

# CULTURAL HINDUTVA AND ISLAMOPHOBIA

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### **ABOUT CARE**

The Centre for Culture-Centred Approach to Research and Evaluation (CARE) at Massey University, Aotearoa New Zealand, is a global hub for communication research that uses participatory and culture-centred methodologies to develop community-driven communication solutions to health and wellbeing. Through experiments in methods of radical democracy anchored in community ownership and community voice, the Centre collaborates with communities, community organisers, community researchers, advocates and activists to imagine and develop sustainable practices for prevention, health care organising, food and agriculture, worker organising, migrant and refugee rights, indigenous rights, rights of the poor and economic transformation.

Prof Mohan J Dutta is the Director of CARE and author of books such as *Neoliberal Health Organizing*, *Communicating Health*, and *Voices of Resistance*.

This white paper may include images and texts around topics such as sexual violence, physical violence, identity-based discrimination and harassment, and genocide. I encourage you to care for your safety and wellbeing while reading this paper.

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Cultural Hindutva is a key resource of the Hindutva ideology, asserting the supremacy of Hindu nationalism through cultural forms, artefacts, and performances<sup>1</sup>. Hindu nationalism organizes around the political conceptualization of India as a Hindu nation, working simultaneously through the erasure of Christians and Muslims that are portrayed as invaders<sup>2</sup>. Of particular salience to Hindutva is the portrayal of the Muslim invader, re-structuring India as a nation on the principles of Islamophobia, through the disenfranchisement of the Muslim other<sup>3</sup>.

The figure of the Muslim as invader is deployed to catalyse various forms of violence, from hate speech targeting Muslims to vigilante violence to statesponsored disenfranchisement of Muslims under the National Registry of Citizens and Citizenship Amendment Act<sup>4</sup>. The ideology of Hindutva thrives on the telling of the story of Hindu supremacy, while simultaneously legitimizing the violence that is deployed by various arms of Hindutva to target religious minorities, oppressed caste communities, and voices that challenge the hegemony of Hindutva<sup>5</sup>. Cultural narratives and performances constructed under the ideology of Hindutva both whitewash the violence of Hindutva as well as recruit participants into the Islamophobic worldview of Hindutva. The international Chinmaya Mission, as a structure embedded within the ideology of Hindutva, participates in the dissemination of Hindutva through the deployment of cultural strategies of storytelling<sup>6</sup>. The mission plays a vital role as a resource of pedagogy, mediating the intergenerational teaching of Hinduism in India<sup>7</sup>. The narratives taught by the Mission are the narratives of Hindu supremacy reflected in the teaching of the Vedas assembled together to prop up pride, in the Hindu identity in the diaspora.

Of particular importance to this cultivation of pride is the creation of the “other.” This active process of othering is particularly salient in the cultivation of identity among diaspora Hindu youth negotiating the tensions of assimilation in the backdrop of the histories of colonization and partition. This cultivation of pride in the Hindu identity is deeply intertwined with the seeding and circulation of Islamophobia through pedagogy<sup>8</sup>.

Swami Chinmayananda, key architect of the Chinmaya Mission, played a key role alongside Golwalkar in the formation of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP)<sup>9</sup>. The VHP is a terrorist organization that has been directly linked to the deployment of violence<sup>10</sup>.

It is therefore vital that the cultural elements of Hindutva in Aotearoa be closely examined and interrogated. In the backdrop of the ongoing challenges of Islamophobia in Aotearoa and globally, it is vital that arts and cultural organizations closely examine their funding of cultural performances that are connected to the ideology of Hindutva.

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