



AOTEAROA ALLIANCE OF PROGRESSIVE INDIANS

Sunday 3 October 2021

To: Hindu New Zealanders and organisations

Cc: New Zealand Human Rights Commission
Race Relations Commission
Ministry for Ethnic Communities
Ministry of Education
New Zealand Police
Religious Diversity Centre
Auckland Interfaith Council
Massey University

Re: On the Statements by the Hindu Council of New Zealand (HCNZ), and Hindu Organisations, Temples and Associations Forum (HOTA)

Namaste, and tēnā koutou,

The Hindu Council of New Zealand (HCNZ), and the Hindu Organisations, Temples and Associations Forum (HOTA) are seeking co-signatories on a statement intended for “Massey University, Human Rights Commission, Relevant Agencies.” The email’s subject line is *New Zealand Hindu Community Joint Statement – End Hinduphobia disguised as Academic Freedom*. It includes the two statements provided by HCNZ and HOTA attached as pdfs. These documents concern the scholarly activities of Professor Mohan J. Dutta of Massey University (details below). Their demand is that Massey University apologise for their support of Prof. Dutta’s work and that the University rescind his publishing. Their email is currently, as on September 28th, being distributed widely, including to the committees of various temples and organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand.

We are Hindu New Zealanders and members of Aotearoa Alliance of Progressive Indians. Our collective values are grounded in the principles of secularism and democracy, which lie at the heart of both the Indian and New Zealand constitutions. **We are writing because the HCNZ and HOTA statements make several factual errors and omissions, and thus misrepresent Prof. Dutta’s work and what is at stake. We believe this distortion is unjustified, and that it is part of a greater harmful movement that many Hindus are becoming unknowingly absorbed into.**



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In the supplementary (p. 4 – 14), we provide the missing context to HCNZ and HOTA's statements and explain the inconsistency of their position so you are fully informed of what your signature on their statements supports, and of what withholding and even opposing it could make possible for our community. We have identified the following **5 important problems with HCNZ and HOTA's claims, which we elaborate on in the supplementary with details and evidence:**

1. Hindutva is not the same as Hinduism. As Hindu New Zealanders, we cannot stress enough the point that a critique of Hindutva is not a critique of Hinduism. Hindutva names how a modern, far-right extremist, nationalistic political ideology has come about over the past century, which is distinctly different from and indeed detrimental to the diverse range of religious and spiritual practices of Hinduism. **HCNZ and HOTA falsely conflate Hindutva and Hinduism in order to try to silence the scholarly activities of Prof. Dutta, a Hindu.**
2. **HCNZ and HOTA presuppose to represent the "Hindu Community in New Zealand," but this is undermined by the great number of Hindu groups and individuals who are expressly in support of Massey University.** Their claim that "Prof. Dutta has ended up maligning an entire community" is unjustified and is a distortion of the facts.
3. **The claim to "Hinduphobia" aims to take advantage of the worries of minority communities within Aotearoa** who have experienced forms of discrimination and racism. By misleading the reader based on conflating Hindutva and Hinduism, HCNZ and HOTA promote a sense of victimhood.
4. **HCNZ (Vishva Hindu Parishad of New Zealand Inc.) is a key organisation in the infrastructure of Hindutva,** which is nowhere acknowledged in HCNZ and HOTA's statements.
5. At this crucial time in Aotearoa, against the backdrop of violence against minorities, there is increasing scrutiny placed upon extremism in all its forms by the State and citizens alike. **The stance against Academic Freedom that HCNZ and HOTA take in fact obstructs justice-based projects conducted by CARE and Massey University.** The commitment to Academic Freedom lies at the heart of our support for Prof. Dutta's scholarship.



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Our text is offered to Hindu New Zealanders to provide our perspective and to support you in making the decision to abstain from and even oppose HCNZ and HOTA, as well as the new organisation under the name of “Hindu Foundation” whose activities mirror HCNZ and HOTA .

We trust that some of you as Hindu New Zealanders, and some of your organisations sincerely do not with align with the values of Hindutva as promoted by HCNZ and HOTA, and we would like to offer this letter as a space in which you are able to reflect upon, and compare your standing with that of the Hindutva movement. In the instance you have already signed in support of HCNZ and HOTA, or Hindu Foundation and Hindu Youth New Zealand, we would like to encourage you to urgently withdraw your support by asking your names to be removed from their petitions.

