

SPECIAL TOPIC REPORT: HINDUTVA-LINKED ORGANISATIONS IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND: BIDIRECTIONAL FLOWS AND EQUIVOCATION AS COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGY

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The Center 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.

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HINDUTVA-LINKED ORGANISATIONS IN AOTEAROA NZ: BIDIRECTIONAL FLOWS AND EQUIVOCATION AS COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGY

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INTRODUCTION

Hindu nationalism, referred to as Hindutva, is a political ideology that seeks to remake India as a Hindu nation (Hindu *rashtra*), constructed on the principles of a monolithic Hindu culture (*sanskriti*) and Hindu race (*jati*).¹ The idea of a Hindu nation state is diametrically opposed to, and indeed aims to undo, the foundations of India as a “Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic,” as per its Constitution of 1950.²

Since its inception in pre-independence India, the project of Hindutva has aimed to create a cultural hegemony by attempting to unify the majority under a homogenised conception of “the Hindus”, while simultaneously marginalising, excluding, and erasing diverse minorities.³ Based on the principle of othering, the political ideology of Hindutva attempts to mobilise the majority against alleged injustices done by the Other through a combination of militancy, male chauvinism, and vigilante violence.⁴ This has led some scholars to categorise Hindutva as a form of right wing extremism,⁵ fascism in the classical sense,⁶ militant Hinduism,⁷ identity-motivated violent extremism,⁸ and ethnonationalism.⁹ As such, the ideology of Hindutva poses critical challenges to social cohesion.¹⁰

The Hindutva movement is organised as a network of religious institutions, civil society groups, paramilitary volunteers, and political formations, referred to collectively as the Sangh Parivar, “the family of the Sangh”—i.e., of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).¹¹ Translated as the National Volunteer Corps, the RSS is a paramilitary volunteer organisation—a vigilante militia¹² founded on the political ideology of “Hindu nationalism and the subordination of non-Hindus,”¹³ and is decidedly anti-Muslim.¹⁴

Since the 1990s, the ideological project of Hindutva has been mainstreamed through a wide range of communication channels, resulting in a propaganda infrastructure of digital platforms, traditional media (e.g., television), cultural events, and performances.¹⁵ The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), with its roots in the political ideology of Hindutva, has further legitimised a plethora of marginalising practices directed at diverse minorities, in particular at Indian Muslims which has reached genocidal proportions.¹⁶

There is a bidirectional flow of influence for the support of the Hindutva project, with the global Indian diaspora organising financial, cultural, political, and volunteer support, while simultaneously being shaped by the organising forces of Hindutva in India.¹⁷ Salient in the global ascendance of Hindutva is the mobilising of Islamophobia in digital spaces.¹⁸ These efforts converge with the production of Islamophobia by white supremacist groups.¹⁹ The global flow of Hindutva points to the need for a critical understanding of its brick-and-mortar infrastructures in the diaspora, such as news media platforms, religious organisations, and cultural groups.

In this white paper, we determine key organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand linked with the Hindutva movement. We provide details of their connections and material exchanges with Hindutva organisations and individuals in India; their deployment of Hindutva concepts, cultural narratives, and symbolic references; and their strategies to spread the Hindutva ideology in Aotearoa New Zealand. Furthermore, we identify the communicative strategy of equivocation, which allows Hindutva-linked groups in Aotearoa New Zealand to lay claim to the Hindutva movement in India, while simultaneously obfuscating such links by appealing to multiculturalist liberal democracies with the narratives of co-existence, and *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (The World is One Family).²⁰ Finally, we outline how the Hindutva-linked organisations are legitimised in Aotearoa New Zealand through an uncritical multiculturalism.²¹ We demonstrate how, in the context of multiculturalism, the platform that is provided to Hindutva-linked organisations is secured through the active participation of New Zealand politicians and public figures.

Our analysis is based on secondary sources: published texts, publicly available records, and reports of the activities of the organisations in question. Since the website links we offer here as evidence are live and dynamic, they may become unavailable in the future.

HINDUTVA-LINKED ORGANISATIONS IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

The political ideology of Hindutva receives strong support in the diaspora, connected with its predominance in India.²² This raises critical questions about the role of Hindutva-linked groups and individuals in Aotearoa New Zealand, and the impact of the ideology on social cohesion.

In their most recent annual update, “New Zealand’s Violent and Extremism Environment” issued 23 November 2021, the Combined Threat Assessment Group (CTAG) listed Hindutva under Extremist Ideologies in New Zealand: “In the reporting period, CTAG assessed that there are almost certainly a small number of individuals and groups in New Zealand who adhere to Hindutva IMVE [Identity-Motivated Violent Extremism].”²³

The growth of Hindutva in Aotearoa New Zealand began in the early 1990s, and has persisted, particularly emboldened by the Bharatiya Janata Party’s (BJP) historic electoral victory in the 2014 Indian general elections. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the Hindutva ideology informs many Hindu organisations and temples, as well as groups propagating “Indian culture.” Key Hindutva-linked organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand are:

1. Hindu Council of New Zealand (HCNZ)
2. Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh New Zealand (HSSNZ)
3. Overseas friends of BJP New Zealand (OFBJP NZ)

The HCNZ has further established, or is otherwise affiliated with, the Hindu Heritage Centre, Hindu Social Service Foundation, Hindu Elders Foundation, Hindu Youth New Zealand, Hindu Organisations, Temples and Associations (HOTA), Aotearoa Research Organisation for Generic Yoga and Ayurveda (AROGYA), and the Hindu Emergency and Relief Team (HEART).²⁵ (The broader network of Hindutva-affiliated organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand will be unpacked in a forthcoming paper.) The membership and leadership of the Hindutva-affiliated in Aotearoa New Zealand groups often overlap,²⁶ and they frequently organise events together.²⁷ While they differ in their public purpose, they each work to spread and legitimise the Hindutva ideology in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

1. The Hindu Council of New Zealand

The Hindu Council of New Zealand (HCNZ) was formed in the mid-1990s and subsequently registered as a charity.²⁸ As per its constitution, “The name of the organisation shall be ‘the Hindu Council of New Zealand Incorporated’ (in ethnic language: *Vishva Hindu Parishad of New Zealand Incorporated*).”²⁹ On the website of India’s Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), HCNZ is listed under “New Zealand Main Hindu Organisations,” under “Hindus abroad.”³⁰

