

[We Don't Worship Cows!](#)

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IN MY OPINION

We Don't Worship Cows!

I am proud to be Hindu and happy to explain why

Gautam Rama Varma Pathial

I am a Indian Hindu living in the state of Oregon, on the west coast of the United States. There are only 11,000 Indians in this state. I am the only one in my school district, and there are none in the two neighboring districts. My nearest Indian neighbor lives 45 minutes away.

While I was attending public school, a lot of kids asked me questions about Hinduism. Some of these queries--like "Why do you worship cows?"--are easier to answer than others. Especially challenging are the sarcastically nettling questions like: "You want a bite of beef?" or "Are you going to sacrifice me to your Goddess?" Usually, I am able to keep a level head. When I get asked the tough questions, I find myself thanking God for the chance to answer, but also praying that my responses are suitable.

That question about sacrificing people was almost certainly inspired by the film, Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom, in which a Kali cult is depicted as bloodthirsty murderers who sacrifice people. Movie director Steven Spielberg and story-writer George Lucas surely meant no harm in their movie, but their presentation innocently reflected an all-too-common ignorance among the non-Hindu public in their perception of Hinduism.

I have been attending regular classes at the Chinmaya Mission Balavihar since I was

five years old. There I have been fortunate to learn of the deep mysticism of Hinduism, and also about Indian culture. The spiritual titan Swami Vivekananda said: "Unity is Knowledge, diversity is ignorance. This knowledge is your birthright. I have not to teach it to you. There were never different religions in the world." Inspired by this and a saying often repeated at the Chinmaya Mission, "knowledge is power, " I find myself deeply rooted and firm in my beliefs. I am not one to be swayed.

Thanks to this training and the wisdom of my mother, I have been able to intelligently deflect many insults and answer many antagonistic questions at school.

When I am asked about cows, I calmly reply: "First of all, we don't worship cows. We respect them. India is a land where farming is a common job, and thus, cows play a big part in the lives of many Indians. They help us in many ways. Even their cow dung is used. (Then, of course, I would go on to explain this). And besides, what does it matter if I don't eat cow? Do you eat snakes? Or dogs? No? Dogs are quite a delicacy in Korea, you know."

As for the questions about human sacrifice, I explain to them that George Lucas just needed to create some villains who did horrific things. He was not trying to make a statement about Hinduism. Then I clarify that sacrificing human beings is definitely not in our scriptures.

Growing up Hindu in America was a bit unnerving at first. This was simply because many of the people that I met did not know anything about Hinduism. And people generally fear what they do not understand.

Being Hindu is something that I have always been proud of. I was raised that way. I feel sad when I see another Hindu kid laughing along with the jokes that are made about us and our culture.

When we put up barriers between people on the basis of religion or race, we are allowing ourselves to become ignoble bigots. If a fellow student ridicules my religion, I do not have to turn around and ridicule his.

Any advice I might have is directed toward other Hindu youth like myself, growing up in America. It is this: "Don't get disheartened by the ridiculous questions and insulting comments that are flung upon you. Be proud of the religion that you belong to. Be a good, exemplary Hindu. If you can do that, you will have achieved something that you can truly be proud of."

Gautam Pathial, 15, lives with his parents in Newberg, Oregon, where he attends private school and aspires to be a lawyer.