

Closing Statement @dghconference (Read by Prof M. Dhanda & Prof J. Kapur)

We close the “Dismantling Global Hindutva: Multidisciplinary Perspectives” conference today with a brief note on behalf of the Ad-Hoc Organizing Committee reflecting on the past three days. We offer these reflections while keeping our collective gaze directed firmly toward the future. Perhaps the most important achievement of this conference is that it happened at all. From the moment it was announced, there were relentless and vicious attacks on organizers, panelists, and moderators. *Orchestrated* attacks on the universities whose departments, programs, and academic units co-sponsored the conference. But these universities and individuals held firm, insisting on upholding the principle of academic freedom and the rights of scholars to discuss urgent issues even in the face of constant threat.

The rise of a supremacist ideology in India - and its export and amplification through various diasporic networks - is indeed an urgent issue. It merits sustained inquiry across scholarly disciplines, and we are proud that we were able to engage in a critical academic inquiry of precisely this nature over the past three days. In doing so, we hope to have honoured the resilience shown by so many activists and organizers from communities that have actively been targeted by the state and/or by extremist organizations. We hope also to have established a crucial precedent for academia: that the critical academic study of Hindu nationalism or Hindutva will continue, regardless of any attacks that may follow.

This conference was never about upholding a party line. Academics engage in debates and disagreements. Debating contentious topics is a normal and important part of academic life and the responsible exercise of academic freedom. This has been evident across all of our panels. While many will maliciously quote what our panelists said - out of context - and continue to spread disinformation about this conference, all those who watched the conference or followed our live-tweeting saw with what nuance, care and copious evidence all our panelists approached the topic of Hindutva. It is precisely in order to have nuanced conversations, on difficult topics with immense real-world stakes, that scholarship on Hindutva and its consequences must continue.

We want to thank everyone who made this possible, and to acknowledge the very real risks they took in doing so. These include enormous risks faced by participants from India, especially those still living there. In particular, we acknowledge the immense burden placed on scholars and artists from sexual and religious minorities and from caste-oppressed communities, and those who are precarious by virtue of their occupational status in academia or because of their immigration status. The burdens of such bravery are not shared equally, and it is especially unfortunate that the threats made to this conference have meant that for many their extraordinary courage and work in putting together this conference cannot be publicly acknowledged. To all of you, we offer our deepest gratitude.

Several significant research questions have arisen. The conference has revealed several transnational dimensions of Hindutva, its histories of influence from Fascism and Zionism, and its current ties and connections to authoritarian movements around the world. How might research on Hindutva usefully integrate such comparative, transnational perspectives? What are the lessons to be learnt from international

resistance movements? We also revisited some old questions with the hope to find new answers: e.g. Can caste be removed from a Hindu way of life? Can the analyses offered in this conference guide us to construct a social, political and ecological vision as an alternative to Hindutva? How can we break through and overcome current polarizations and divisions in working toward such a vision?

It is our hope that the ideas discussed at this conference will continue to reverberate through ongoing discussion, both within more privileged academic spaces and in more immediately vulnerable and embattled sites in India and elsewhere. That those who participated in the conference, and the thousands of people who listened to the discussions, will extend these debates. That they will bring them, bravely, into their classrooms and seminar rooms, into academic journals, into their writing for non-academic venues, and even to their personal conversations with friends and families. Many of these conversations already happen and will continue to happen at great personal cost. But to continue to scrutinize the workings of power with scholarship is our collective imperative, our ethical responsibility. We can do no less.

We have been humbled and exhilarated by the overwhelming support we found in this endeavor from circles beyond the conference itself. Thank you to the over 900 scholars who spontaneously created a petition in support of this conference. Thank you to the professional bodies such as PEN America and the Association for Asian Studies, and the many community organizations the world over, who championed our academic freedom. Thank you to all those who listened, engaged, and participated. What you witnessed was both ordinary and extraordinary: the successful completion of an academic conference during which scholars and public intellectuals critically examined scholarship, put forward new ideas, debated and disagreed, always respectfully and always with evidence, about the nature of Hindutva.

Thank you, once again, for being here, and for making this conference happen.

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