Hinduism v. Hindutva: Informal Measures to Preserve Pluralistic Values

By Sarthak Gupta
Policy Brief Series No. 152 (2024)

1. The Problem

Faced with the rise of religious polarization and hate-laced ideologies in India, can Hindu religious leaders, as traditional custodians of Hinduism's pluralistic traditions, play a role in countering divisive forces that distort the faith's core values of tolerance and non-violence (*Ahimsa*)? In the recent volume *Religion, Hateful Expression and Violence*, edited by Morten Bergsmo and Kishan Manocha, the chapters by Bergsmo, Damojipurapu, and Badar and Essawy highlight the role of "informal sanctions" or means of public disapproval administered by religious leaders.[1] The latter two authors explain how, in the context of Islám, such leaders not only provide religious interpretations (through non-binding *fatwás*), but also regulate social and administrative aspects of the faith, including mosque activities, religious education, and proposing legislation. The chapter on India by Damojipurapu advocates for engaging influential religious figures across urban, rural and suburban areas to discourage hate speech and violence propagated under the guise of religion.[2]

This policy brief examines the distinction between 'Hinduism', an ancient and pluralistic religious tradition, and 'Hindutva', a political ideology rooted in Hindu nationalism and cultural supremacy. It discusses the concerning trend of Hindutva leaders appropriating Hindu symbols, narratives and terminology to propagate divisive rhetoric and hate speech. The brief also explores the role of influential Hindu religious organizations aligned with Hindutva ideology in shaping public discourse and perpetuating hate speech under the guise of preserving Hindu traditions.

2. Understanding the Difference Between Hinduism and Hindutva

In contemporary Indian discourse, the distinction between Hinduism and Hindutva represents a fundamental dichotomy between a diverse, inclusive religious tradition, on the one hand, and a narrow, exclusivist political ideology, on the other.[3] At the heart of this debate lies a profound exploration of identity, ideology, and the complex interplay between religion and politics in the Indian context.

Hinduism, an ancient and diverse religious tradition, embodies a rich tapestry of beliefs, practices and philosophies characterized by its pluralistic ethos and inclusivity. It thrives on openness to diverse interpretations, regional variations and the assimilation of external influences, rooted in the exploration of eternal truths rather than rigid dogma.[4]

In contrast, Hindutva emerges as a political ideology rooted in the assertion of Hindu nationalism and cultural supremacy. Coined and articulated in Vinayak D. Savarkar's early twentieth century writing *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?* – which illustrates the mechanisms of Hindu nationalist-identity construction through the stigmatization and emulation of 'threatening others' – Hindutva ideology aims to unify a standardized Hindu identity and utilize it for political purposes.[5] It stresses the importance of Hindu culture, traditions and symbols, frequently overshadowing religious minorities (mainly Muslims).[6]

The divergence between Hinduism and Hindutva becomes evident in their respective approaches to plurality, inclusivity and historical narratives. Hinduism, with its decentralized structure and philosophical diversity, accommodates a broad spectrum of beliefs and practices, fostering a culture of tolerance and acceptance.[7] In contrast, Hindutva espouses a narrow, exclusivist worldview that seeks to marginalize dissenting voices and impose a uniform Hindu identity on Indian society. Hindutva narratives often downplay or distort historical realities, casting Muslims and Christians as perpetual antagonists in a grand Hindu–Muslim binary.[8]

Since the introduction of Hindutva by Savarkar and Gowalkar, it became a key factor driving political and social division and has been a constant, fundamental question in Indian politics about the country's identity: 'Should India be a secular nation where all religions are equal, or should it be a Hindu nation where Hinduism is the only acceptable religion?'.[9] In contemporary India, the ascendancy of

1 See Morten Bergsmo, "On the Problem of Hateful Expression in the Name of Religion" (https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/x0h6cl/); Medha Damojipurapu, "Patterns and Risks in Contemporary Religion-Based Hate Speech in India" (https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/kpfg46/); Mohamed Elewa Badar and Rana Moustafa Essawy, "How Should Responsible Religious Leaders React to Hate Speech in Their Community?" (https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/7llcrc/), in Morten Bergsmo and Kishan Manocha (eds.), *Religion, Hateful Expression and Violence*, Torkel Opsahl Academic EPublisher ('TOAEP'), Brussels, 2023, p. 978 (https://www.toaep.org/ps-pdf/41-bergsmo-manocha/).