Namaste, and ngā mihi nui,

Hindu New Zealanders and members of Aotearoa Alliance of Progressive Indians
committed to the principles of secularism and democracy

kia.ora@aotearoaprogressiveindians.org



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SUPPLEMENTARY

Background

Since August 2021, there have been an increasing number of cases of online abuse, expressions of hatred, and threats to Prof. Dutta's life and livelihood by Hindutva-aligned (Hindu Nationalism) groups and individuals in Aotearoa New Zealand. The NZ Police are aware, as they've said, "of concerns being raised that far-right nationalist or extremist Indian groups are operating in New Zealand."¹ Notwithstanding the scrutiny of the NZ Police, as well as the wider New Zealand public,² Hindutva-aligned bodies in Aotearoa are carrying out a smear campaign and attempted intimidation of scholars like Prof. Dutta, Director of the Center for Culture-Centered Approach to Research and Evaluation (CARE), as well as Massey University for supporting the Academic Freedom of Prof. Dutta as guaranteed by the Education Act of 1989.³ This has flared up recently in response, allegedly, to:

- A. *Cultural Hindutva and Islamophobia*,⁴ a White Paper authored by Prof. Dutta published May 2021 by CARE;
- B. Prof. Dutta's wider scholarly research, including his lecture *Critically Interrogating the Hinduphobic Narrative* delivered online on August 25th,⁵ and his opinion piece on the use of Sanskrit in the New Zealand Parliament in 2020;⁶
- C. CARE and Massey University's support of the *Dismantling Global Hindutva*⁷ conference alongside more than 53 universities including leading global institutions such as Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, NYU and others.

¹ Qiuyi Tan, "Police aware of concerns about far-right Indian nationalist groups in NZ," *NZ Herald* (27 September 2021) [Link](#).

² Laura Walters, "The rise of Hindutva and hate in Aotearoa's Indian diaspora," *Stuff and Sunday Star Times* (3 October 2021) [Link](#).

³ "Academic freedom and institutional autonomy of institutions (other than NZIST)," *Education Act 1989*, part 14, section 161 (reprinted as at 1 August 2020) [Link](#).

⁴ Mohan J. Dutta, "Cultural Hindutva and Islamophobia," *CARE White Paper Series*, issue 11 (May 2021) [Link](#).

⁵ Mohan J. Dutta, "Critically interrogating the Hinduphobia narrative," *CARE #EndTheHate Lecture Series* (25 August 2021) [Link](#).

⁶ Mohan J. Dutta, "Opinion: Why does an oath in Sanskrit in Aotearoa New Zealand's parliament raise questions?" *Massey University News* (27 November 2020) [Link](#).

⁷ *Dismantling Global Hindutva: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, conference (10-12 September 2021) [Link](#).



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Let us elaborate on the 5 important problems with HCNZ and HOTA's claims:

1. They misrepresent the difference between Hindutva and Hinduism

Perhaps the most important error in the HCNZ and HOTA's statements concerns the distinction between Hindutva and Hinduism. Hindutva is not the same as Hinduism.⁸ **As Hindu New Zealanders, we cannot stress enough the point that a critique of Hindutva is not a critique of Hinduism.**

Hindutva names how a modern, right-wing extremist, nationalistic political ideology has come about over the past century, which is distinctly different from and indeed detrimental to the diverse range of religious and spiritual practices of Hinduism. "If Hindutva is Hinduism," as the filmmaker Anand Patwardhan recently put it, "then the Ku Klux Klan is Christianity."⁹ While it is true that Hindutva is a word derived from Sanskrit with the literal meaning of "Hindu-ness,"¹⁰ it is nevertheless distinct from Hinduism.

HCNZ writes that Prof. Dutta "made a number of unsubstantiated allegations against Hindus." This statement is erroneous on two accounts: Firstly, we've included a link below to the White Paper where it is plain to see that research supports each claim Prof. Dutta makes, which he includes as references in the White Paper as part of his scholarly due diligence. What's more, nowhere does he critique the religion of Hinduism in the White Paper, but rather focuses on Hindutva. Secondly, the topic of Prof. Dutta's discussion is not Hindu people or followers of Hinduism, but Hindutva. In a subsequent statement, as a Hindu himself, Prof. Dutta has reiterated, "Hindutva extremism is the threat to Hinduism."¹¹

Prof. Dutta's scholarship joins many other works and voices in being critical of Hindutva movements.¹² HCNZ and HOTA's claims that this is an attack on Hinduism relies on them collapsing the two terms Hindutva and Hinduism into one another, and assume that they are interchangeable for most people

⁸ Arvind Sharma, "On the Difference Between Hinduism and Hindutva," *Education About Asia*, Volume 25, Number 1 (Spring 2020) [Link](#).