The VHP is an organisation at the core of the Hindutva movement. As part of the Sangh Parivar, it works alongside the paramilitary volunteer organisation Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the political party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), student union Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), religious militant organisation Bajrang Dal, and the farmers' union Bharatiya Kisan Sangh (BKS).³¹

Since the founding of the VHP in 1964 by prominent RSS leaders M. S. Golwalkar, S. S. Apte and Swami Chinmayananda of Chinmaya Mission, the VHP has been instrumental in establishing and promoting the Hindutva ideology. At its inaugural meeting, Apte elaborated on the formation of the VHP as follows:

*The world has been divided to Christian, Islam and communist. All of them view Hindu society as very fine rich food on which to feast and fatten themselves. It is necessary in this age of conflict to think of and organise the Hindu world to save it from the evils of all the three.*³²

The organising and mobilising logic of the VHP rests on the principle of othering. It produces the idea of a Hindu society that is under threat by “the evils” of the Other, and figures Christians, Muslims, and Communists as feeding on Hindu society.³³ By constructing “Hindu society” as a victim, the Hindutva ideology propagated by the VHP motivates a sense of grievance, which then legitimates majoritarian violence towards the Other.³⁴

Since its founding, the VHP has been condemned for its contribution to violence against Muslims in India, particularly for its role in the demolition of 1992 Babri Masjid in which 2,000 people were killed in communal riots.³⁵ The VHP was then instrumental in the campaign to build a temple dedicated to Lord Rama at Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, in the backdrop of Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) electoral campaign to retain power in the state.³⁶ In 2018, the VHP and Bajrang Dal were classified as militant religious organisations by the CIA in its The World Factbook, under the category of political pressure groups.³⁷

Many organisations outside India organise and mobilise the Indian diaspora toward the VHP's causes.³⁸ However, the diaspora organisations linked with the VHP in India frequently obfuscate their connection. Even as they make various forms of rhetorical claims to the VHP, and facilitate the movement of people and resources between the diaspora and India (as explored below), they also deploy a strategic ambiguity to claim separation from the VHP. As the President of HCNZ Vinod Kumar notes, “We are morally linked (to the VHP), but not physically linked.”³⁹ This communicative strategy of equivocation both articulates identitarian connection, and simultaneously obfuscates identitarian connection by appealing to religious tolerance, universal connection and co-existence.

Take, for example, the constitution of the HCNZ, which states its aims and objectives as follows:

1. *to unite and organise the Hindus residing in New Zealand by encouraging them to follow and protect the principles and practices of Hindu Dharma;*
2. *to cultivate the spirit of self respect for themselves and their Dharma as Hindus, and to bestow respect for the people of all colours, creeds, races and religions;*
3. *to bring together all Hindu related organisations and institutions in New Zealand to promote universal human value of co-existence;*
4. *to encourage the spirit of service to humanity on the basis of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (World is one large family).*⁴⁰

The communicative strategy of equivocation is vital to the discursive architecture of Hindutva in the diaspora. Through equivocation, Hindutva-linked organisations such as the HCNZ are able to lay claim to the political ideology of Hindutva in India, while also deploying narratives of religious tolerance, universal connection and co-existence to secure their legitimacy in multiculturalist liberal democracies. Such articulations by Hindutva-linked groups that utilise principles of multiculturalism are evident in other parts of the West, such as the U.K. and U.S.⁴¹

However, the HCNZ's appeals to multiculturalist values and its aim "to bestow respect for the people of all colours, creeds, races and religions,"⁴² is contradicted by its commitment to the broader ideology of Hindutva. One such example is given by its reason for the resourcing of "Dharma Pracharaks (Preacher)":

*To establish, manage and assist centres for training Dharma Pracharaks (Preacher) for the purpose of propagating dynamic Hindu Dharma representing the fundamental values of life comprehended by various faiths and denominations having their roots in Hindu Dharma such as, Shaiva, Vaishnava, Bouddha, Jaina and Sikh, etc.*⁴³

The attempt to assimilate Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism into a monolithic Hindu culture is fundamental to the Hindutva project.⁴⁴ However, in Aotearoa New Zealand, the Sikh Council of New Zealand, "concerned at the sustained efforts by the Hindu Council of New Zealand to subsume the separate and distinct identity of Sikhs,"⁴⁵ expressed the following in a press release:

4. *Sikh organisations have been treating Hindu Council and its views as a problem of the Hindu community that they needed to tackle internally. In this regard, a major point of concern for us has been its open affiliation with Vishav [sic.] Hindu Parishad (or World Hindu Council) – an extremely violent and rabidly extremist organisation that has caused tens of thousands of deaths in communal riots in India.*
5. *Vishav Hindu Parishad is a branch of Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (or RSS for short) which has been twice banned as a terrorist organisation in India for its violent and divisive activities aimed at establishing an oligarchy of Higher Castes and efforts to claim India as a Hindu nation with all citizens being asked to declare themselves as Hindus and failing which be treated as second class citizens.*
6. *It is most unfortunate that Hindu Council of New Zealand has chosen to bring this destructive agenda of RSS/VHP to New Zealand and cause friction amongst communities with benefit accruing only to Hindu Council in advancing its agenda of divide & rule. [...]*
9. *Hindu Council has also caused great consternation amongst the Sikh organisations by sending an invitation letter which, amongst other things goes on to label the Sikh organisations as "organisations of a Hindu base". We invite Hindu Council of New Zealand to accept its mistakes and apologize to the Sikh organisations for labelling them as "organisations of a Hindu base" and to stop pushing Golwalkar's agenda of "assimilating into one united whole". [...]*
10. *We also invite the Hindu Council to take back its highly derogatory and distorted version of Sikh history and religion which has been posted on an internet forum on its behalf. The views expressed therein have been effectively discredited many a time, and it is unfortunate that RSS/VHP/Hindu Council keep repeating the discredited views a la Goebbels.*⁴⁶

Through cultural programmes and political movements, Hindutva ideologues aim forcibly to assimilate diverse religions of the subcontinent under a monolith, while simultaneously marking Islam and Christianity as foreign threats.⁴⁷

An uncritical multiculturalism in Aotearoa New Zealand allows HCNZ, as a Hindutva-linked organisation, to achieve legitimacy. Specifically, the active participation of New Zealand politicians and public figures enables HCNZ to position itself as the monolithic voice of Hindu New Zealanders. Over the years, the HCNZ's National Hindu Conference has been inaugurated by Deputy Prime Minister Winston Peters (2019), Minister of Ethnic Affairs Judith Collins (2012), Leader of the Opposition Phil Goff (2010), King Tūheitia (2008), and Prime Minister Helen Clark (2007). See Table 1 and Table 2 in the appendix for more examples of high profile guests who have inaugurated, spoken at and/or attended HCNZ's National Hindu Conferences and other HCNZ-affiliated events.

