

CRITICAL DIASPORIC SOUTH ASIAN FEMINISMS COLLECTIVE

Statement on the bogus bogey ‘Hinduphobia’

We write in the context of the surge of activity in recent months, especially in the Toronto area, among supporters of the Hindu ethnonationalist government of India whose objective is to convert India -- a secular democracy with constitutional guarantees of equality for all -- into a Hindu state. A few months ago, they attempted to shut down demonstrations held across the GTA in solidarity with the sustained movement by India’s farmers against new farm laws that will destroy their livelihoods. Now they are aggressively mobilizing to shut down an online academic conference entitled [Dismantling Global Hindutva: Multidisciplinary Perspectives](#),¹ claiming that it is sponsoring “Hinduphobia” and is “an act of hate against Hindus.”

Nothing could be further from the truth. Hindutva, or Hindu nationalism, as distinct from Hinduism as a religious tradition, is a political project of Hindu supremacy and Hindu majoritarianism. The conference website makes this distinction very clear:

Hindutva is a political philosophy styled after European fascism of the early twentieth century, an ideology that privileges a cult of personality and authoritarian leadership. By contrast, Hinduism is a term used to describe a wide range of religious practices and beliefs that are heterodox, and like the practices and beliefs of any major religion with hundreds of millions of followers, continuously under contestation, and often contradictory. Hinduism has rightly been critiqued for the deep inequities in Indian society, most importantly for the caste system. Many Hindu reformers have also offered these critiques.

Hindutva refuses these critiques, as well as such syncretic faiths, and instead doubles down on using supremacist tools in the service of a toxic and genocidal unifying theory of a “Hindu Rashtra” or Hindu nation. In other words, instead of recognizing the plurality and the changes and debates within Hinduism, Hindutva demands an unquestioned allegiance to a myth-oriented, hate-mongering dogma that reifies and sanctions its violent modes of operation.²

¹ The conference has been co-sponsored by over 70 academic departments and centres from over 50 universities across the US and Canada. The speakers at the three-day long event are all highly respected scholars in various fields related to the study of South Asia. The conference has received an overwhelming number of registrations, with some 7,500 attendees expected to attend online. Last week, more than 900 academics from across the world, scholars of genocide, mass violence, and human rights, and 60 organisations connected to South Asia all issued statements in support of the conference.

² <https://dismantlinghindutva.com/resources/hindutva-is-not-hinduism/>

Thus, Hindutva is not only a deep assault on the human and citizenship rights of India's religious minorities, which includes the world's third largest Muslim population as well as Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, and Parsis. It is also an attempt to forcefully incorporate caste-oppressed communities such as the Dalits, as well as India's Indigenous communities, Adivasis, in order to construct a homogenous "Hindu" majority.

With ferocity and violence, Hindu ethnonationalist forces have been on the ascendant in India. Most recently, with consecutive electoral victories of the BJP under Prime Minister Modi, Hindutva supporters have launched an all-out attack on the secular democratic fabric of the country. They have systematically put their supporters in positions of influence and power throughout the country -- in the bureaucracy, the judiciary, and the forces of law and order. The government has instituted discriminatory policies including beef bans, restrictions on religious conversion and interfaith weddings, and the introduction of religious discrimination into India's citizenship laws. There has been an exponential rise in religious and caste-based violence, including hate crimes, lynchings, and rapes directed against Muslims, Dalits, Sikhs, Christians, Adivasis, dissenting Hindus, and especially women of these communities. A range of academic and artistic events and outputs (talks, films, books) that challenge the Hindutva narrative have been banned or cancelled. And those who resist are summarily silenced -- assassinated, imprisoned under draconian laws on false charges, harassed with spurious investigative commissions, etc. There is a climate of fear that is very reminiscent of Germany in the 1930s. The growing number of violent attacks by Hindutva-affiliated social vigilantes, as well as state repression, against minorities and oppressed communities, dissenters, students, journalists, lawyers, artists, farmers, academics, and human rights defenders is well-documented by Indian and international civil liberties and human rights organizations.

That the Hindutva movement has had strong roots in the diaspora has been well documented by scholars (Sud, 2008; Bhatt and Mukta, 2000).³ The tactic that their supporters in the diaspora use is the classic one of appropriating the realities and experiences of the oppressed and distorting them to serve their agenda. Far from being victims, however, Hindutva activists in North America are acting with the support of the powerful Indian state: as a recent editorial in the Indian press noted, "Hindutva enjoys not just *state patronage* -- which it has, off and on, to a greater or lesser degree, for years if not decades -- but also *state power*." The term "Hinduphobia" is an appropriation of the term "Islamophobia." While Islamophobic discourse has systemically oppressed, marginalized, dispossessed, and violently killed Muslims throughout the world, Hinduphobia does not exist as a structural concern in any part of the world.

Religion-based oppression demands demonization and dehumanization of a religion. Calling out oppressive regimes does not equate to fear of a religion. It is like those who shout "White Lives

³ Bhatt, C., & Mukta, P. (2000). Hindutva in the West: mapping the antinomies of diaspora nationalism. *Ethnic and racial studies*, 23(3), 407-441.

Sud, N. (2008). Tracing the links between Hindu nationalism and the Indian diaspora. *St Antony's International Review*, 3(2), 50-65.

Matter” when confronted by Black Lives Matter, or like the rhetoric of the mens’ rights movement. As Meena Kandasamy said in the “Dismantling Global Hindutva Conference”, *“The tools of the oppressed people are being used to stop the dismantling of the master’s house and to hold it intact and together. This appropriation is what makes Hindutva deadly and dangerous.”* For those who do not know the facts, the spurious narrative of these Hindutva supporters can sound logical. Winning an audience and support here reinforces and contributes to the state terror and impunity being experienced by minorities, dissidents, and human rights defenders in India.

The Hindutva agenda is an agenda of upper caste, patriarchal, ultra-nationalist majoritarian tyranny, inequality and oppression, where caste, religious minorities, sexual minorities, and women will be a perpetual underclass, living on sufferance.⁴

This is why Critical Diasporic South Asian Feminisms Collective is raising the alarm and inviting all who support equality, justice, and peace to take a stand against the dangerous forces of Hindutva in our midst. They must not be allowed to operate here with the same impunity they enjoy in India to attack and shut down free debate and discussion, the expression of solidarity with those resisting Hindutva, and scholarly research, knowledge production, and teaching that examines its diverse implications. We commend the organizers of the Dismantling Global Hindutva conference, many of whom are students and volunteers, for creating the space for just such a critical examination of Hindutva and we strongly condemn all efforts to threaten them and shut down the conference. We urge universities and other institutions to continue to defend the principles of academic freedom and resist the pressure to withdraw their sponsorship of the conference.

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⁴ For those wishing to learn more about Hindutva, the Dismantling Global Hindutva conference provides some good resources: <https://dismantlinghindutva.com/resources/hindutva-reading-list/>