

# **Cultural Hindutva and Islamophobia**

**Mohan J. Dutta  
Dean's Chair Professor  
Director,  
Center for Culture-centered  
Approach to Research & Evaluation  
(CARE) & Massey University**



**CENTRE FOR CULTURE-CENTRED APPROACH  
TO RESEARCH AND EVALUATION**

THE CARE WHITE PAPER SERIES IS A PUBLICATION OF THE CENTER FOR  
CULTURE-CENTERED APPROACH TO RESEARCH AND EVALUATION  
(CARE)

Requests for permission to reproduce the *CARE White Paper Series* should be directed to  
the SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION JOURNALISM & MARKETING  
MASSEY UNIVERSITY, NEW ZEALAND

**Center for Culture-Centered Approach to Research and Evaluation (CARE)**

**School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing**

**BSC 1.06 Level 1, Business Studies Central**

**Massey University Manawatu campus**

**Private Bag 11 222**

**Palmerston North, New Zealand**

**Tel: +64-06-951-9282; ext=86282**

**W** [massey.ac.nz/care](http://massey.ac.nz/care)

Mohan J. Dutta, Director, CARE  
[m.j.dutta@massey.ac.nz](mailto:m.j.dutta@massey.ac.nz)

Copyright of this paper resides with the author(s) and further publication, in whole or  
in part, shall only be made by authorization of the author(s).

CARE is online at [massey.ac.nz/care](http://massey.ac.nz/care) | Facebook @CAREMassey

# Cultural Hindutva and Islamophobia

19 May 2021

Mohan J. Dutta, Dean's Chair Professor  
Director, Center for Culture-centered Approach to Research and Evaluation  
(CARE), Massey University

## ABOUT CARE

The Center for Culture-centered Approach to Research and Evaluation (CARE) at Massey University, Aotearoa New Zealand, is a global hub for communication research that uses participatory and culture-centered 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 Center collaborates with communities, community organizers, community researchers, advocates, and activists to imagine and develop sustainable practices for prevention, health care organizing, food and agriculture, worker organizing, migrant and refugee rights, indigenous rights, rights of the poor, and economic transformation.

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

## CARE WHITE PAPER SERIES

# Cultural Hindutva and Islamophobia

Mohan J. Dutta, Dean's Chair Professor

Director, Center for Culture-centered Approach to Research and Evaluation (CARE), Massey University

Cultural Hindutva is a key resource of the Hindutva ideology, asserting the supremacy of Hindu nationalism through cultural forms, artefacts, and performances<sup>i</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>ii</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>iii</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 state-sponsored disenfranchisement of Muslims under the National Registry of Citizens and Citizenship Amendment Act<sup>iv</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>v</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>vi</sup>. The mission plays a vital role as a resource of pedagogy, mediating the inter-generational teaching of Hinduism in India<sup>vii</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>viii</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>ix</sup>. The VHP is a terrorist organization that has been directly linked to the deployment of violence<sup>x</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.

---

<sup>i</sup>Berti, D., Jaoul, N., & Kanungo, P. (Eds.). (2020). Cultural entrenchment of Hindutva: local mediations and forms of convergence. Taylor & Francis.

<sup>ii</sup>Sharma, J. (2011). *Hindutva: Exploring the idea of Hindu nationalism*. Penguin Books India.

<sup>iii</sup> Thobani, S. (2019). Alt-Right with the Hindu-right: long-distance nationalism and the perfection of Hindutva. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 42(5), 745-762.

<sup>iv</sup> Kumbamu, A. (2020). Saffron Fascism: The Conflux of Hindutva Ultra-Nationalism, Neoliberal Extractivism, and the Rise of Authoritarian Populism in Modi's India. In *The Global Rise of Authoritarianism in the 21st Century* (pp. 161-177). Routledge.

<sup>v</sup>Baber, Z. (2000). Religious nationalism, violence and the Hindutva movement in India. *Dialectical Anthropology*, 25(1), 61-76; Banaji, S. (2018). Vigilante publics: Orientalism, modernity and Hindutva fascism in India. *Javnost-The Public*, 25(4), 333-350; Leidig, E. (2020). Hindutva as a variant of right-wing extremism. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 54(3), 215-237.

<sup>vi</sup> Falcone, J. M. (2012). Putting the "fun" in fundamentalism: Religious nationalism and the split self at Hindutva summer camps in the United States. *Ethos*, 40(2), 164-195.

<sup>vii</sup> Pandya, S. P. (2016). 'Guru' Culture in South Asia: The Case of Chinmaya Mission in India. *Society and Culture in South Asia*, 2(2), 204-232.

<sup>viii</sup> Falcone, J. M. (2012). Putting the "fun" in fundamentalism: Religious nationalism and the split self at Hindutva summer camps in the United States. *Ethos*, 40(2), 164-195.

<sup>ix</sup>Bhatt, C., & Mukta, P. (2000). Hindutva in the West: mapping the antinomies of diaspora nationalism. *Ethnic and racial studies*, 23(3), 407-441; Ganapathy-Coleman, H. (2013). Raising "authentic" Indian children in the United States: Dynamism in the ethnotheories of immigrant Hindu parents. *Ethos*, 41(4), 360-386.

<sup>x</sup>Bidwai, P. (2008). Confronting the reality of Hindutva terrorism. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 10-13; Kanungo, P. (2008). Hindutva's fury against Christians in Orissa. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 16-19.