2 Damojipurapu, 2023, *ibid.*, p. 277.

3 Arvind Sharma, "On the Difference Between Hinduism and Hindutva", in *Asian Philosophies and Religions*, 2020, vol. 25, no. 1, p. 45.

4 Will Sweetman, "'Hinduism' and the History of 'Religion': Protestant Presuppositions in the Critique of the Concept of Hinduism", in *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, 2003, vol. 15, no. 4, pp. 329–353.

5 Vinayak D. Savarkar, *Hindu Rashtra Darshan*, 1949, p. 5.

6 Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1998, p. 26.

7 Asko Parpola, *The Roots of Hinduism: The Early Aryans and The Indus Civilization*, Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 3–5.

8 Manu Bhagavan, "Princely States and the Hindu Imaginary: Exploring the Cartography of Hindu Nationalism in Colonial India", in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 2008, vol. 67, no. 3, p. 884.

9 Dhirendra K. Jha, "The RSS and MS Golwalkar's undeniable links to Nazism", *The Caravan*, 1 August 2021; L.K. Sharma, "The Sangh's Dream of a 'Hindu Rashtra' is Not Even Shared By Most Hindus", *The Wire*, 27 June 2022.

Hindutva has profound implications for religious pluralism, democratic values and social cohesion. The Hindu nationalist movement is spearheaded by organizations such as the Bharatiya Janata Party ('BJP'), Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh ('RSS'), Bajrang Dal and Durga Vahini, which are and have been the slogan bearers of the Hindutva ideology, demanding a Hindu nation and engaging in fostering numerous instances of communal violence, hate speech and hate crimes witnessed over the past decades.[10]

Ever since the BJP came to power in 2014, the demand for a Hindu nation following Savarkar's Hindutva has come to the fore on the pretext that Hinduism and Hindutva are inter-connected, as the term 'Hindu' is common to both.[11] This phenomenon – that is, using the term 'Hindu' from Hinduism in the ideology of 'Hindutva' – exemplifies how religious terminology can be co-opted and weaponized by supremacist ideological movements to construct narratives of perceived demographic threat and marginalization. It perpetuates the dangerous conflation of religious identity with regressive, anti-national impulses. The politicization of 'Hindu' identity under the banner of Hindutva has led to heightened communal tensions, discrimination against religious minorities, and erosion of secular principles. The instrumentalization of religion for electoral gains has fuelled divisive rhetoric, religious polarization, and instances of communal violence. Furthermore, the conflation of Hindutva with Hinduism risks obscuring the nuanced and pluralistic nature of Hinduism, reducing it to a monolithic political ideology and fostering an ecosystem wherein hate speech is considered a religious sermon.[12]

3. Hindutva and Hate Speech

The BJP and RSS jointly stage-manage the Hindutva moment, starting with their party manifestos, which have included, *inter alia*, the construction of the Ram Temple over disputed land among Muslims and Hindus, the abrogation of Article 370 (Special Status to Jammu and Kashmir region), triple *talaq*, implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act, and "conserving Bharatiya Faith and Culture".[13] While proponents of Hindutva often espouse the preservation of Hindu heritage and traditions, the ideology has been increasingly associated with the propagation of hate speech targeting religious minorities, particularly Muslims. This trend is fuelled by rhetoric that portrays Muslims as 'others', framing them as threats to Hindu interests and national security.[14] Golwalkar viewed Muslims, Christians and communists as akin to demons in Indian mythology, with Hindus as the avenging angels who would restore the purity of the Motherland by slaying them.[15] Such divisive narratives of Savarkar and Golwalkar not only exacerbated communal tensions but also contributed to the marginalization and discrimination of religious minorities, perpetuating a cycle of violence and intolerance for the protection and creation of a 'Hindu nation'.