⁹ Anand Patwardhan, "If Hindutva is Hinduism then the Ku Klux Klan is Christianity," *Scroll.in* (12 September 2021) [Link](#).

¹⁰ Vaibhav Purandare, "Hindutva is not the same as Hinduism, said Savarkar," *The Telegraph India Online* (22 August 2019) [Link](#).

¹¹ Qiuyi Tan, "Police aware of concerns about far-right Indian nationalist groups in NZ," *NZ Herald* (27 September 2021) [Link](#).

¹² Ramachandra Guha, "How the Hindu mind has shrunk in its capacity for free thought and self-critique," *Scroll.in* (28 March 2021) [Link](#); Christophe Jaffrelot, "Rise of Hindutva has enabled a counter-revolution against Mandal's gains," *The Indian Express* (10 February 2021) [Link](#); Hannah Ellis-Petersen, "Death threats sent to participants of US conference on Hindu nationalism," *The Guardian* (9 September 2021) [Link](#).



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more broadly. HOTA writes, “To everyone reading and consuming such academic discourse, Hindutva = Hinduism.” However, this assumption rests on withholding, and even distorting the extensive literature on Hindutva, and how the founding fathers of the movement themselves describe it.¹³ In contrast, **we trust that any reader who is given sufficient context will understand the distinction.** We believe as Hindus that it is imperative that we ourselves understand the history and meaning of the Hindutva project so that we can oppose it and its erosion of Hindu values.

What is Hindutva?

The project of Hindutva is organised around the idea of promoting India as a “Hindu Rashtra” (Hindu Nationalism).¹⁴ The movement emerged in the 20th-century alongside the work of its founders including V. D. Savarkar, whose 1923 book *Essentials of Hindutva* advanced the creation of a Hindu Rashtra as the core socio-political objective of Hindutva.¹⁵ Savarkar, M. S. Golwalkar, S. S. Apte and others sustained dialogues with Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany to form a far-right, socio-political ideology and **a supremacist force based on aggressive and strategic deformations of Hinduism, and of the pluralistic character of India and its diaspora**—i.e., its diversity of opinions and dissenting voices, distinct and diverse deities, and often contradictory devotional choices. As a form of far-right extremism in the present-day, Hindutva threatens to strip the subcontinent of its pluralism and syncretism, of its many cultures and creeds.¹⁶

What’s particularly wrongful and harmful about the narrative of India as a “Hindu Rashtra” is that it frames Christian and Muslim Indians as internal threats to the “Hindu Nation” by constructing them as outsiders.¹⁷ Simultaneously, through the practice of *ghar-wapsi* (“returning home” or converting non-Hindus),¹⁸ Hindu Nationalism erases Adivasi, Bahujan, Dalit among other minority, resistant identities. Consequently, the only way these minority communities can continue to exist is if they erase their differences and declare their allegiance to the monolithic Hindu *sanskriti* promoted by

¹³ The founder of Hindutva, V. D. Savarkar, said that Hindutva is not the same as Hinduism. See “Hindutva is not the same as Hinduism said Savarkar” by Vaibhav Purandare, *The Telegraph India Online* (22 August 2019) [Link](#).

¹⁴ Jyotirmaya Sharma, *Hindutva: Exploring the idea of Hindu nationalism* (Viking, 2003, republished HarperCollins, 2016) [Link](#).

¹⁵ Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Essentials of Hindutva* (Veer Savakar Prakashan, 1923), republished as *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* (1928) [Link](#).

¹⁶ Eviane Leidig, “Hindutva as a variant of right-wing extremism,” *Patterns of Prejudice*, volume 54, issue 3 (Routledge, 2020), page 215. [Link](#).

¹⁷ Ashutosh Varshney, “Contested Meanings: India’s National Identity, Hindu Nationalism, and the Politics of Anxiety,” *Daedalus*, volume 122, number 3 (The MIT Press, 1993), page 252. [Link](#).

