

HfHR writes in support of the "Dismantling Global Hindutva" conference

ADMIN HFHR · AUGUST 28, 2021



DISMANTLING GLOBAL HINDUTVA

**September 10-12,
9:30 am to 3 pm Eastern Time
Register at: bit.ly/dghconference**

Speakers include:
Anand Patwardhan | Ayesha Kidwai | Banu Subramaniam | Bhanwar Meghwanshi | Christophe Jaffrelot | Kavita Krishnan | Meena Kandasamy | Mohammad Junaid | Nandini Sunder | Neha Dixit | P. Sivakami

In panels on:
Caste | Gender, Sexuality | Political Economy | Science | Propaganda | & More

Cosponsored by 60+ centers or departments at 45+ universities, including at:

Contributing Cosponsors: Northwestern | Stockton | UPenn | Black, Brown, and Queer Studies | Harvard | U of Washington, Seattle | U Toronto Mississauga | Princeton | Stanford | UC Santa Cruz | Ohio State | McMaster | Simon Fraser | UT Austin | Cornell | UC Berkeley | Syracuse | Emory | UC San Diego | NYU | U Illinois Urbana-Champaign | UMass, Amherst

Supporting Cosponsors: Amherst College | Boston College | Columbia | Concordia | Dalhousie | Dayton | Drew | Georgetown | Lehigh | New School | Polis Project | Rutgers | St. Mary's | U Amsterdam | U Chicago | U Colorado-Boulder | U Göttingen | U Illinois Chicago | U Manitoba | U Michigan | U Pittsburgh | USC | U Toronto | U Virginia | U Wisconsin-Madison | William Paterson | Yale | York

OUR LETTER TO UNIVERSITIES AND DEPARTMENTS CO-SPONSORING THE
CONFERENCE:

August 23, 2021

To: All universities and departments co-sponsoring the academic conference on Hindutva (Hindu nationalism)

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Re: We are Hindus who support academic freedom and the "Dismantling Global Hindutva" conference on September 10-12, 2021

We are writing to you on behalf of **Hindus for Human Rights** (HfHR), a two-year old advocacy organization that provides a platform for progressive Hindus to speak out in support of democratic freedoms and pluralism.

HfHR advocates for civil and human rights in South Asia and North America, rooted in the values of our faith: *shanti* (peace), *nyaya* (justice) and *satya* (truth). We provide a Hindu voice of resistance to all forms of bigotry and oppression based on one's faith, color, caste, gender, or sexual orientation.

We also staunchly oppose the misappropriation of our Hindu faith by the ideology of Hindutva (also frequently referred to as Hindu supremacy, Hindu nationalism, etc.), whose foundational principle is to redefine over 200 million Muslim and Christian citizens of India as the 'other,' who do not legitimately belong and must therefore either accept second class citizenship or be displaced from their homeland.

As you must be aware, it is this very ideology that informs the policies of the current government in India, which has led to unprecedented violence against India's minorities. Beef bans and resulting mob lynchings of Muslims, restrictions on religious conversions and rising attacks against Christians, laws against interfaith weddings, the imprisonment of activists without due process under modified anti-terrorism laws, punitive actions against press and academic freedom, etc. have today become defining features of the world's largest democracy.

Sadly, a significant section of the Hindu American community, which has greatly benefited from America's Civil Rights movement, seems to also support the majoritarian/authoritarian rulers in India – a troubling contradiction of values that we have been speaking out against. We are also greatly troubled that Hindutva ideology has been making inroads into academia and the Hindu student population.

It is in this context that we are writing to express our unequivocal support for the upcoming academic conference titled, "Dismantling Global Hindutva" on September 10-12, with co-sponsorships from 60+ departments and centers at 49 universities worldwide. This conference is coming at a critical time for the world's largest democracy, which is seeing a precipitous decline in civil and human rights under the current government.