The Hindutva movement has propagated numerous conspiracy theories vilifying Muslims, portraying the minority community as a threat to Hindu interests. For example, the term '*jihád*' has taken many shapes, from 'love *jihád*' to 'land *jihád*', 'corona *jihád*', 'thook *jihád*', 'civil services *jihád*' and 'redi *jihád*', as discussed by Damojipurapu.[16] Hindutva leaders have resorted to inflammatory rhetoric conflating Muslim identity with anti-nationalism and terrorism. This phenomenon was starkly evident during the nationwide protests against the discriminatory Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019. Instead of addressing concerns through dialogue, Hindutva figures branded the peaceful protesters as 'anti-nationals' and 'traitors'. Inflammatory speeches by leaders who issued ultimatums against the Citizenship Amendment Act protests are regarded as catalysts for the deadly anti-Muslim violence that erupted in north-east Delhi in 2020. Equally alarming were slogans like '*goli maro saalon ko*' (shoot the traitors) raised by Union Minister Anurag Thakur, implying violent retribution against dissenters.[17] In her chapter in *Religion, Hateful Expression and Violence*, Damojipurapu conducts an in-depth analysis of the overarching themes and language employed in contemporary hate speech targeting Muslims in India.[18]

Similarly, the vilification of the Tablighi Jamaat congregation by certain media outlets, such as *Republic TV*, contributed to the rise of hate speech against the entire Muslim community during the Covid-19 pandemic. The *hijáb* controversy in Karnataka, which saw Hindu students donning saffron shawls in counter-protests against Muslim students wearing *hijábs*, further exacerbated religious polarization and highlighted the growing influence of Hindu nationalist organizations in educational institutions.[19] The concept of '*ghar wapsi*' (homecoming), promoted by the Sangh Parivar group of Hindutva organizations, seeks to 'reconvert' members of minority religions to Hinduism and reinforces the notion that non-Hindus are outsiders who do not belong to the nation.[20] Additionally, the instances of lynching and violence against Muslims in the name of the protection of cows underscore the escalating intolerance and hate crimes fuelled by Hindu nationalist ideology.[21] The communal violence in Jahangirpuri during a Hanuman Jayanti procession, where Hindu men brandished swords and waved saffron flags in front of a mosque, further illustrates the growing tensions and the potential for religious conflicts to erupt in the face of provocative actions and inflammatory rhetoric.[22]

The inauguration in January 2024 of the Ram Mandir temple

10 Walter K. Andersen and Shridhar D. Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism*, Penguin Random House India, Gurgaon, 2019; Bruce Desmond Graham, *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics. The Origins and Development of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh*, Cambridge University Press, 1993.

11 Arvind Sharma, "On Hindu, Hindustan, Hinduism and Hindutva", in *Numen*, 2002, vol. 49, no. 1, pp. 1–36.

12 "Removing hate speech from sermons", *Asia News Network*, 28 March 2018.

13 BJP, "BJP Elections Manifesto", 2014, and "BJP Elections Manifesto", 2019 (available on the BJP's web site). See also Omar Rashid, "BJP promise on temple a gimmick, say Ayodhya seers", *The Hindu*, 7 April 2014; Haseeb A. Drabu, "Narendra Modi and Article 370", *The Mint*, 2 May 2014; Rajiv Srivastava, "Mandir, triple talaq, exodus in BJP's manifesto for UP", *The Times of India*, 29 January, 2017; Ayan Guha, "BJP Promise of 'No Nationality Proof' for Namasudra in CAA Outreach Hits Roadblock", *The Wire*, 3 April 2024. See also the Citizenship Amendment Act, 12 December 2019 (https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/6tus7j/).

14 Jaffrelot, 1998, p. 25, see *supra* note 6. See also Cynthia Talbot, "Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self: Hindu-Muslim Identities in Pre-Colonial India", in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1995, vol. 37, no. 4, pp. 692–722.