Crucial to the global organising of Hindutva is the intertextuality between spaces, referring to discursive and material spaces drawing on each other and referencing each other, with communicative resources flowing back-and-forth between the spaces. Connections between HCNZ and the Hindutva movement in India are expressed through the flow of people and resources. Swami Vigyananand,⁴⁸ the Joint Secretary General of the VHP and the founder and chair of the World Hindu Foundation, was a guest at the 1st New Zealand National Hindu Conference in Auckland in 2007.⁴⁹ He was also hosted by the HCNZ in 2017 for an open discussion session in Porirua City (Figure 1).

In a 2019 news story published by New Zealand's *Stuff*, Swami Vigyananand was described as the "brains behind the World Hindu Economic Forum"⁵⁰ (WHEF). The WHEF provides a platform for prominent Hindutva ideologues.⁵¹ The keynote speaker at the 2019 forum in Mumbai was Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Yogi Adityanath,⁵² whose aggressive targeting of Muslims is well documented.⁵³ That same year, the forum was attended by Hardik Desai, Raj Tyagi, Vinod Kumar, and Guna Magesan representing "Team New Zealand."⁵⁴ Magesan has been the General Secretary of HCNZ, and Kumar the President of HCNZ and Chair of Hindu Heritage Trust.⁵⁵

According to its website, the WHEF seeks:

*... to bring together financially successful elements within the Hindu Society such as traders, bankers, technocrats, investors, industrialists, businessmen, professionals, along with economists and thinkers, so that each group can share their business knowledge, experience, expertise and resources with their fellow brethren to trigger the creation of surplus wealth and make society prosperous.*⁵⁶

Note the articulation of financial interest that forms the global infrastructure of Hindutva. The financial mechanisms driving the infrastructure of Hindutva in Aotearoa New Zealand seek to create economic openings and opportunities for New Zealand business interests aligned with the Hindutva movement. Hindutva, therefore, is a profitable venture. Consider the following excerpt from a HCNZ press release that details New Zealanders and New Zealand business affiliations in attendance at the WHEF in 2012. Critical here is the framing of Māori businesses as market opportunities for Hindutva:

The Hindu business delegation members included Mr Vinod Kumar, Managing Director of Magsons Hardware Limited, Dr Guna Magesan, Director of Kiwi Bharat Ltd and General Secretary of Hindu Council of New Zealand, Mr Kuldeep Sharma, Director of DairyCare NZ and Mr Mahesh Bindra.

Magsons Hardware Limited, owner of three Mitre10 stores, largest retailers of home improvement products in New Zealand. DairyCare NZ is the manufacturer of a range of patented animal health products (based on Manuka honey and Aloe Vera) that are alternative to antibiotics and chemical based medicine.

Dr Magesan chaired one session on "Making Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Successful in the Global Market Place and Transform them as Global Players" where the panellists came from New Zealand, Malaysia, UK and India.

This conference gave an opportunity for New Zealand business people to cooperate, collaborate, and share business ideas and opportunities with investors.

*A number of Hindu business leaders from around the world are interested in investing in New Zealand in general and with Maori businesses in particular, and we have invited them to participate in the New Zealand Hindu Business Conference next year.*⁵⁷

Kumar and Magesan have been involved with the WHEF since its inception.⁵⁸ In 2015, the RSS publication *The Organiser*⁵⁹ named Magesan as the CEO of the WHEF.⁶⁰ In 2019, *Stuff* reported that Magesan was invited to sit on the governing council of the WHEF, the second New Zealander after Kumar.⁶¹ Magesan has been a

Justice of Peace in New Zealand since 2009.⁶² According to HCNZ's press release, Magesan's international involvements also extend to the World Hindu Congress, when he was invited in 2014 by Swami Vigyanand's World Hindu Foundation to join the organising team.⁶³

Worth noting is the bidirectional flow of Hindutva ideologues, its people and resources. Writing for *The Organiser*, in an article titled "Exploring Brand NRI," Magesan notes in a section labelled, "Can we realise Make in India without making India a Man Making Nation?":

*With the support of Sangh Parivar organisations and other Hindu organisations, children born and brought up in overseas countries, spend reasonable time in understanding our traditions, cultural heritage, and our Hindu way of life. Public educational programmes such as conferences, seminars and workshops are organised to benefit young Indians. Similarly, such programmes need to be organised in India. Sangh-inspired organisations need form alliances with other like-minded Hindu organisations to develop a strong, vibrant and assertive Hindu society. Param Poojaneeya Guruji had correctly said "Our brethren abroad will have to bring about a total transformation in the thoughts and life styles if they have to lead a happier, richer and more honoured life abroad and also make the image of India shine brighter in those countries". Once that happens outside India, it will be followed in India.*⁶⁴

2. Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh NZ

The networked structure of the Hindutva organisation RSS is exported and reproduced outside India through the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) ("Hindu Volunteers Corps").⁶⁵ The organisations that make up the global reach of the HSS propagate the Hindutva project abroad, finding advocates and sources of funding.⁶⁶ Members of the HSS are often former members of the RSS in India prior to their emigration.⁶⁷ The HSS has a presence in approximately 135 countries,⁶⁸ including Aotearoa New Zealand.

The Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh NZ (HSSNZ) was established in 1996.⁶⁹ There are nine *shakhas* (chapters) of HSSNZ in Aotearoa New Zealand.⁷⁰ The HSSNZ has an extensive list of objectives formalised in its "Rules of the Society." Worth noting in the objectives is the following:

*To take step desirable with a view to establish a disciplined society of Hindus generally by eradicating fissiparous tendencies arising from diversity of sects, faiths, caste, creed, language and other differences that appear among them.*⁷¹

The Hindutva project as exemplified by the above objective seeks to erase the pluralism of Hinduism, a diversity that the HSSNZ claims leads to "fissiparous tendencies." To construct a culturally homogenous Hindu majority is one of the core tenets of the Hindutva ideology.⁷²

That the HSSNZ reproduces the organisational structure of the RSS is evident in its constitution and membership. The roles and responsibilities for HSSNZ office bearers is given as follows in its "Rules of the Society," following RSS prescriptions:

The office-bearers of the Sangh are to be:

- (1) *The President (Sanghchalak)*
- (2) *The Secretary (Karyavaha)*
- (3) *The Joint Secretary (Sah-Karyavaha)*
- (4) *The Treasurer (Nidhi Pramukh)*
- (5) *The Public Relations Officer (Sampark Pramukh)*⁷³

Compare the HSSNZ organisational structure with that of the RSS, where the non-elective supreme head of the RSS Mohan Bhagwat is called "Sarsanghchalak," where the general secretaries are called "Sah Sarkaryavah," and where the executive head of each RSS *shakha* is called "Karyavah."⁷⁴ The HSSNZ's

terms are not mere translations from Indian languages for committee roles but correspond to specific designations prescribed by the RSS as part of its organisational network. As the RSS author Ratan Sharda explains:

The RSS has a highly federal structure that is defined clearly in its constitution. [...] Organisational units [...] have karyavah as the executive head of the team and in-charge of overall activities. The guide and philosopher at each level is 'sanghchaalak', that is President of the organisation of a particular area. [...] He does not take part in day to day functioning or decision making of the organisation; this falls under a karyavah's domain. His most important role is that of a guardian to all the volunteers and workers. He is the public face of RSS in the locality.⁷⁵

Sharda further explains the responsibilities of each office-bearer, systems for self-financing the organisations through “guru dakshina” (an offering to a guru for education, training or guidance), the organising of Sangh Shiksha Varg camps—all of which the HSSNZ follows—as well as detailing the flows of information across the RSS network:

Resolutions passed in the Pratinidhi Sabha⁷⁶ and Kendriya Karyakarini Mandal⁷⁷ truly reflects RSS views of various issues facing the nation and Hindu society at a given time. A serious student of the RSS should read these resolutions which are made public immediately and sent to media for publication.⁷⁸

A common method employed by Hindutva organisations to grow their movement is the training of youth, such as through the RSS's Sangh Shiksha Varg camps. Foundational figures of the Hindutva ideology, such as B.S. Moonje and V.D. Savarkar, took inspiration from fascist youth movements of 20th Century Europe. In his diary during a visit to Italy, Moonje expressed his thoughts on Opera Nazionale Balilla, the foremost Italian fascist youth organisation:

The Balilla institutions and the conception of the whole organisation have appealed to me most [...]. Mussolini saw the essential weakness of his country and conceived the idea of the Balilla organisation... Nothing better could have been conceived for the military organisation of Italy...The idea of fascism vividly brings out the conception of unity amongst people...India and particularly Hindu India need some such institution for the military regeneration of the Hindus.⁷⁹

Many of the methods employed by such movements in 20th Century Europe were subsequently implemented by the RSS, and continue to be in use to this day.

A central part of the HSSNZ activities is its reproduction of the RSS's Sangh Shiksha Varg camps. The HSSNZ's Sangh Shiksha Varg camp held in Auckland, April 2019 was aimed at families and young people and sought to train them in the structural framework of the RSS.⁸⁰ The pedagogy of the camp was structured on the RSS pedagogy, constituted into sharirik and boudhik activities.⁸¹ Like its counterparts in the HSS globally, the camp incorporated marching and martial training to effectively use a *lathi* (a long, heavy bamboo stick used as a baton), and discussions “related to Hindu Dharma (way of living) and what we can do to protect it.”⁸² Aspects of this training are also incorporated into the weekly *shakhas* held around the country. Children are often rewarded for their participation by being given small saffron flags, a symbol of the RSS and Hindutva as an ideology.⁸³

In their recruitment efforts, the HSSNZ often targets parents, particularly recent migrants. HSSNZ promotes its programmes as an effective way to encourage prosocial behaviour in their children (Figure 2), as well as a method to ensure children growing up in Aotearoa New Zealand are aware of and proud of their heritage (Figure 3). These persuasions play into a common anxiety among recent migrants about the loss of culture and the influences of the West on their first generation children. The RSS's *The Organiser* explains the anxiety among migrant parents as follows:

*The American Hindu is perpetually concerned that his children are brought up in the Hindu tradition, that he gets acquainted with the Hindu gods and goddesses. Some of the parents are highly exercised over their children being tainted by the Western culture. Some they are now repenting at leisure that in their blind pursuit of wealth they had abandoned their children to absorb the Western culture. Others have awakened to the danger.*⁸⁴

“Western culture” is here framed as a danger that threatens to render impure Hindu children. Correspondingly, in order to resist the idea of the West’s polluting influence, the cultural pedagogy of Hindutva organisations seek to train youth in what they uphold as a superior tradition (*sanskār*).⁸⁵ Using cultural activities as the basis for pedagogy, young people are recruited into Hindutva organisations, in turn sustaining the RSS in the diaspora.⁸⁶

The HSSNZ ceremonially endorses and promotes major Hindutva ideologues, such as V. D. Savarkar, K. B. Hedgewar, Lakshmibai Kelkar, and M. S. Golwalkar. Portraits of these leaders appear with garlands at HSS *shakhas* (Figure 4), a sign of great reverence for those who have passed. Veneration of Hindutva ideologues is also evidenced through the HSSNZ’s public Facebook posts. The HSSNZ has referred to Golwalkar as “one of the greatest social reformer of post-Independent India,” “a seer and visionary,” and as a “Rashtra-rishi” (a saint of the *rashtra*) (Figure 5). Similarly, the HSSNZ has referred to Savarkar as “a great man,” “great freedom fighter,” “the epitome of selflessness, patriotism and courage,” as well as a “righteous legend” (Figure 6).

