

# Reconfiguring nationalism: Transnational entanglements of *Hindutva* and radical right ideology

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## Summary

This dissertation explores a minority within the Indian diaspora who support the ideological agenda of the radical right in the West. It situates the Brexit referendum and process in the UK, and Trump's election and presidency in the US, as manifestations of the radical right which provided an opportunity to merge the ideological currents of *Hindutva* (or Hindu nationalism)—an ideology originating from India—with these phenomena. Thus, this dissertation traces the transnational ideological linkages between *Hindutva* and the Western radical right. It positions the role of diaspora networks as interlocutors in adapting *Hindutva* towards Western political contexts, in effect creating alliances with radical right actors. United by shared practices of exclusion, this results in the reconfiguring of nationalist imaginaries made possible by transnational entanglements.

The dissertation consists of five articles that follow an overview of the background, the theoretical framework, and the methodological approaches of the study. The background provides historical and contemporary context of the evolution of *Hindutva*, its reformulation with the diaspora, and its convergence with the Brexit and Trump campaigns. The dissertation then draws upon theoretical insights in nationalism scholarship, as well as studies of diaspora and of the radical right, focusing on the conceptual overlaps between these fields in order to establish an intellectual foundation for the topic. Lastly, it employs a combined methodological approach that utilises genealogy, qualitative content analysis on social media, quantitative social media analysis, and semi-structured interviews as a means of demonstrating how ideology is operationalised at multiple scales.

The first article introduces *Hindutva* into the terminology of right-wing extremism. It argues that the origins and development of *Hindutva* need to be understood not as processes simply taking place locally, in isolation, but in fact deeply connected to extreme right movements in the West. The subsequent growth and 'mainstreaming' of *Hindutva* has been instrumental in nation-building and in creating a majoritarian identity in India. By situating the ideological, historical, and organisational dimensions of *Hindutva*, this article provides an analytical contribution towards how

we might conceptualise right-wing extremism in its global manifestations rather than just a Western phenomenon.

The second article traces the ideological linkages between diaspora *Hindutva* and the contemporary radical right in Western societies. It positions diaspora political participation and mobilisation online as not only a form of long-distance nationalism towards India: equally important is the role of minority identity formation in 'host societies'. Such practices of identity formation can be inherently exclusionary, thus creating an alliance between diaspora *Hindutva* and radical right actors on the shared basis of 'othering'. This article sheds light on processes of ideological hybridity between diaspora communities and the nationalist narratives of the Brexit and Trump agendas.

The third article discusses how Indian diaspora actors employ Western radical right discourse online. It explores how these actors engage with issues and rhetoric in the Brexit and Trump Twittersphere(s) in order to shape ideas, strategies, and agendas within this network. In doing so, these actors adapt narratives of diaspora *Hindutva* into local political contexts as a means of justifying support for radical right platforms. Importantly, it is not just diasporic Hindus, but also Sikhs and Christians, sometimes united by an anti-Muslim stance, who participate in this process. This article illustrates how Indian diaspora actors are creating new boundaries of inclusion and exclusion within radical right nationalist imaginaries.

The fourth article examines how Indian diaspora actors embed themselves into the British and American radical right online milieux. By analysing Twitter activity of diaspora users, it reveals the vast and interconnected network of radical right communities that are transnationally oriented. As a result, these communities are key nodes in building bridges for information exchange between users. This article finds that in perpetuating and circulating tropes and narratives of the radical right online, Indian diaspora actors rely on transnational dynamics to further exclusionary nationalist aims.

The fifth article addresses the negotiation between long-distance nationalist and nationalist attachments amongst Indian diaspora supporters of Brexit and Trump in the UK and US. Through interviews, it unpacks the complex associations that some individuals hold towards their countries of origin/descent versus their countries of settlement/residence. In order to make sense of their positioning, these diaspora actors construct and maintain boundaries that not only depend on transnational ties, but cement nationalist sentiments. This article highlights how Indian diaspora actors simultaneously articulate not competing, but complementary nationalisms, when articulating support for Brexit and Trump.