15 Ramachandra Guha, "The Hindu Supremacist: M.S. Golwalkar", in *id.* (ed.), *The Makers of Modern India*, Penguin Random House India, Gurgaon, 2012, p. 371.

16 Medha Damojipurapu, "Language, Themes and Responses to Hate Speech in India", Policy Brief Series No. 132 (2022), TOAEP, Brussels, 2022 (https://www.toaep.org/pbs-pdf/132-damojipurapu/).

17 Liz Matthew and Abhinav Rajput, "Minister Anurag Thakur Chants Desh Ke Gaddaron Ko, Poll Rally Crowd Completes Goli Maaro …", *The Indian Express*, 28 January 2020.

18 Damojipurapu, 2023, pp. 218–222, see *supra* note 1.

19 "Karnataka Hijab Ban: CM Suspends Classes for Three Days", *Maktoob Media*, 8 February 2022; Harshit Sabarwal, "Karnataka hijab row: The controversy explained", *Hindustan Times*, 15 March 2022.

20 Prem K. Vijayan and Karen Gabriel, "Hindutva's Psychological Warfare: The Insidious Agendas of 'Ghar Wapsi'", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2015, vol. 50, no. 11, pp. 22–24.

21 Damojipurapu, 2023, pp. 258–261 see *supra* note 1. Aishwarya S. Iyer, "Dadri Lynching Trial Begins: How Akhlaq's Kin Waited for 5 Years", *The Quint*, 26 March 2021; "No One Killed Pehlu Khan", *Maktoob Media*, 14 August 2019; Sukrita Baruah and Abhishek Angad, "Dadri Lynching: No Question of Returning Home, Just Hope Case Moves Quickly, Says Akhlaq's Kin", *The Indian Express*, 28 September 2018.

22 Damojipurapu, 2023, pp. 262–264, see *supra* note 1. See also Arfa Khanum Sherwani, "Watch: How Communal Clashes Broke Out in Delhi's Jahangirpuri Arfa Khanum", *The Wire*, 21 April 2022; "Jahangirpuri: Shock and Anger in Delhi After Religious Violence", *BBC News*, 18 April 2022.

construction at the disputed site in Ayodhya, a location that has long been a flashpoint for religious tensions between Hindu and Muslim communities, also witnessed instances of hate speech by Hindu nationalist groups.[23] In Mumbai, a Muslim man was forcibly coerced to chant Hindu religious slogans like '*Jai Shri Ram*' by members of Hindutva groups.[24] Similarly, in Karnataka, a 17-year-old Dalit boy was assaulted and forced to say '*Jai Shri Ram*' for insulting Hindu gods because he had included a photo of the Dalit leader Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar on his WhatsApp status.[25] In Bihar's Khirma village, Darbhanga district, men participating in a celebratory procession for the Ram Temple inauguration set fire to a Muslim cemetery.[26] In Delhi's Jaitpur locality, people were shown in videos raising objectionable slogans and vandalizing properties in a Muslim neighbourhood during Ram Mandir celebrations.[27] In Madhya Pradesh's Jhabua district, a group of approximately 25 men climbed atop a church and affixed saffron flags while chanting '*Jai Shri Ram*'.[28] In Telangana's Nalgonda district, 200–250 people affiliated with Hindutva outfits such as Vishva Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal gathered demanding that a Hanuman temple be built adjacent to an existing mosque. In Hathnoor Mandal, Telangana, a right-wing Hindutva mob set fire to a shop owned by a Muslim vendor during a Ram Mandir celebratory rally.[29] By portraying the Muslim community as inherently opposed to the construction of the Ram Mandir temple, these groups sought to delegitimize and 'otherize' or 'other' Muslims, casting them as obstacles to the realization of a monolithic Hindu nation-state. Moreover, the invocation of historical narratives surrounding the Ayodhya dispute was employed to stoke fears of demographic threats and cultural erasure, perpetuating the dangerous myth of an existential conflict between Hindu and Muslim civilizational aspirations. Regrettably, the aftermath of the inauguration ceremony witnessed a spate of incidents across various states, where Hindu nationalist groups engaged in acts of intimidation, vandalism and hate speech targeting Muslim individuals, properties and places of worship.