¹⁸ South Asia Scholar Activist Collective, “What is Hindutva?” *Hindutva Harassment Field Manual* (September 2021) [Link](#).



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Hindutva.¹⁹ The HCNZ and HOTA statements provide us with just such an example of a push towards producing a singular, monolithic narrative.

It's important to note that the idea of **Hindu Nationalism is opposed to and indeed aims to undo the secular foundations of India**, as per its Constitution of 1949, as a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic.²⁰ Hindutva is reinforced by the false sense of victimhood, widespread conspiracy theories, disinformation campaigns, and never-ending imaginary threats from foreign powers.²¹

Falsely conflating Hindutva and Hinduism attempts to malign legitimate criticism. We need to see HCNZ and HOTA mixing the difference as not something innocent—i.e., not simply based on a lack of evidence or understanding. The effect of blending the two terms is like throwing sand in the eyes of anyone wanting to see clearly. This is a dangerous strategy of obfuscation, which attempts to silence the critique of Hindutva. As has been widely discussed, it is an extension of the Hindutva strategy being used in India and elsewhere.²²

The consequence of HCNZ and HOTA's statements undermine the ability of many Hindus, such as ourselves, to identify as Hindus if we do not prescribe to their espoused claims. What's more, by voicing our disagreement or desires for reform, we run the risk of being labelled anti-Hindu or "Hinduphobic." As the recent smear campaign against Prof. Dutta has demonstrated, the overall effect is to try to silence debate and disagreement. But the irony is not lost on us of being labelled anti-Hindu or Hinduphobic in the name of a religion that promotes diversity, pluralism, and inclusivity!

If we want to centre the values of diversity, pluralism, inclusivity, even dialogue, disagreement and dissent as a part of Hinduism, then we can recall and embrace a legacy of critical thinkers who have helped to progress a society towards justice. After all, these dissenters form a part of the Hinduism we've inherited:

Andal, Basavanna, Mahadeviyakka, Kabir, Mirabai, Tukaram, Jnanesvar, Sai Baba of Shirdi,

¹⁹ M. A. Muqtedar Khan and Rifat Binte Lutful. "Emerging Hindu Rashtra and Its Impact on Indian Muslims," *Religions*, Issue 12 (2021) [Link](#).

²⁰ Government of India, "Constitution of India," [India.gov.in Link](#).

²¹ Siddharth Varadarajan, "What Hindutva Really Is and Why It's Risky to Debate It," *The Wire* (10 September 2021) [Link](#).

²² The obfuscation we refer to is elsewhere described as a "smokescreen." See Shreena Gandhi et. al., "Hinduphobia is a Smokescreen for Hindu Nationalists" in *Religion News Service* (10 September 2021) [Link](#).



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Chaitanya Mahabrabhu, Sarada Devi and Ramakrishna Paramahansa;

More recently, modern-day teachers such as Jyotirao and Savitribai Phule, Gandhi, Gokhale, Ambedkar, Tagore, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Periyar, Vivekananda, Baba Lal Das, Lalon Fakir and countless others;

And even mixed communities such as the Valmikis, Mirasis, Sonar, Cheeta-Merats, the Bauls, and many more others.

Each of these individuals and each of these groups, in their own way, led powerful critiques of the injustices of their day, and they demonstrate the syncretism that continues to challenge the monolithic Hindutva narrative.

2. That HCNZ and HOTA represent the “Hindu Community”

The HCNZ statement opens with, “Hindu Community in New Zealand calls to end prejudice and hatred against Hindus in New Zealand.” In HOTA’s statement, the call to action is similarly framed as representing a singular, homogenous community: “We appeal to the New Zealand Hindu community [...]” It is under this pretence of total community representation that HCNZ and HOTA are engaging with and stoking the sentiments of New Zealanders who identify as Hindu.

However, **their assumptions to represent the “Hindu Community in New Zealand” is undermined by the great number of Hindu groups and individuals in Aotearoa who are expressly in support of Massey University**, and further advocate, as recommended in Prof. Dutta’s paper, “that the cultural elements of Hindutva in Aotearoa be closely examined and interrogated.”²³

Counting ourselves as among such a group of Hindus who denounce Hindutva (Hindu Nationalism), we add our names as Hindu New Zealanders unambiguously against Hindutva.²⁴ Our names appear alongside Hindus for Human Rights,²⁵ as well as other South Asian organisations in Aotearoa such as

²³ Mohan J. Dutta, “Cultural Hindutva and Islamophobia,” *CARE White Paper Series*, issue 11 (May 2021) [Link](#).