Golwalkar and Savarkar are foundational figures of the Hindutva ideology.⁸⁷ Indeed, Hindutva as a political ideology was codified by Savarkar in his 1923 pamphlet *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* It is critical to note that Golwalkar and Savarkar were both inspired by fascist ideologues in Europe.

In his 1939 book, Golwalkar wrote, “German race pride has now become the topic of the day. To keep up the purity of the Race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by purging the country of the Semitic Races – the Jews. [...] a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by.”⁸⁸ In an address to RSS members the year before, Golwalkar asserted: “If we Hindus grow stronger, in time Muslim friends ... will have to play the part of German Jews.”⁸⁹

The fundamental value of racial inequality that underpinned the European fascist movements was advocated by Savarkar in the context of India. The conception of a Hindu race (*jati*) formed the basis of Hindutva as a supremacist ideology. When asked by an American war correspondent in 1944, “How do you plan to treat Mohammedans?” Savarkar replied, “As a minority, in the position of your Negroes.”⁹⁰

The cult of personality developed around the key architects of Hindutva, whose political organising is built upon fascist and Islamophobic elements, has vital implications for Aotearoa New Zealand.

3. Overseas Friends of the Bharatiya Janata Party New Zealand

With its roots in the political ideology of Hindutva, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) asserts a Hindu nationalist policy that seeks to organise India as a Hindu nation (Hindu *rashtra*).⁹¹ The BJP’s policy agenda legitimises marginalising practices directed at diverse minorities, particularly against Indian Muslims and Christians, and endorses communal violence and militant action.⁹²

The BJP draws its support for the Hindu nationalist movement outside India through its affiliated Overseas Friends of BJP (OFBJP) organisations.⁹³ In the United States, the OFBJP USA registered itself as a “foreign agent” in the backdrop of Prime Minister Modi’s decision to endorse President Trump and after his party’s willingness to mobilise sections of the Indian-American community to advance controversial causes.⁹⁴ In a study of the BJP’s political strategy in its relationship with the OFBJP organisations around the world, Masaaki Nakatsu notes:

BJP looked for a new political strategy overseas and incorporated various demands of the OFBJP into government policies, such as the dual citizenship and the appointment of the person involved with these organizations as ambassador in charge of Indian diaspora affairs. The OFBJP, on the other hand, strengthened its supporting activities for the BJP in Indian diaspora society.⁹⁵

The Overseas Friends of the Bharatiya Janata Party New Zealand (OFBJP NZ) was established in 2014 in the lead up to the Indian General Election.⁹⁶ The activities of the BJP are coordinated with the Indian diaspora through the network of the OFBJP, including the OFBJP NZ. On its public-facing Facebook and Twitter platforms (Figure 7), the OFBJP NZ frequently reposts and shares content from the BJP, VHP, RSS, and HSSNZ (Figures 8–11). Critical discourse analysis of OFBJP NZ's communications point to the recreation of the Hindutva ideology in the diaspora, and indicates a bidirectional flow of influence and support that plays on the Indian diaspora's emotional attachment to India.⁹⁷

During the 2019 Indian general elections, the OFBJP NZ organised an event in Auckland called Chai Pe Charcha ("chit-chat over chai," named after Prime Minister Modi's publicity campaign). In an interview with the news media platform Apnu Gujarat New Zealand, OFBJP NZ's Vice President Dev Bhardwaj says:

Chai pe charcha karte hue oon logo ne [referring to the BJP] bataye ki waha se kaise convince karthe apne jo overseas mein log baithe hain aur vote dene ke liye. Aur hum yaha aur bhi logo se nivedan karte hai ki jo bhi log samne ana chahiye bathaiye aur aage vote dene ke liye yaha se logo ko appeal bhi lijiye.

(Chit-chatting over chai, they [referring to the BJP] said from there how to convince our people sitting overseas to give their vote. And we're from here requesting even more people, whoever wants to come forward, tell and take our appeal from here to vote going forward.)⁹⁸

The interviewer frames the OFBJP NZ as representing the interests of all Indians in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland: "Auckland mein jitne bhi bhartiya hein, voh yaha par ikhata hue hai. [However many Indians there are in Auckland, they have gathered here]."⁹⁹ That same news report notes that "Nearly 100 plus people participated."¹⁰⁰ (In 2018, the Auckland Council recorded 154,824 people identifying as Indian living in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.¹⁰¹)

Upon Narendra Modi's successful campaign for the prime ministerial candidacy that year, the BJP invited Bhardwaj for Prime Minister Modi's swearing-in ceremony in New Delhi. Bhardwaj is quoted thanking the BJP for the invitation in a news report by the *Indian Weekender*.¹⁰² In that same news report, the BJP's Foreign Affairs in-charge Vijay Chauthaiwale notes the importance of the Indian diaspora in the political campaign: "Thousands of NRIs [Non-Resident Indian] were involved in campaigning in one way or another, many of them worked hard in their respective countries. About 600–700 NRI actually came here and stayed for 2–4 weeks during the campaign."¹⁰³

There is a further interpenetrating relationship between the OFBJP NZ and other Hindutva-linked organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand. At the World Hindu Economic Forum later that same year in 2019, Hardik Desai of OFBJP NZ was in attendance representing "Team New Zealand" alongside HCNZ's General Secretary Guna Magesan and President Vinod Kumar,¹⁰⁴ and where the keynote speaker was BJP's "Priest of Violence" Yogi Adityanath.¹⁰⁵

In the local context of Aotearoa New Zealand, OFBJP NZ's public programmes with other Hindutva-linked organisations are means for engaging the Indian diaspora in the political ideology of Hindutva. For example, the OFBJP NZ and the Hindu Elders Foundation ("a division of Hindu Council of New Zealand")¹⁰⁶ held an awards ceremony together in December 2018 for an essay writing competition for youth on the topic of "My Visionary Bharat in 2027."¹⁰⁷

CONCLUSION

In his 2015 PhD thesis on the Indian diaspora in New Zealand, Todd Nachowitz calls for The Human Rights Commission's Diversity Action Programme (DAP) to "more assiduously vet its applications for enrollment, as even well intentioned programmes may become potentially compromised by association with evidently fundamentalist organisations."¹⁰⁸ Nachowitz names the HCNZ as an example of such an organisation that has made its way onto the DAP list of participants "that either actively discriminates, or is supported by larger umbrella organisations that discriminate."¹⁰⁹ On the HCNZ, Nachowitz writes:

Hindu Council of New Zealand, a 2013 DAP member, has ties to the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), which itself is linked with the Rāshtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bhārtiya Janta Party (BJP).

