

OPINION

Fostering Religious Inclusion: The Hindu Student Association

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Trinity College fosters a diverse student body comprising both domestic and international students from a wide range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Despite these differences, religious faith has the potential to serve as a unifying force, bridging divides within the international student community as well as between international and domestic students. As an institution founded in 1823 on a religious foundation — signified by its very name, which invokes the Holy Trinity — Trinity College must acknowledge the significance of religious spaces on campus. Religion encompasses a diverse array of elements, ranging from material symbols to deeply held beliefs. Ethical principles, religious practices and rituals collectively serve to actualize faith and provide it with struc-

ture and meaning. However, at the core of any religious tradition lies a fundamental emphasis on unity. The opportunity to congregate with others who share similar beliefs not only affirms one's faith but also reinforces it.

As an active member of the Muslim Student Association, I have had the privilege of attending the Service of Holy Communion at the Chapel and participating in Shabbat at the Hillel House. However, as a member of Trinity's South Asian community, I have observed a significant gap in the availability of communal spaces for Hindu students.

Hinduism merits formal recognition within Trinity's campus culture. While major Hindu festivals such as Diwali and Holi are celebrated at Trinity, the ability to conduct regular prayers or religious observances remains a challenge. Last year, the South Asian Student Association (SASA) organized

an intimate prayer service before Diwali, which drew participation from around 20 students, some of which were from beyond the South Asian community, demonstrating the need for and the potential inclusivity of religious spaces on campus.

While the college does not have a designated faculty specializing in Hindu studies, it is essential to acknowledge and support the Hindu student body through tangible efforts to organize and make space for our community. Celebrating major festivals is a step toward representation, but it does not fully encapsulate the Hindu religious practice. A student-led Hindu Student Association would provide the structure to organize small (yet significant) religious observances, such as Mahashivratri prayers or accommodations for students observing fasts. More than a logistical necessity, this is a matter of identity

and belonging. Cultural organizations such as SASA play a vital role in fostering inclusivity, but Hindu students should not be expected to rely solely on broad cultural initiatives to meet their religious needs.

At Trinity, being a Bantam is more than just wearing blue and gold — it's about creating a home that cultivates a strong sense of belonging for everyone. This sense of inclusivity should extend to every aspect of campus life, including religious expression. Trinity has made meaningful efforts to create spaces where different faiths and cultures can be celebrated, but there's still work to be done. Hindu students deserve a place where they can come together, practice their traditions and feel just as supported as other religious communities on campus.

The establishment of a Hindu Student Association is imperative, both for the vis-

ibility of Hindu identity on campus and for the creation of a welcoming environment for Hindu students, particularly those from international backgrounds. As part of my research at the Greenberg Center, I aim to collaborate with Hindu students and Trinity's administration to initiate this process. The initial phase of my research will involve gathering survey responses to understand the needs and priorities of the student body. This will be followed by one-on-one conversations with students to refine our approach, identify key focus areas and develop effective strategies for establishing a student-led Hindu Student Association. While the absence of such an organization may not be immediately perceived as a pressing issue, addressing the subtle exclusion experienced by the Hindu student community is crucial in fostering a more inclusive and representative ethos.