²⁴ Aotearoa Alliance of Progressive Indians, *Statement of Solidarity with Professor Dutta* (7 September 2021) [Link](#).

²⁵ Hindus for Human Rights, *HfHR’s Australia-New Zealand Chapter Expresses Concern over Attacks Directed at Prof. Mohan Dutta* (15 September 2021) [Link](#).



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Shaheed Bhagat Singh Charitable Trust,²⁶ Indian Association of Minorities, Guru Ravidass Sabha, Dr. Ambedkar Sports and Culture Association, Dr. Ambedkar Mission Society, Begampura Sikh Temple, to name just a few groups.²⁷ As far as individual Hindus are concerned, we count a total of 140 signatories on an open Letter in Support of CARE,²⁸ and 257 signatures in AAPI's petition in support of Academic Freedoms.²⁹ When HCNZ writes, "Prof. Dutta has ended up maligning an entire community," it is clear that this is not the case.

It is important also to note that HCNZ and HOTA's claim to represent the "Hindu Community" is based on a sleight of hand or trick. **Hindus do not need to belong to HCNZ or HOTA or any other organisation to be entitled to the identity of Hindu.** We can therefore challenge the idea that HCNZ or HOTA claim to represent 121,644.³⁰ Secondly, Hindutva-aligned groups' intention to equate Hindus with Indians results in the marginalisation of other minority identities. Among the Indian population in the Census, the Sikh community is the fastest growing, and those who are Hindu are actually a minority among the Indian population.

The HCNZ and HOTA statements join a series of attempts (including Hindu Youth New Zealand and the newly founded group Hindu Foundation) to also silence the voices of minorities in the diaspora who have written in strong support of Prof. Dutta.

²⁶ Shaheed Bhagat Singh Charitable Trust, *Statement in Complete Solidarity with Professor Mohan Dutta and The Center for Culture-Centered Approach to Research and Evaluation (CARE)* (15 September 2021) [Link](#).

²⁷ Indian Association of Minorities of New Zealand et. al., *Re: The article published by Dr. Mohan Dutta [...]*, letter (16 September 2021) [Link](#).

²⁸ *Letter in Support of CARE* (accessed 3 October 2021) [Link](#).

²⁹ Aotearoa Alliance of Progressive Indians, *Sign Now in Support of Academic Freedoms* (accessed 3 October 2021) [Link](#).

³⁰ Kay Seatter-Dunbar, "Losing our Religion," *Stats NZ* (3 October 2019) [Link](#).



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3. The claim of “Hinduphobia”

HCNZ writes, “over the last few years, all of this [contribution of Hindus in New Zealand] has come under attack.” It continues, “We therefore call upon all Hindu organisations to express support in the condemnation of Hinduphobia and Hindumisia [...]”

The first statement neither names nor alludes to who is perpetrating the perceived attack that we, as Hindus in Aotearoa, are supposedly experiencing. This is deliberately preys on and takes advantage of South Asian minority communities’s worries within Aotearoa, who have experienced forms of discrimination and racism here on the basis of our brown skin, as ethnic or racial minorities. HCNZ and HOTA strategically obfuscate white supremacy, which actually forms the basis of this racism. Without properly mentioning how racism functions, HC and HOTA draw on our vulnerabilities as minorities to wrongly block the critique of Hindutva.

Let us reflect on the reality of racism in Aotearoa and clearly see that our brown and black siblings of other religious groups also suffer under white supremacy. We, as Hindus, are not the true victims based upon our Hinduism. However, as we explain earlier, **the Hindutva ideology perpetuates harm in which our brown and black siblings of other religious groups experience discrimination, primarily Islamophobia as evident in the violence of recent events.** We must be motivated to stand alongside our siblings undeterred by our differences. HCNZ and HOTA

In his day, Gandhi was criticized for his “misuse” of Hinduism. He was labelled a “traitor” to the “Hindu people.” He wrote in *Young India* May 29, 1924, “My claim to Hinduism has been rejected by some because I believe [in] and advocate non-violence in its extreme form. They say that I am a Christian in disguise. I have been even seriously told that I am distorting the meaning of the Gita when I ascribe to that great poem the teaching of unadulterated non-violence.”³¹

The idea of “Hinduphobia” is rooted in this move to label someone like Prof. Dutta as the wrong type of Hindu, even anti-Hindu and “Hinduphobic”!