In footnotes attached to the passage above, Nachowitz explains the significance of the HCNZ's connection with the VHP and the RSS:

The VHP, or World Hindu Council, is a Hindu religious fundamentalist organisation based in India on the ideology of Hindutva, advocating Hindu nationalism and exclusivism. Its main objective is "to organise and consolidate Hindu society and to serve and protect the Hindu Dharma" (Vishva Hindu Parishad 2014). The VHP operates under an umbrella of Hindu nationalist organisations known as the Sangh Parivar, which also includes the RSS and the BJP (Lochtefeld 1994, Katju 2010).¹¹⁰

The RSS, loosely translated as the National Patriotic Organisation, is a right-wing, paramilitary, Hindu nationalist group based in India "founded in 1925 on a platform of Hindu nationalism and the subordination of non-Hindus" (Horowitz 2001:244), and is decidedly anti-Muslim (cf. Curran 1950, Atkins 2004:264).

Nachowitz further identifies Mahesh Bindra as a New Zealand politician and public figure who has been a member of the RSS, and who participates in the World Hindu Economic Forum¹¹² alongside HCNZ's Vinod Kumar and Guna Magesan:

Mahesh Bindra, elected to New Zealand's 51st Parliament in the September 2014 general elections and New Zealand First's 11th List MP, was a member of the RSS in India. In an interview, Bindra states: "I come from a politically active family. My father was a senior functionary of Jana Sangh, which later formed today's Bhārtiya Janta Party (BJP). My association with the Sangh Parivar goes back to the days when I became a Swayam Sevak of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) at the age of 14" (Sharma 2014).¹¹³

Even as Nachowitz identifies HCNZ as a Hindutva-linked organisation, his scholarship is limited by insufficient empirical examination of their connections and material exchanges with Hindutva organisations and individuals in India, and their strategies to spread the Hindutva ideology in Aotearoa New Zealand. Specifically, the communicative strategy of equivocation—which allows Hindutva-linked groups in Aotearoa New Zealand to lay claim to the Hindutva movement in India, while simultaneously obfuscating such links—is documented through Nachowitz's work:

Most Hindu Council members in New Zealand do not overtly profess a connection with such fundamentalist and exclusionist organisations [VHP and the RSS], proclaiming instead to only support Hinduism and Hindu ideals, and remain naïvely unaware of the profound implications of association with organisations espousing such extremist convictions. The fact that many Indian New Zealanders are unaware of their connection with Hindu fundamentalist hate groups like the VHP and the RSS has meant that there is no broader public awareness of these organisations, which are often seen as Hindu 'cultural' or 'religious' groups.¹¹⁴

In a connected footnote, Nachowitz writes:

The author has witnessed, on several occasions between 2008–2013, Hindu Council members vehemently denying any connection with Hindu fundamentalism.¹¹⁵

However, as this paper shows, organisations such as the HCNZ, HSSNZ and OFBJP NZ are linked with the Hindutva movement through inter-organisational networks and flows of financial, cultural and human capital. As such, the HCNZ members' claims to not overtly be connected with the Hindutva movement is not naive, but rather forms part of a communicative strategy of equivocation—a strategy vital to the discursive architecture of Hindutva in the diaspora. Therefore, equivocation ought to be closely discerned by attending to the empirical in the everyday contexts of diverse spaces in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Christophe Jaffrelot and Ingrid Therwath draw on the concept of long-distance nationalism proposed by Benedict Anderson in order to depict the synergistic relationship between a centralised organisation in the country of origin, and a favourable climate among migrants in the diaspora for ethnic mobilisation.¹¹⁶ Racist social exclusion of Indian migrant communities in Western nation states fosters favourable conditions for migrants to partake in the Hindutva movement.¹¹⁷

In the context of multiculturalist liberal democracies, Hindutva organisations present themselves as “ethnic lobbies,”¹¹⁸ as opposed to ideologically-motivated. They market themselves as cultural organisations, and often hold the seat for representing Hindus at multi-faith and multicultural initiatives in the diaspora. An uncritical approach to ethnic representation in Aotearoa New Zealand fosters an environment that enables Hindutva-linked organisations to secure hegemonic power by positioning themselves as the monolithic voice of Hindus.¹¹⁹

The way in which multicultural organisations are officially recognised and engaged in Aotearoa New Zealand does not interrogate the underlying ideology guiding the organisations. This allows ideologically-motivated organisations based on the principle of othering to consolidate power and control. As Balmurli Natrajan puts it in “Practicing Hindus, Hindutva and Multiculturalism”:

A ‘majority’ religion in India, Hinduism has traveled across national borders to become a ‘minority’ religion in other social spaces such as the USA and UK. In such societies, Hinduism has increasingly come under the dominance of Hindutva’s majoritarian ideology, which is successfully represented under multiculturalism as a benign ideology contributing to cultural diversity.

Consequently, representations of religions in school textbooks, scholarly writings, and popular media have become key sites for the enactment of multiculturalism’s ‘tolerance’ with each religious ‘community’ taking upon itself the leadership and rights of representing its own ‘authenticity’ on a multicultural canvas.¹²⁰

The context of an uncritical multiculturalism enables Hindutva-linked organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand to project themselves as the designated representative of Hindus based on a monolithic construction of Hindu culture (sanskriti) and Hindu race (jati). The reticence to consider how ethnic communities are not internally homogeneous entrenches power inequalities, overwriting genuine diversity and erasing critical interrogations that come from the margins of ethnic communities. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the voices of protest against Hindutva, including voices of Muslim communities experiencing the deleterious effects of Hindutva, have been systematically erased and subjected to gaslighting.¹²¹ In this way, uncritical multiculturalism perpetuates ongoing forms of erasure at the margins.

