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Sent: Fri, February 5, 2010 9:03:29 PM
Subject: "The Hindus -An Alternative History" -Does It Deserve An Award?

Barbara Hoffert
NBCC, VP/Awards
360 Park Avenue South
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Dear Ms. Hoffert,

I was appalled to learn that the NBCC is considering Wendy Doniger as a potential honoree for her book entitled **"The Hindus - An Alternative History"**. Since people like me are the subject matter of the book, you might accept that at the very least ,as a Hindu, I am entitled to offer my views.

The Great Buddha, once referring to the rules of speech had advised to **" Speak only what is true, what is kind and what is necessary"**. Dr. Doniger's failure to satisfy any of these preliminary maxims and your intent to disregard this fundamental edict can only be ascribed to a single possibility -that by pedigree,learning, ethos,faith or sensitivity most of you are not Hindus.Therefore,one must reach the inescapable conclusion that you happen to **like** what the author stands for, or represents in her viewpoints, despite not being ideally positioned to judge it's veracity or quality.The famed Wendy Doniger deserves yet another award because her work **resonates with your impression** of the Hindus.**Thus, by honoring her, you shall reveal yourselves as well.**The issue at hand is of some importance because the work is not a Dan Brown novel - the author purports to present the history of a billion people and **you** assume the mantle of deciding the quality of this historical work.The history of Hindus is a continuing saga that began through an oral tradition and continued into a vast Sanskritic (and regional) literary tradition whose corpus includes, both the sacred and philosophical (theistic,non theistic and atheistic/agnostic) along with the scientific and secular

(grammar and language, logic and art, astronomy and mathematics, life sciences and earth sciences). It is only either the very ignorant or the very mischievous, who would dare encapsulate Hindu history under a brazen title such as "The Hindus- an alternative history"- creating an impression that the author has mastered the original history and felt compelled to offer a more adequate alternative. This masterly alternative seems to convey, to the uninitiated or casual, that the Hindu history is nothing more than a tale of heathens who worship sexually deviant mythic characters, deleting in one Machiavellian stroke, a vast portion of the creative output of a timeless civilization. The Hindus are to the world civilization, what grammar is to Language, numbers to Mathematics or strings to Music - their tradition is undoubtedly, a world heritage. In brief, when you talk of Hindu history, you talk of **all** that the term Hindu encompasses - a monumental creation of rare breath, diversity and quality accrued through the collective striving of countless visionary geniuses from the beginnings of time. The Hindu history stretches well beyond a multiplicity of diverse spiritual and philosophical streams to include the sciences and arts. Ignorance of the above is not to be begrudged but deliberate reduction, trivialization and selective distortion is a malefic act -to support it through awards, an institutional crime. The Hindu ethos was deep and dynamic enough to survive the slaughter of the Islamic invaders and rapacious plunder of the West. Unfortunately, the violence that Wendy Doniger re-inflicts on Hindus, to your approving applause, is as pernicious -being an assault on Hindu ideals.

Does it occur to any of you, that the Hindu, heathen or not, is free to choose his ideal and worship whatever symbols he holds sacred- that, his right to pursue his faith without public or private ridicule or persecution is no less sacrosanct than the rights of a Jew, a Christian or a Moslem. The rights to free speech do not include the freedom to indulge in cultural violence or desecration of symbols- just because they are alien. The Hindus are capable of a befitting reply -it is just that their philosophical worldview does not include crusades, evangelism, conversions, Jihad, sanctions, fatwahs, racism or imperialism- as they view all creation as one. Might I suggest greater introspection in your thinking so that you stop supporting cultural and religious imperialism -just because you have the temporal ability and a cultural inclination towards it.

The Wendy Donigers of academia, put to shame, the egalitarian vision of the founding fathers of this great nation. On your part, you need only to ask yourself, whether you have the qualifications to decide on the merits of the book in question - do you know Sanskrit and have access to authentic indigenous literary resources? do you have the experience of being born in a Hindu family to experience the living faith? have you lived in India and been in the company of great Acharyas and masters to know the oral tradition? have you even reviewed any of the translated literature of the Hindu

philosophical tradition that is available outside India eg in Chinese, Russian, Romanian, Greek, Arabic, Mongolian, Lithuanian, Celtic or even in English (when that language became somewhat adequate in the last four centuries). Does Wendy Doniger have a scholarship based on such experience? If not, then why does she need to offer an alternate history? Isn't history of any race, the chronicle of it's own people- in it's own language, through its own symbolism and through it's own eyes? Need I offer more pointers to the obvious? One wonders why there is so much gut wrenching over a politician's use of "retarded" or "negro" -self righteous institutions trip over each other in offering condemnation! When a billion people and their faith are trashed, their religion desecrated, the same self righteous institutions actually consider granting awards -is racism more acceptable when one doesn't have to worry about voter backlash ? ***As a Hindu, I seek divinity all around me, even in the profane - Dr. Doniger, your potential honoree, seeks the profane all around her -even in the divine. I hope you shall have the courage to accept that the essential difference in our individual propensities and choices are rooted in our individual civilizations -let us now, as citizens of one nation, decide together- what we wish our America to be.***

Regretfully,

Subroto Gangopadhyay, MD FACC