³¹ Vijay Prashad, “Letter to a Young American Hindu,” *Pass the Roti on the Left Hand Side* (21 May 2007) [Link](#).



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4. Troubling links between Hindu Council and the Vishva Hindu Parishad

CONSTITUTION OF HINDU COUNCIL OF NEW ZEALAND INCORPORATED

18/6/03

1. PREAMBLE

The founding fathers of this organisation envision the world as one large family "*Vasudaiva Kutumbakam*", as visualised by the ancient seers of Bharat (India). This vision is to spread the message of inter-dependence of human societies and nature, including plant, animal kingdom and the environment – "Harmony with the Creation". This cosmic harmony depends on *Dharma*. Dharma means eternal and universal values for the well-being of all. The founders of this organisation are therefore would like to promote respect for religious and cultural diversity.

2. NAME

The name of the organisation shall be the "Hindu Council of New Zealand Incorporated" (in ethnic language: Vishva Hindu Parishad of New Zealand Incorporated).

The Headquarters of the Hindu Council of New Zealand Incorporated shall be at 52 Hillcrest Avenue, Rotorua, New Zealand. The mailing address shall be PO Box 6240, Rotorua, New Zealand. The Governing Council of the Hindu Council of New Zealand Incorporated may, however, transfer the Headquarters (and the mailing address) to any other place as they may think fit.

3. DEFINITIONS

The term "Constitution" as used hereinafter, shall refer to only the Constitution of the Hindu Council of New Zealand Incorporated.

The term "Hindu" means a person, natural or legal, or one believing in, following or respecting the values of life – ethical, religious and spiritual –, which have developed in Bharat (i.e. India) and includes a person calling himself a Hindu.



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The political alignments of the Hindu Council are troubling, to say the least. This is particularly salient to foreground, as HCNZ seeks to occupy the space to speak for all Hindus. As pictured, the constitution of the HCNZ states that, “2. The name of the organization shall be the “Hindu Council of New Zealand Incorporated” (in ethnic language: *Vishva Hindu Parishad of New Zealand Incorporated*).” What’s more, they are clearly seen to promote the idea of India as a Hindu Nation based upon their definitions.

The Vishva Hindu Parishad is a key organisation in the infrastructure of Hindutva.³² It is explicitly connected with violence on innumerable accounts in the context of the subcontinent, including being **connected with organized riots and civil unrest. The VHP and its youth wing Bajrang Dal, which in the New Zealand context would equate to the HCNZ and the Hindu Youth New Zealand have been complicit in the violent attacks continued against minorities in the subcontinent.**³³ This has brought Hindutva-aligned groups and individuals to the forefront of Human Rights Watch.³⁴ Specifically, the VHP has been classified as a “militant religious organization” by the CIA in 2018 its World Factbook’s entry.³⁵

5. Stance against Academic Freedom

One of the key points of HCNZ and HOTA concerns Academic Freedom. HOTA writes, “Over the past few years, there has been an [sic.] several attacks to this [Hindu] community that has been supported and encouraged under the guise of Academic Freedom by those in and out of academia in New Zealand and overseas.”

Firstly, the sweeping and disingenuous statement, and the claim to “several attacks” is not supported with any evidence. HCNZ and HOTA’s underlying message to Massey University is to

³² G. Sampath, “Force of Hindutva,” *The Hindu* (14 October 2017) [Link](#); James G. Lochtefeld, “The Vishva Hindu Parishad and the Roots of Hindu Militancy,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, volume 62, number 2 (Oxford University Press: Summer, 1994) [Link](#).

³³ Ashutosh Varshney, “Understanding Gujarat Violence,” *Items: Insights from the Social Sciences*, volume 4, number 1 (Social Science Research Council, Winter 2002–3) [Link](#); Megha Kumar, *Communalism and Sexual Violence in India: The Politics of Gender, Ethnicity and Conflict* (Bloomsbury, 2016) [Link](#); Ratna Kapoor, “Normalizing Violence: Transitional Justice and the Gujarat Riots,” *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law*, volume 15, number 3 (Columbia University, 2006) [Link](#); Werner Menski, “Ashis Nandy et. al., Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of the Self,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, volume 61, issue 2 (Oxford University Press, 1998) [Link](#).