In the wake of the 2019 Christchurch Mosque shootings, it is vital to examine how Islamophobia flows through various ideological formations, including white supremacy and Hindutva. Critically interrogating the political ideology of Hindutva is vital to building social cohesion in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In demonstrating the presence of Hindutva-linked organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand, this paper is limited to the analysis of secondary sources: published texts, publicly available records, and reports of activities. We recommend that future research examine the practices of Hindutva-linked organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand, although access will pose a key challenge while maintaining the commitment to informed consent. Equally important for future research will be in-depth interviews with gender diverse, religious and oppressed-caste minorities in order to develop strategies that counter the effects of the Hindutva ideology in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The development of strategies to counter the ideology of Hindutva will need to be underpinned by questions such as: What are the consequences for organising, funding and promoting visits of Hindutva ideologues from India? What are the consequences for New Zealand organisations, institutions and platforms that host public speeches delivered by Hindutva ideologues from India? What are the consequences for the propagation of the Hindutva ideology by New Zealanders attending and representing Aotearoa New Zealand at Hindutva-linked international conferences? What are the consequences for training New Zealand youth in pedagogies linked to Hindutva organisations in India?

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our preliminary analysis, we make the following recommendations. In making the recommendations, we draw on the tenets of the culture-centered approach (CCA).¹²² The CCA interrogates the ways in which culture is deployed to create and reproduce structures that erase the voices of communities at the margins. In the context of Hindutva, the CCA documents the mobilization of culture by Hindu nationalism to erase the voices of Muslims both in India and in the diaspora. It illuminates the importance of culture, suggesting that “culture” must always be interrogated in its uses, particularly in the context of the production of culture as essence and representation to prop up ethnonationalism. We suggest the relevance of critically interrogating:

1. the charitable status granted to organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand with links to the Hindutva ideology;
2. the ways government agencies attend forums hosted by Hindutva-linked organisations;
3. the funding of Hindutva-linked organisations; and
4. the ways government agencies issue invitations to Hindutva-linked organisations to participate in forums.

Finally, drawing on the concept that voice infrastructures serve as the basis for building social cohesion, we recommend:

1. that giving effect to the spirit of the Royal Commission Inquiry into the Christchurch attack will require centering the voices of Indian Muslims and diverse Indian minority communities; and
2. particularly during crises as evident in Leicester, it is critically important to listen to Muslim voices in mainstream media, policy analyses, and state response.

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APPENDIX:

Table 1: New Zealand politicians and public figures in attendance at the HCNZ's National Hindu Conferences.

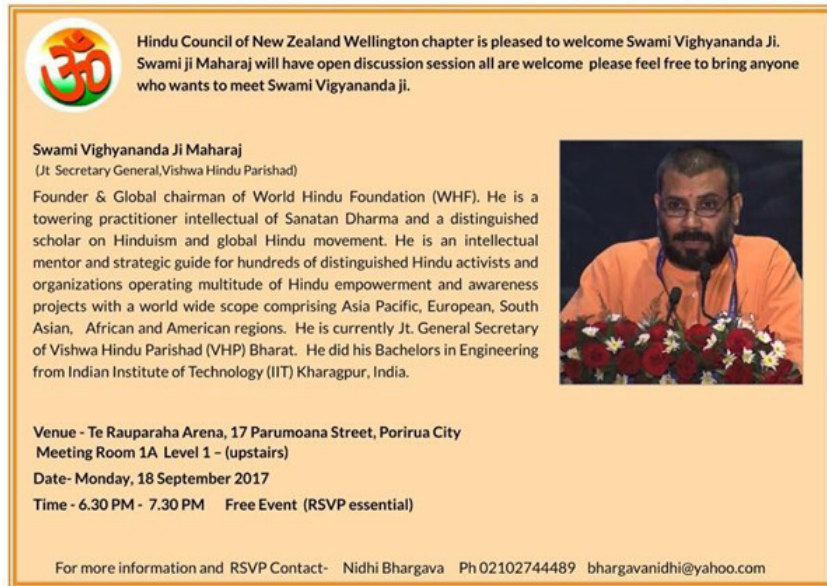
<p>5th New Zealand National Hindu Conference ¹²³ May 4th, 2019</p>	<p>Inaugurated by Deputy Prime Minister Winston Peters, and attended by Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Ethnic Communities Michael Wood, National MP Kanwaljit Singh Bakshi, National MP Parmjeet Parmar, Hon. Consul of India Bhav Dhillon, Chief Human Rights Commissioner Paul Hunt, Principal Advisor to NZ Police Inspector Rakesh Naidoo, and Chief Human Rights Commissioner Paul Hunt.</p>
<p>4th New Zealand National Hindu Conference ¹²⁴ May 12 – 13th, 2012</p>	<p>Inaugurated by Minister of Ethnic Affairs Judith Collins, and attended by Leader of Opposition David Shearer, National MP Kanwaljeet Bakshi, National MP Melissa Lee, Labour MP Aupito William Sio, and Labour MP Rajen Prasad.</p> <p>Also attended by representatives of the Vishva Hindu Parishad of Australia and Vishva Hindu Parishad of Fiji.¹²⁵</p>
<p>3rd New Zealand National Hindu Conference ¹²⁶ May 15th, 2010</p>	<p>Inaugurated by Leader of the Opposition Phil Goff (Figure 12), and attended by Dr. Haare Williams, Mayor of Manukau City Len Brown, Labour MP Rajen Prasad, and Green MP Keith Locke.</p>
<p>2nd New Zealand National Hindu Conference ¹²⁷ May 16th, 2008</p>	<p>Inaugurated by His Highness Te Arikinui King Tuheitia, and attended by Dr. Haare Williams, and Rakesh Naidoo of the NZ Police.</p>
<p>1st New Zealand National Hindu Conference ¹²⁸ May 12th, 2007</p>	<p>Inaugurated by Prime Minister Helen Clark, and attended by Mayor of Manukau City Barry Curtis, and Dr. Haare Williams.</p>


Table 2: New Zealand politicians and public figures in attendance at HCNZ-affiliated events.