As the electoral cycle for the next parliamentary term commenced in April 2024, certain incidents and rhetoric from leaders associated with the ruling BJP and affiliated Hindutva organizations leaders – themselves engaged in hate speech targeting the Muslim minority community – show a pattern of religious majoritarianism, where elections become a catalyst for divisive narratives and the otherization of minorities. In Jammu, Ekam Sanatan Bharat Dal Chief Ankur Sharma made inflammatory claims about an alleged '*Ghazwa-e-Hind*' (a righteous battle to conquer India) by Muslims. He accused Muslim men of pursuing 'land *jihád*' and propounded a new term, '*Islamikarand*' (Islámización), warning that Jammu would be used as a launchpad to target north India.[30] In Bihar's Gaya district, Pravin Togadia, President of the Antarrashtriya Hindu Parishad, delivered a divisive speech promoting a religious conception of nationhood. He remarked that for 500 years "the flag of Islam" ruled over India until being defeated and replaced with "saffron flags" through bloodshed by Hindu ancestors.[31] Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while delivering a speech in Rajasthan, made the following statement:

And their [Indian National Congress] earlier government had said that Muslims have the first right over the nation's wealth. This means that they [the Indian National Congress] will collect people's wealth and distribute it among those who have more children, to the infiltrators. *Should your hard-earned money be given to infiltrators?*[32]

The reference to "those who have more children" serves as a veiled attempt to target Muslims by perpetuating the false narrative that they have larger families with the intention of overtaking the population and establishing an Islámic nation. This rhetoric plays into the divisive ideology that portrays Muslims as a demographic threat to the majority Hindu population. By insinuating that government resources would be unfairly distributed to Muslims due to their allegedly higher birth rates, Modi's speech not only demonizes an entire community, but also fosters a hateful ecosystem. Furthermore, using the term 'infiltrators' to refer to Muslims in political discourse serves to otherize and marginalize them, implying that they do not belong to the nation or are somehow illegitimate residents, contributing to a climate of hate speech.

4. Informal Sanctions by Self-Identified Hindu Leaders

The rise of hate speech and divisive rhetoric targeting the Muslim minority, propagated by leaders associated with Hindutva organizations, necessitates a concerted response from influential Hindu religious figures and institutions. The use of informal social sanctions, means of public disapproval, and moral persuasion by respected Hindu religious authorities may serve as a potent countermeasure against the normalization of such hate-mongering narratives. By reclaiming the moral high ground and reaffirming the inclusive essence of Hinduism, its leaders could potentially neutralize the polarizing effects of hate speech and foster an environment conducive to social harmony and coexistence.

However, unlike some other religions, Hinduism does not have a centralized religious authority that dictates religious practices or issues binding sanctions.[33] This decentralized nature of Hinduism allows for a wide range of interpretations and practices, often varying between regions and communities. However, the attempted instrumentalization of Hinduism by Hindutva has introduced a significant shift in this dynamic. This transformation has led to the emergence of political leaders who hold sway as religious figures, blurring the lines between politics and religion. These leaders, often affiliated with organizations like the RSS and the BJP, wield considerable influence in shaping societal norms and values.

In December 2021, the 'Dharma Sansad' (Religious Parliament) conclaves in Haridwar (a prominent religious site in India) and Chhattisgarh witnessed explicit and unequivocal calls for violence, including statements advocating the killing of millions belonging to religious minorities to establish a 'Hindu nation' by the religious leaders of Hinduism from all over the country and an organization called 'Hindu Raksha Sena' (Hindu Defence Force).[34] Religious speakers threatened the government with dire consequences if their demands for a Hindu nation were not met, drawing parallels with historical events like the 1857 revolt against colonial rule.[35] One of the speakers – a self-identified religious leader and protector of Hinduism, Narsingh Anand – called for a "war against Muslims" and urged "Hindus to take up weapons" to ensure a "Muslim didn't become the Prime

23   "As Ram Temple inaugurated in UP, reports arrive of communal incidents from five states", *Citizens for Justice and Peace* ('CJP'), 23 January 2024.

