

LETTER OF SUPPORT

from Scholars of Genocide, Mass Violence, and Human Rights

We, scholars of genocide, mass violence, and human rights, extend our support to the organizers of and participants in the upcoming conference "Dismantling Global Hindutva" on Sep 10-12, 2021. The scholarly conference has been co-sponsored by departments, centers, and programs at over 50 American Universities. It will bring together scholars and public intellectuals from around the world to understand the ramifications of the political philosophy of Hindutva in India and elsewhere. The Hindutva ideology or Hindu Nationalism is based on the concept of establishing a pure Hindu state, a Hindu Rashtra, in India through the exclusion of its Muslim and Christian minorities. Extensive scholarship has shown that it is rooted in fascism with its founders explicitly referencing German fascism as an inspiration.

There is now a concerted and coordinated effort against the conference by Hindutva aligned groups both in India and the US. Co-sponsoring Universities and Departments have been barraged by thousands of emails asking for them to withdraw from the conference. There has also been extensive and virulent trolling on social media.

Most dangerously, these efforts are trying to portray the conference as an attack on the Hindu religion. The conference organizers have repeatedly clarified on the conference website and all conference materials that Hindutva, the political philosophy of Hindu majoritarianism, is distinct from the religious practices of Hinduism. There is also an attempt to claim that the conference engages in "Hinduphobia." As the Hindus for Human Rights organization here in the U.S. has clarified "the term has long been weaponized by Hindutva nationalists to deflect their own phobias against Muslims and Christians." The South Asian Scholar Activist Collective has also described the term as a distraction "in the west to silence critiques of casteism, Islamophobia, sexism, anti-Semitism, racism, and other forms of supremacist ideologies at the heart of Hindutva."

This pushback is not unexpected. In India, the rise in power of Hindutva-aligned groups has led to a crackdown on all forms of democratic dissent and the intimidation and imprisonment of academics, journalists, human rights groups and activists. This overall erosion of democratic practices and freedoms in India has been noted by global research networks and the global media. Several well-known academics figures in India have recently had to leave the country after being specifically targeted for raising their voices against this crackdown on dissent. In the U.S., scholars of South Asia have also been the targets of concerted attacks. The South Asian Scholar Activist Collective has now described the harassment patterns of Hindutva aligned groups in their field manual.

The organized efforts to shut down this conference represent a serious challenge to academic freedom in the U.S. that will have implications beyond the scholarship of South Asia. We therefore stand firmly in support of the organizers of the Dismantling Global Hindutva conference.

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