The goal of the conference, as we understand it, is to shine light on Hindutva ideology, especially on its U.S. avatars, and to bring about better awareness in the academic

community. Our expectation is that speakers will make a clear distinction between Hindutva v. Hinduism as practised by a majority of Hindus (per a recent [Pew Research Center survey](#), an overwhelming majority of Indians, more than 80 percent, believe respect for all religions lies at the core of their identity as Indians.)

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We understand that some Hindu American groups, purporting to speak for all Hindus, are opposing the conference, labelling it as "anti-India" and "anti-Hindu." Such a characterization clearly betrays a deliberate conflation of Hindutva ideology with Hinduism, perhaps in an attempt to co-opt the community into falsely believing that the conference is directed against Hinduism.

As progressive Hindus, we reject such implied equivalence between Hindutva and Hinduism. As we show in the attached document "Hindutva Ideology is NOT Hinduism," the differences between the two are glaring and irreconcilable. In fact, commentators are increasingly comparing Hindutva ideology to early signs of fascism from European history – not a surprise given that the founders of Hindutva ideology drew their inspiration from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.

As recent immigrants, there is no doubt that Hindus often experience discrimination, similar to the experiences of many other immigrant communities in our history. We are therefore quite sensitive to complaints of bias faced by younger generation Hindu Americans (and Muslim Americans too). However, we do not believe that this conference against Hindutva ideology promotes discrimination against Hindus or threatens the safety of Hindu students.

It is unfortunate that Hindu American advocacy groups leading the students on are attempting to lump all forms of discrimination into "Hinduphobia," a convenient way to distract us from the terrible religious rights situation in India. We believe that they are doing a great disservice to our future generations and their ability to see various forms of discrimination for what they are so they can deal with them effectively, as many other immigrant communities have in the past.

As Hindus, we stand for respect for all people, freedom of speech, and freedom of inquiry. Please be aware that many progressive Hindus and other Indian Americans join us in disagreeing with those who have expressed discontent with the conference—because, not in spite of, our faith values.

We hope that you will extend the fullest support for the upcoming conference and demonstrate our unified commitment to academic freedom.

Sincerely,

Sunita Viswanath and Raju Rajagopal, Co-founders, Hindus for Human Rights, USA

(Please address any comment and queries to info@hindusforhumanrights.org)

HINDUTVA IDEOLOGY IS NOT HINDUISM

Hinduism abounds in stories of kindness and compassion **vs.**

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Hindutva propagates fear, insecurity, exclusiveness, and hatred.

Hinduism welcomes other faiths and traditions **vs.**

Hindutva's very foundation is disdain for Islam and Christianity.

Progressive Hinduism owns up to the ugly and shameful legacy of caste discrimination and works for its annihilation **vs.**

Hindutva is desperate to distance Hinduism from caste, with no meaningful action on the ground to end caste bigotry.

Hinduism's *bakhti* (devotion) has no room for hate **vs.**

Hindutva's 'devotion' to Lord Rama is built on triumphalism over other religions.

Hinduism has no single authority and respects all pathways to God **vs.**

Hindutva aspires to a homogenized and 'semiticized' Hinduism that it can control.



Hinduism teaches equality of Shiva and Shakti, the male and the female **vs.**

Previous
Hindutva is patriarchal and regressive on gender rights.
What's Hindutva And Why It Conflicts With Hinduism (A guest view)

Next
Our Moral Responsibility to Our Afghan Siblings
Hinduism teaches *ahimsa* as a core value, a legacy strengthened by Buddhism **vs.**

Hindutva glorifies aggressiveness, violence, and revenge against history.

A Hindu showed that non-violence and civil disobedience can work **vs.**

Hindutva mocks non-violence as weak and unmanly, and was responsible for his assassination.

INFO@HINDUSFORHUMANRIGHTS.ORG

Progressive Hinduism believes in a secular polity where faith is a private matter **vs.**

Hindutva is rushing into a majoritarian Hindu state where the 'others' would be second-class citizens.

Hindus for Human Rights is a
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in the US under EIN

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