24   Hate Detector, X-handle @HateDetectors, 22 January 2024.

25   "Dalit student assaulted over WhatsApp status on Rama and Ambedkar", *The Hindu*, 24 January 2024.

26   The Observer Post, X-handle @TheObserverPost, 22 January 2024.

27   Hate Detector, X-handle @HateDetectors, 22 January 2024.

28   "Eve of Ram temple inauguration sees "clashes", planting of saffron flag atop Church", *Sabrang India*, 22 January 2024.

29   "After violent Ram temple celebrations, clashes, authorities demolish Muslims' shops in Mumbai's Mira Road", *Maktoob Media*, 23 January 2024.

30   "Several instances of hate speech in March and April mar the election cycle, demonise religious minorities before the polls", *CJP*, 10 April 2024.

31   *Ibid*.

32   Akhil Chaudhary, "Modi's Islamophobic Speech Shows Despite Tall Claims, BJP Is Jittery About 2024", *The Wire*, 23 April 2024 (emphasis added).

33   Gavin D. Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 113, 134, 155–161, 167–168.

34   Saroj Chadha, "Dharam Sansad in Haridwar (17–20 December, 2021)", *Times of India*, 27 December 2021. See also Kaushik Raj, X-handle @kaushikrj6, 22 December 2021.

35   Ashutosh Bhardwaj, "Haridwar Dharam Sansad Threatens War Far Scarier Than 1857", *The Wire*, 28 December 2021.

Minister in 2029".[36] Alarmingly, these conclaves also invoked the concept of a 'Dharmadesh' (Religious Order), which was portrayed as the "words of god" that the state must recognize, effectively seeking to undermine the secular foundations of the Indian democracy and rule of law.[37] The references to a "cleansing drive" (akin to the ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Muslims) and demands to exclude Muslim vendors from pilgrimage sites further underscore the severity of the divisive and discriminatory rhetoric perpetuated by these groups.[38] Moreover, the oath-taking ceremony in New Delhi – where participants called for genocide, vowed to "make India a Hindu nation", and expressed a willingness to "kill" for this cause – exemplifies how Hindutva has been elevated to a near-militant ideology, detached from the spiritual and philosophical foundations of Hinduism.[39]

Thus, it is evident that certain Hindutva leaders, by identifying themselves as Hindu religious leaders, have distorted the meaning and essence of Hinduism, a religious tradition known for its principles of non-violence, pluralism and tolerance.[40] They have appropriated Hindu symbols and narratives to propagate their ideological agenda, which is rooted in Hindu nationalism, the exclusion of minorities, and the desire to establish a Hindu nation. The speeches and events showcase the blurring of the line between Hinduism and Hindutva, making it increasingly difficult to separate the two. They have invoked religious concepts and terminology, such as 'Dharma Sansad' (Religious Parliament) and 'Sanatani Hindus' (believers of Hinduism), to lend legitimacy and religious sanction to their divisive and often violent rhetoric. Unfortunately, this merging of political and religious authority has resulted in the propagation of hate speech, and led to the normalization of discriminatory practices and policies targeting religious minorities. Under the guise of preserving Hindu traditions and values, certain Indian state governments led by the BJP have introduced legislation and administrative measures that disproportionately impact Muslim communities.[41] For example, laws restricting interfaith marriages, banning certain dietary practices, and curtailing religious expressions in public spaces have been enacted, fuelling a climate of fear and marginalization in minority communities.[42] Moreover, the influence of Hindutva ideology has permeated educational institutions, with instances of textbooks and curriculum materials promoting biased narratives and perpetuating negative stereotypes about non-Hindu communities.[43]

