



Vishva Hindu Parishad of Australia Inc.

World Hindu Council

31 January 2024



The Office of the SBS Ombudsman
Australia

Subject: Hindu Australians Condemn SBS's False Reporting on Shri Ram Mandir in India

Dear [REDACTED], Namaste

We extend our gratitude for considering our request and affording us the opportunity to provide further insights.

In the modern, enlightened world, there is a collective condemnation of supremacist ideologies and the oppression they propagate. It is universally acknowledged that a marginalised community cannot flourish economically or even survive for long, without reclaiming their dignity.

It is an incontrovertible truth that the path to reclaiming dignity involves shedding the vestiges of oppressive colonialism and reinstating indigenous cultural norms. The global embrace of decolonisation and cultural reclamation underscores this imperative, yet the acceptance of such endeavours seems curiously elusive when it concerns Hindus.

Consider, for instance, the transformation of the Hagia Sophia Church. Originally erected in 537 CE, it underwent conversions over centuries, from a church to a mosque and eventually a museum during the Turkish Republic. However, in late 2020, both Hagia Sophia and the Church of the Holy Saviour in Chora were swiftly reconverted into mosques, reflecting a poignant yearning to reclaim historical narratives.

This historical precedent illustrates the profound sentiment attached to reclaiming cultural heritage. It underscores the imperative for modern society to rectify historical injustices without assigning blame, acknowledging the power dynamics that led to colonial impositions.

The disputed structure erected by Babur atop an existing temple exemplifies colonial oppression—a manifestation of supremacist dominance. This assertion finds validation in Babur's own racially charged biographical accounts, corroborated by irrefutable archaeological evidence presented in democratic judicial proceedings.

For India to stride confidently towards economic prosperity and cultural liberation, the dismantling of such structures was imperative—a symbolic rejection of supremacist narratives it suffered over 700 years of invasion and occupation.

The biased narrative perpetuated by SBS mirrors the insidious tactics of denial often employed to obfuscate historical realities. By perpetuating misinformation and distorting historical truths, SBS inadvertently perpetuates the erasure of Hindu suffering at the hands of invaders who came to India to loot, persecute, and convert.

Australia's largest Hindu organisation

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We question the necessity for SBS to engage overseas content creators when Australia boasts an abundance of journalistic talent. Outsourcing reporting undermines local expertise and deprives indigenous voices of representation.

By harnessing local insights, we can ensure a more nuanced and culturally sensitive portrayal of Hindu perspectives. Recent celebrations within the Hindu and Indian communities in Australia serve as a testament to the peaceful coexistence and communal harmony that we seek to foster.

We reference the SBS code of practice to underscore our objections, demonstrating that our concerns are not merely emotive but rooted in a genuine demand for journalistic integrity.

We implore SBS to heed our call for balanced and equitable reporting, reflective of Australia's multicultural fabric.

SBS Code of Practice:

To ensure our content meets community expectations, we have the SBS Code of Practice, which sets out rules and standards for all SBS content no matter where you access it – on television, radio, online, or on social media. The Code of Practice covers important matters like...

TRUST

How we provide trustworthy and relevant content

Our news and current affairs content is accurate, balanced and impartial, and in the public interest.

1. The article egregiously neglects to acknowledge that the disputed temple site has historical roots dating back over 2500 years, with archaeological evidence confirming the existence of a pre-existing temple beneath the mosque.
2. By selectively emphasising the deconstruction of the sixteenth-century mosque, the article wilfully ignores the historical context: the mosque was erected by Mughal invaders upon the desecrated remains of the original Shri Ram Mandir, an act of cultural erasure and religious subjugation.
3. Rather than merely a belief held by Hindus, it has been conclusively established by both Canadian geophysicists and Indian archaeologists that the mosque was indeed constructed atop the ruins of a pre-existing temple, debunking any notion of conjecture.
4. The article conveniently omits the documented actions of Babur in 1528 A.D., during which he not only destroyed the ancient temple but also erected a mosque in its stead, commonly referred to as 'Jamabhoomi Mosque' (birthplace mosque) and 'Babur's mosque', further affirming the deliberate obliteration of indigenous religious structures.
5. Absent from the SBS report is any mention of the extensive archaeological surveys and historical records attesting to the presence of temples on the site dating back to 2000 BCE, an oversight that undermines the depth of historical injustice endured by the Hindu community.
6. The SBS report disregards established archaeological findings and historical documentation confirming the presence of temples on the disputed site since ancient times, a glaring omission that distorts the historical narrative.