³⁴ Human Rights Watch, “India: Events of 2020,” World Report (2021) [Link](#).

³⁵ Staff at Scroll.in, “CIA calls Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal ‘religious militant organisations’ in World Factbook,” *Scroll.in* (15 June 2018) [Link](#).



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delegitimize the much needed work of Prof. Dutta as evidenced by the rise of Hindutva globally.

Furthermore, it is unclear on what basis HCNZ and HOTA are demonstrating that they're credible voices of the so-called Hindu Community. As we have shown, they're undermined in this role by innumerable Hindus in opposition to Hindutva. Let us closely examine the basis of Academic Freedoms, which HCNZ and HOTA argue Prof. Dutta has breached, and therefore they want to "call upon Massey University to apologise." Below is the content from the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit from March 2000:

According to Section 162 (4) (a) (v) of the Education Amendment Act, New Zealand universities are to be characterised by an acceptance of "the role of critic and conscience of society." This suggests that universities are to provide an environment within which academic staff can state and publish ideas and conclusions without fear of retribution or persecution, either within or beyond the walls of the universities. For this to happen, university authorities must be prepared to tolerate deviations from conventional wisdom by their academic staff, and to defend these staff when adverse pressures are brought to bear on them from sources outside the university. [...]

Academic freedom is integral to the role of critic and conscience of society, since freedom of this nature enables academics to voice their opinions and ideas, and publish their findings, without fear of reprimand. [...] If universities are to function effectively in this manner, it is imperative that they encourage academic staff to exercise this freedom.³⁶

We see Prof Dutta's work and his white paper exemplifying this vital role as critic and conscience of society. **Hindutva needs to be vigorously critiqued, especially given the attacks on Academic Freedom in India, and it is the ethical duty of South Asian academics in the diaspora to respond to this crisis.**

We commend Massey University for demonstrating its commitment to Academic Freedom in the face of Hindutva-aligned groups and individuals' bullying, and persistent harassment. We request you, Hindu and non-Hindu readers alike, to do the same—i.e., to protect our scholars and to support the Academic Freedom of Universities.

³⁶ D. Gareth Jones, Kerry Galvin, and David Woodhouse, "Universities as Critic and Conscience of Society: The role of academic freedom," *New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit* (2000) [Link](#).



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Conclusion

At this crucial time in Aotearoa New Zealand, against the backdrop of violence against minorities, there is increasing scrutiny placed upon extremism in all its forms by State authorities and citizens alike. HCNZ and HOTA's demand that Prof. Dutta and Massey University apologise comes across as unethical, and antithetical to the Hindu principle of *dharma*. It is especially clear that Prof. Dutta's White Paper is about extremist elements in Hindutva ideology, calling for careful examination of its presence in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Hindu New Zealanders and organisations' support of HCNZ and HOTA at this time should be perceived as obstructing justice-based projects conducted by Massey University. We especially urge temple organisations, who ordinarily form the support base for HCNZ and HOTA, to carefully consider our analysis. We offer our text to Hindu New Zealanders to provide our perspective and to support you in making the decision to abstain from and even oppose HCNZ and HOTA, as well as the new organisation under the name of "Hindu Foundation" whose activities mirror HCNZ and HOTA .

We trust that some of you as Hindu New Zealanders and some of your organisations sincerely do not align with the values of Hindutva, and we would like to offer this letter as a space in which you are able to reflect upon, and compare your standing with that of the Hindutva movement. In the instance you have already signed in support of HCNZ and HOTA, or Hindu Foundation and Hindu Youth New Zealand, we would like to encourage you to withdraw your support.

For our part, as Hindu New Zealanders, we aim to promote India not as a "Hindu Nation" but as plural, inclusive, and entwined across many, many identities and inheritances, as evidenced by the diversity of the diaspora in Aotearoa New Zealand. **The idea of a "Hindu Nation" is antithetical and opposed to the principles of democratic equality of all people, and the basis for human dignity as transcending any differences in caste and creed.**

END

Key Reference

Mohan J. Dutta, "Cultural Hindutva and Islamophobia," *CARE White Paper Series*, Issue 11 (May 2021) [Link](#).