5. Challenges and Opportunities

While these political figures may not necessarily be recognized as traditional religious leaders, their words and actions carry significant influence and shape public discourse, often perpetuating negative stereotypes, fear-mongering, and discrimination against religious minorities. Thus, the role of informal religious sanctions in combating hate speech and divisive rhetoric within the context of Hinduism and Hindutva remains a complex issue. The influence of religious leaders and organizations aligned with Hindutva ideology shape public discourse and narratives within their communities. In a recent policy brief, Bergsmo highlighted how peace and reconciliation actors face significant challenges from religious hatred and prejudice, which undermine their efforts and the effectiveness of international law. To mitigate this, he suggests, among other measures, that religious leaders refrain from and condemn hate speech, using both formal and informal sanctions within their communities to counteract such harmful rhetoric.[44]

Given the decentralized nature of Hinduism and the absence of a single, authoritative religious body, it becomes crucial to identify and engage with influential religious leaders or figures at the local and regional levels. They include prominent spiritual leaders, heads of religious institutions, and respected scholars and intellectuals within the Hindu community. Their interventions may encounter resistance from entrenched interests and ideological factions within the broader Hindutva ecosystem. By emphasizing the core values of tolerance, pluralism and respect for diversity inherent to Hindu traditions, religious leaders can play a crucial role in challenging the narratives of hate speech and promoting a more inclusive and harmonious society.

Moreover, as suggested by Bergsmo, measures can be taken to identify and impress upon these *de facto* religious leaders the importance of using informal sanctions or means of public disapproval against those who engage in hateful expression or violence in the name of religion or Hindutva ideology.[45] The lines between religion, politics and ideology are often blurred in the Indian context, and some religious figures or institutions may themselves be influenced or co-opted by Hindutva ideology, complicating the process of identifying and engaging genuine voices of religious authority to combat hate speech.

Sarthak Gupta is a CILRAP Fellow and a former Judicial Law Clerk-cum-Research Associate at the Supreme Court of India. He holds a B.A., LL.B. (Hons.) degree from the Institute of Law, Nirma University, Ahmedabad. He is also a Helton Fellow at the American Society of International Law.

36   Avaneesh Mishra, "Haridwar Hate Speeches Target Minorities, Call for Violence; DGP Says Illegal", *The Indian Express*, 24 December 2021.

37   N.C. Asthana, "A Hate-Filled Call to Arms and Violence at Haridwar", *The Wire*, 24 December 2021.

38   *Ibid*. See also Rana Ayyub, "In India, calls for Muslim genocide grow louder. Modi's silence is an endorsement", *The Washington Post*, 29 December 2021.

39   Waquar Hasan, "'Can Kill 20 Lakh of Them': Call for Muslim Genocide at Haridwar Event Attended by 50 Hindu Monks", *Maktoob Media*, 23 December 2021.

40   Ashwani Peetush, "Ahimsa", in Deen Chatterjee (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Global Justice*, 2011, Springer, Berlin, pp. 22–26.

41   Aakar Patel, "Book Excerpt: The Many Anti-Muslim Laws Brought in By the Modi Government", *The Wire*, 12 November 2021.

42   Heather Holman, "A Reckoning for Religious Freedom: India's BJP and the International Implications of Anti-Muslim Leadership", in *American University International Law Review*, 2023, vol. 38, no. 1, pp. 231–270.

43   Astha Savyasachi, "Communal Textbooks, Teachers Who Brought Down

Babri: How RSS Schools Create Hindutva Foot Soldiers", *The Wire*, 22 May 2023.

44   Morten Bergsmo, "Peace and Reconciliation Diplomacy Challenged by Religious Hatred, Dissimulation and Denial", Policy Brief Series No. 149 (2024), TOAEP, Brussels, 2024 (https://www.toaep.org/pbs-pdf/149-bergsmo/).

45   Morten Bergsmo, 2023, p. 1, see *supra* note 1.