's family eventually talked him out of his involvement with the Moonies; he is a professional "exit counselor," charging families thousands of dollars to "rescue" relatives from "destructive cults." The second and third beliefs--the millennium and the apocalypse--both come from the last book of the Christian Bible, "The Revelation of Saint John the Divine." In this remarkable chapter, Saint John describes a terrible vision he has had of the judgment of God, and various disasters which will befall mankind. The millennium (Revelations 20:1-5) refers to the return of Jesus, the Messiah, for a thousand-year reign; some Christians expect this to begin in the year 2000. The Apocalypse is an alternate name for Revelations, and is the ultimate destruction--much of it by fire--of evil and triumph of good which precedes the return of Christ and the thousand-year reign. David Koresh believed in this, indeed his compound was named Ranch Apocalypse. The US government was the evil force, and the final result a fulfillment of his own prophecy through the death by fiery suicide of himself and 85 followers including many women and children. His

remaining followers, including the children, expect Koresh, their Messiah, to return at any moment. The point of examining these parts of Christian philosophy is to show that they are not Hindu. Hindus don't believe in an apocalypse or a thousand-year reign. Hindus--who believe God is in all things and evil does not exist--do not formulate philosophies which make everyone else in the world their enemy, as Koresh did. Hindus do not share the passionate anguish and fear of God and hell which empowers many cults. Why do People Fear the Cults? Most westerners are not like the evangelical and fundamentalist Christians who make holy war on heretical cults--a battle with more than a passing similarity to the Inquisition and witch-hunts of earlier centuries. The common person's concerns are different, and real. There are religious organizations who break the law; Koresh's group was just one. Others make use of deception in their recruiting and fund-raising programs (such as the Moonies, according to Hassan). Still others enter the political arena, trying to win elections, or buy up houses with the intent to take over a town, as Rajneesh did in Antelope, Oregon. These activities affect the average citizen's security, safety and financial investment. They concern governments and cause files to be opened in FBI offices. The cult literature is unfortunately heavily tainted by Christian religious preconceptions. There are few neutral experts to adequately distinguish between groups with different or unusual beliefs and those with true potential for lawless and destructive behavior. What do Hindus do About it? The Hindus in New Jersey have a problem. The local Sayerville residents think the Hindu temple could be the next Ranch Apocalypse surrounded by tanks and hundreds of heavily armed FBI agents. Or perhaps the next Antelope, Oregon, to be bought up by a strange group, causing land values to fall. Hindus must understand the "cult issue" and the true sense of fear which it has generated in those 500 residents of Sayerville. Public relations is the key. This can be done on a person-to-person basis where temple representatives meet the important members of the community, go door to door introducing themselves to the neighbors; hold meetings for the express purpose of explaining who they are and what they intend; make contact with ministers and rabbis of existing congregations in the area requesting their support; and meet local civil liberty groups. Hindus can set up free medical clinics for the poor, establish scholarships at local schools, join local community organizations, participate in public events and make sure they employ non-Hindu people in their businesses. Hindus in Atlanta, Georgia, and Flint, Michigan, have used these methods successfully. There are hindrances to the acceptance of Hindus all over the western world [see also the page one article on Europe]. The cult issue compounds the problems caused by racism, immigration and economic impact. But by wise public relations, Hindus can distance themselves from the cult issue and be seen for what they are, an asset, not a problem, for a community. Who Are the Cult-Watchers Watching? These approximately fifty groups appear to be the largest and/or best known of the 120 listed in ten common sources on cults. Many are not cults at all. We list them only to show how cult watchers are monitoring religious groups. They are listed according to the religion of the founder. "Spiritualist and Mind Science" include some organizations which are only partly religious. Buddhist: Zen Buddhism, Soka Gakkai International. Christian: Apostolic United Brethren; Boston Church of Christ; Christian Conservative Church of

America; Christian Foundation; Church of Christ, Scientist [Christian Scientists]; Church of Israel; Church of Jesus Christ Christian; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints [Mormons]; Church of the Living Word; Family of Love; Fatima Crusaders; Foundation of Human Understanding; Great Commission International, Identity Movement (including The Covenant, Sword and the Arm of the Lord); Jehovah's Witness; Local Church of Witness Lee; Love Family; Ministry of Christ Church; New Christian Crusade Church; Northeast Kingdom; People's Temple [Jim Jones]; Unification Church [the Moonies]; United Order Effort; University Bible Fellowship; Way International; Worldwide Church of God. Hindu: Ananda Marga; Hare Krishna; Siddha Yoga Dham; Transcendental Meditation. Islam: American Muslim Mission; Nation of Islam; Sufism; Yahweh (Christian/Muslim). Jain: OSHA [Rajneesh]. Sikh: Sikh Dharma (Happy, Healthy, Holy Organization). Sant Mat Tradition: Eckankar; Movement of Spiritual Inner Awareness. Spiritualist, Theosophy, Mind Science: Church of Scientology; est (The Forum); Frederick Lenz/Rama; Lifespring; National Spiritualist Association of Churches; One, Inc.; Universal Church of the Master; Universal Harmony Foundation; Church Universal and Triumphant.