7. The construction of the Mandir was sanctioned by the Supreme Court of India following a rigorous legal process, culminating in a unanimous decision by a five-member bench, underscoring the legitimacy and authority behind the temple's reconstruction.
8. In a landmark verdict, the Indian Supreme Court, including a Muslim judge among its five-member bench, conclusively ruled in 2019 that the mosque was erected atop a Hindu structure. This decision, reached after decades of legal deliberation, affirmed the Hindu community's rightful claim to the land.
9. Over a span of 70 years, the protracted legal battle provided ample opportunity for Muslim litigants to present evidence supporting their case, yet their failure to substantiate their claims underscores the thoroughness of the judicial process.
10. Despite the absence of evidence presented to the Indian Supreme Court (highest court of India) validating the mosque's uninterrupted use as a place of worship from 1528 to 1858, the article fails to acknowledge this critical legal discrepancy, perpetuating a distorted narrative.
11. Recognising the importance of religious harmony, the Indian judiciary facilitated the construction of a new mosque for Muslim litigants, demonstrating a commitment to addressing the grievances of all parties involved.
12. Hundreds of innocent lives, both Hindu and Muslim, were tragically lost in the wake of the Ayodhya dispute, yet the article selectively downplays the atrocities endured by Hindu devotees, perpetuating a one-sided portrayal of the conflict.
13. The article fails to acknowledge heinous acts of violence perpetrated against Hindu pilgrims, such as the barbaric attack on peaceful devotees aboard a train, illustrating a clear bias in the reporting.
14. The misreporting of casualty figures, including those from the Mumbai riots, underscores the need for accurate and responsible journalism, as erroneous statistics only serve to further inflame tensions and perpetuate misinformation.
15. By framing Hindus as aggressors and Muslims as victims, the article grossly oversimplifies the complexities of the Ayodhya dispute, neglecting the shared suffering experienced by both communities and perpetuating divisive narratives.
16. Contrary to the article's insinuations, India's minorities, including Muslims and Christians, are afforded equal rights and protections under the law, with special provisions in place to safeguard their religious freedoms and educational opportunities.
17. The assertion that minorities in India live in a state of fear lacks substantiation and fails to account for the diverse experiences of individuals within these communities. Prominent figures like Mr. KK Mohammed and Mr. Iqbal Ansari, who supported the temple construction, exemplify the nuanced perspectives that challenge sweeping generalisations about religious harmony in India.

RESPECT

How we practice and promote respect

We avoid content that promotes prejudice and discrimination including the unjustified use of stereotypes, taking context into account.

1. The media's portrayal of the Ayodhya dispute should transcend narrow religious categorisations and instead focus on presenting an objective analysis grounded in historical facts. By refraining from framing the issue solely through the lens of Hindu-Muslim conflict, journalists can foster a more nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding the dispute.
2. The article in question employs language fraught with bias and prejudice, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and discriminatory narratives.
3. Terms such as 'muscular', 'Hindu zealots', and 'Hindu mobs' serve to sensationalise the issue and vilify a particular religious community, while the labelling of a political party as 'secularist' introduces partisan bias into the discourse. Such usage is unacceptable and undermines the principles of fair and balanced journalism.
4. The construction of the disputed structure by Babur atop an existing temple was a manifestation of colonial oppression and power dynamics, as evidenced by historical accounts and archaeological findings presented in a court of law. Rather than providing an objective and informative report, the SBS article perpetuates prejudice and bigotry by failing to contextualise the historical injustices underlying the dispute.

SBS Charter, contained in Section 6 of the Special Broadcasting Service Act 1991, states:

(1) The principal function of the SBS is to provide multilingual and multicultural broadcasting and digital media services that inform, educate and entertain all Australians and, in doing so, reflect Australia's multicultural society.

(2) The SBS, in performing its principal function, must:

(c) promote understanding and acceptance of the cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity of the Australian people; and

The shortcomings of the SBS article are twofold:

1. The failure to deliver unbiased, evidence-based coverage that educates and informs all Australians, reflecting the diverse tapestry of our multicultural society.
2. By politicising a religious event of immense significance to the Hindu community, SBS perpetuates discord and Hindu antipathy, undermining its purported commitment to fostering understanding and acceptance of cultural diversity.
3. Inconsistencies in SBS's approach are evident in its support for Aboriginal reconciliation while neglecting to extend the same recognition and respect to the Hindu community's quest for cultural restoration. The significance of the birthplace of Shri Ram Bhagwan to Hindus is tantamount to the reverence afforded to Aboriginal sacred sites like Uluru or Lake Mungo.

By meticulously addressing each point, we hope to underscore the imperative for balanced and accurate reporting that upholds journalistic integrity and fosters a deeper understanding of complex socio-cultural issues.

The Hindu Australian community finds itself marginalised and misrepresented by SBS's biased reporting, which not only fosters anti-social sentiments but also undermines communal harmony. Such irresponsible journalism jeopardises the hard-earned reputation of SBS as a champion of multicultural values.

We urge SBS to rectify this by presenting a balanced narrative of the developments surrounding the construction of the Ram Mandir. This entails acknowledging the legal processes, compensation measures, and broader historical context surrounding this landmark event.

Constructive dialogue and understanding among communities are essential to nurturing unity and religious harmony, principles that must guide SBS's editorial approach.

To ensure fair and accurate reporting, we request that SBS scrutinises the current and future articles authored by specific journalists, ensuring they adhere to journalistic standards and refrain from omitting crucial facts to skew the narrative against Hindus.

We extend an invitation to meet with you or the board in person to elucidate our position further. Additionally, I am available to provide comments or inputs as needed to foster a more inclusive and respectful discourse.

In conclusion, it is imperative that SBS upholds its commitment to diversity and inclusivity by accurately representing the perspectives and experiences of all communities, thereby fostering a more harmonious and unified society.

I thank you again for the opportunity to present our views and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



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