<p>4th New Zealand Youth Hindu Conference ¹²⁹ February 29th, 2020</p>	<p>The HCNZ-affiliated Hindu Youth Conferences are jointly organised by the Hindu Youth New Zealand and the New Zealand Hindu Students Forum. This event was hosted at the transnational corporation KPMG at its offices in Auckland (Figure 13).</p>	<p>Attended by National MP Kanwaljit Singh Bakshi, Minister for Ethnic Communities Jenny Salesa, Principal Advisor for the New Zealand Police Inspector Rakesh Naidoo, and Race Relations Commissioner Meng Foon.</p>
<p>Raksha Bandhan ¹³⁰ August 31st, 2019</p>	<p>A collaboration between the Wellington chapter of the HCNZ, HOTA, and HSSNZ. The youth volunteers of the HSSNZ handcrafted the rakhi for the occasion.</p>	<p>Attended by Former Mayor of Lower Hutt Ray Wallace, Chris Bishop, Ginny Andersen, Greg O'Connor, Principal Advisor for the New Zealand Police Inspector Rakesh Naidoo, and volunteer firefighter and President of the Wellington Chinese Association Luke Qin. Labour MP Priyanca Radhakrishnan submitted a video to be presented at the event.</p>

HINDUTVA-LINKED ORGANISATIONS IN AOTEAROA NZ:
BIDIRECTIONAL FLOWS AND EQUIVOCATION AS COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGY


Figure 1: HCNZ's invitation to an open discussion session with Swami Vigyananda in Porirua, New Zealand, 18 September 2017.



 Hindu Council of New Zealand Wellington chapter is pleased to welcome Swami Vigyananda Ji. Swami ji Maharaj will have open discussion session all are welcome please feel free to bring anyone who wants to meet Swami Vigyananda ji.

Swami Vigyananda Ji Maharaj
(Jt Secretary General, Vishwa Hindu Parishad)

Founder & Global chairman of World Hindu Foundation (WHF). He is a towering practitioner intellectual of Sanatan Dharma and a distinguished scholar on Hinduism and global Hindu movement. He is an intellectual mentor and strategic guide for hundreds of distinguished Hindu activists and organizations operating multitude of Hindu empowerment and awareness projects with a world wide scope comprising Asia Pacific, European, South Asian, African and American regions. He is currently Jt. General Secretary of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) Bharat. He did his Bachelors in Engineering from Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kharagpur, India.



Venue - Te Rauparaha Arena, 17 Parumoana Street, Porirua City
Meeting Room 1A Level 1 - (upstairs)
Date- Monday, 18 September 2017
Time - 6.30 PM - 7.30 PM Free Event (RSVP essential)

For more information and RSVP Contact- Nidhi Bhargava Ph 02102744489 bhargavanidhi@yahoo.com

Figure 2: HSSNZ's recruitment efforts aimed at parents on its public Facebook page.



 **Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh New Zealand**
8 September 2017 · 🌐

Teaching Your Child to Be a Team Player.
Come and join us every sunday
[#vasudev_kutumbakam](#)



 **Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh New Zealand**

TEAM WORK

We take a look at the importance of building teamwork from a young age, and what you can do to support your child.

The ability to work together with others as part of a team is not simply a skill needed at school, it is a vital skill used in all areas of life.

Take them to weekly shakha

Every sunday
4 to 5.30 PM
Mt Roskill Intermediate School

5 1 share

Figure 3: HSSNZ's recruitment efforts aimed at parents on its public Facebook page.



Figure 4: Portraits of Hindutva ideologues (K. B. Hedgewar, Lakshmbai Kelkar, and M. S. Golwalkar) with garlands at HSSNZ's shakha, shared on HSSNZ's public Facebook page.



Figure 5: HSSNZ's praise for M.S. Golwalkar on its public Facebook page.



Figure 6: HSSNZ's praise for V.D. Savarkar on its public Facebook page.



HINDUTVA-LINKED ORGANISATIONS IN AOTEAROA NZ:
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Figure 7: OFBJP NZ's public Facebook page.

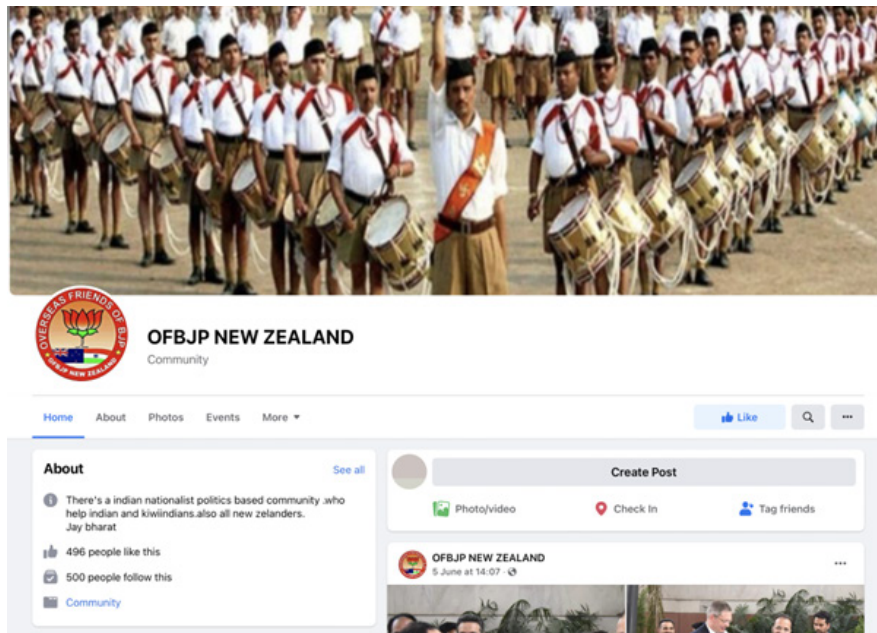


Figure 8: OFBJP NZ shares content from the BJP on its public Facebook page.



Figure 9: OFBJP NZ shares content from the VHP on its public Facebook page.



Figure 10: OFBJP NZ shares content from the RSS on its public Facebook page.



Figure 11: OFBJP NZ shares content from the HSSNZ on its public Facebook page.



Figure 12: Leader of the Opposition Phil Goff at HCNZ's 3rd New Zealand National Hindu Conference.



Figure 13: KPMG NZ hosts the 4th New Zealand Hindu Youth Conference, retrieved from Twitter.



On Saturday 29th February KPMG was delighted to host the 4th New Zealand Hindu Youth Conference at our Auckland Office. With a theme of “Inspirers of Change: Together for Tomorrow” the conference was a great opportunity for youth to help drive change for New Zealand.



1:39 PM · Mar 3, 2020 · Twitter Web App