

# 10 BRIEFING Common Misconceptions About Hinduism

Simple corrections can prevent public remarks from repeating old stereotypes.

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**Misconception: Hinduism is polytheistic.**

Hindu traditions are pluralistic, describing one ultimate reality (“God”) through many divine forms and names.

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**Misconception: Hindus worship idols.**

A murti is a sacred, consecrated form that focuses devotion and helps worshippers relate to the all-pervading Universal Consciousness (“God”).

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**Misconception: Every Indian is Hindu.**

India is a religiously diverse, secular democracy and the ancestral homeland of Hinduism. According to India’s 2011 Census — the latest official census reporting religious affiliation — Hindus constituted 79.8% of the population. Hindus also live throughout the world.

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**Misconception: All Hindus practice in the same way.**

Hinduism allows personal freedom in worship. Practices vary by family, philosophy, region, language, temple, and individual devotion.

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**Misconception: Caste defines Hinduism and Hindu Americans.**

The modern caste system was shaped and hardened under British colonial rule; caste distinctions continue in parts of India’s population. Hindu traditions affirm the inherent divinity of all human beings. The Carnegie Endowment’s nationally representative surveys of Indian Americans (2020 and 2024) found caste-based discrimination to be the least common form reported, at 5–7%, well below discrimination based on skin color, religion, or country of origin.

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**Misconception: The Hindu swastika represents Nazism.**

The word swastika comes from Sanskrit and names an ancient sacred symbol associated with well-being and good fortune. Its use in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain settings differs fundamentally in history, meaning, and context from the Nazi emblem, or Hakenkreuz. Public leaders should recognize both the profound trauma associated with the Nazi emblem and the sacred meaning of the swastika in Dharmic traditions.

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**Misconception: Hindu Americans are answerable for Indian politics.**

Hindu Americans hold diverse views on India and international affairs. They should not be treated as collectively associated with the policies of any foreign government or assumed to share a single political position.

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**FOR PUBLIC LEADERS**

If a public issue involves a contested topic, seek qualified and diverse Hindu perspectives before making a broad statement. [HinduAmericanBrief.org](https://HinduAmericanBrief.org) can provide resources.