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THREATS TO PARTICIPANTS IN HINDU NATIONALISM CONFERENCE RISK SILENCING ACADEMIC FREEDOM

US and India-based Hindu nationalist groups targeting writers, scholars, universities intended to prevent them from participating in "Dismantling Global Hindutva" conference

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 10, 2021

(New York, NY) — In response to reports that U.S.- and India-based Hindu nationalist groups are coordinating **intense pressure** against writers, scholars, and universities to prevent them from sponsoring or participating in the upcoming "Dismantling Global Hindutva" conference, PEN America condemns this campaign of intimidation and retaliation against writers and public intellectuals, and supports their rights to free expression and freedom of academic thought and inquiry. The conference, an **online academic gathering set to start September 10**, is sponsored by dozens of universities including Harvard, Princeton, and Stanford, and will feature international scholars and writers in discussions on the global implications of Hindutva, a right-wing political ideology espoused by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that is based on the belief that India should be a Hindu state.

"The scale of coordinated harassment that writers and scholars are facing in the lead up to this conference—including severe threats directed at individuals and their families—is clearly meant to silence their perspectives, and to cast a chilling effect on academic inquiry and analysis," said **Karin Deutsch Karlekar**, PEN America's **director of free expression at risk programs**. "Right-wing Hindu nationalist groups have deliberately maligned and mischaracterized the conference's goals of academic inquiry on a topic central to the current state of Indian politics, as the ruling BJP government advances discriminatory policies and expands the criminalization of dissent, targeting those who disagree with its espousal of Hindu nationalist views. This campaign against the conference, as well as related threats against individual scholars, further demonstrates the urgent need for educational institutions and authorities in the U.S. and around the world to stand firm in defense of the democratic ideals of free expression and academic freedom. We call on academic institutions to support participating writers and scholars receiving harassment and threats, and urge Indian authorities to speak out in defense of India-based speakers' rights to free expression."

Right-wing groups targeting the conference have **sent speakers and their young children death threats**, made appeals to India's home minister to **take action against India-based speakers**, and sent **millions of emails** pressuring co-sponsoring universities to back out of the conference. Earlier this year, PEN America condemned political interference in the operation of private academic institutions in India, lamenting the **resignations of Pratap Bhanu Mehta and Arvind Subramanian** from Ashoka University.

In the **2020 Freedom to Write Index**, PEN America noted a concerning increase in the number of writers jailed in India in the last year—placing India in the top 10 worldwide, the only democracy included on the list—with many detainees targeted for their work on politics, caste, minorities, and language, such as professors **Hany Babu** and **Anand Teltumbde**. Apart from cases of imprisonment or detention, dozens of writers have endured online harassment, physical threats, lawsuits, or other forms of intimidation for their dissenting views, including **expressing the perspective of ethnic minorities**.

Indian authorities have consistently engaged in crackdowns on academics during major protests since 2018, notably in connection with the **Bhima-Koregaon**, Jammu and Kashmir **Reorganization Act**, **CAA-NRC**, and **farming law** protests. PEN America's **Online Harassment Field Manual** offers practical tools to support writers and individuals facing online abuse, while a **manual by the South Asia Scholar**

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In a new report, PEN America surveys more than 50 bills proposed across the country that are designed to chill academic and educational discussions and impose government dictates on teaching and learning. Learn more about why these bills are so harmful: <https://bit.ly/2ZZHGjd>.

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Activist Collective provides additional guidance for scholars of the Indian subcontinent who are experiencing harassment.

Tags: Academic Freedom, Free Expression and Education, Hindu nationalism, India, writers at risk
Genre: Press Release Topic: academic freedom Category: Advocacy, News & Analysis Country: India, United States

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<https://bit.ly/3kQ7J48>

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