

Language, Themes and Responses to Hate Speech in India

By Medha Damojipurapu

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1. The Problem of Hate Speech Against Indian Muslims

India is witnessing an alarming rise in instances of hateful expression and violence against Muslims in the name of Hinduism. Indian society comprises an amalgamation of people from several religious backgrounds. According to the latest religion census data (2011), Hindus constitute the largest religious majority, comprising approximately 80 percent of the population, while Muslims in India constitute the largest minority and account for approximately 14 percent of the population.¹ The rise in power of the Narendra Modi-led Hindu nationalist political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party ('BJP'), has created a conducive political climate for religion-based hatred and violence to fester and eventually rise to the surface.

Given the present communally-charged climate in India, it is imperative to understand the threat posed by religion-based or -related hate speech against Muslims in the name of Hinduism by mapping, through concrete examples, the kind of language which constitutes contemporary hate rhetoric, as well as by reflecting on the genesis or underlying themes behind such language.

2. Some Historical and Cultural Connotations

At present, Indian Hindus and Muslims are viewed as two distinct communities – a view that has often been projected back into the past.² However, it cannot be said with certitude whether distinct religious identities of Hindus and Muslims existed in pre-colonial times or if they were crystallised during British rule in India.³ Further, there is also disagreement as to whether communal antipathy between these two groups was a result of British colonialism in India, which adopted the infamous policy of 'divide and rule', or whether such rivalry existed prior to British colonization of India.⁴ Regardless, the division of the Indian population into discrete religious communities formed a part of the broader British colonial strategy.⁵

The 'Revolt of 1857' ('Revolt') marked a turning point in the British attitude towards India and set the stage for the delineation of concrete religious identities. The Revolt was the culmination of years of resentment and grievances against the British that were brewing among

Indian soldiers.⁶ The Revolt itself was immediately triggered by the use of new cartridges by the British army for the Enfield rifle, which the Indian soldiers believed were greased with pig and cow fat (pigs are considered unclean by Muslims and Hindus consider cows to be holy animals). Loading the cartridge required tearing it open with one's mouth, which offended the religious sentiments of both Muslims and Hindus and sparked the rebellion. The Revolt marked the end of the British East India Company's rule and gave way to the British Crown assuming direct control over India.⁷

As a consequence of the Revolt, the British began to fear that if the various castes and creeds of India united against them, British rule in India could come under serious threat. Therefore, there was a change in administrative strategies employed by the British in India, which in effect categorized people and produced a particular set of political identities among the local population. For example, a religious dimension to the census was brought in by the British in 1871 and the categories of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' were created, notwithstanding the fact that, until then, identities in India were multiple and not fixed.⁸ In the immediate aftermath of the Revolt, the British adopted strategies to appease Hindus but were distrustful of Muslims (since they believed Muslims to be more responsible for the Revolt than Hindus). The introduction of English as the official language of India and as the medium of higher education also had a significant impact on shaping identity and politics in colonial India. Hindus more readily took to Western education and learning, whereas Muslims, particularly the elite, rejected British ideas and teachings and instead sought to look inwards and revive Islam. The British favoured the recruitment of Hindus to the administrative services and the fact that a far larger number of Hindus had knowledge of Western education than Muslims was an added bonus.⁹ However, a few years later, this policy changed in favour of Muslims, whose demands for separate electorates were met in 1909 (the Indian Councils Act, 1909, commonly referred to as the 'Morley-Minto Reforms', provided for separate electorates, with seats reserved for Muslims).¹⁰

In this backdrop, we see the rise of Hindu nationalism in the early twentieth century. Hindu nationalist groups emerged in response to what they perceived as a "growing Muslim menace".¹¹ The Hindu

¹ Census Organization of India, "Religion Census 2011", *Indian National Census* (2011) (available on the Indian National Census' website).

² 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.

³ Zaheer Babur, "Religious Nationalism, Violence and the Hindutva Movement in India", in *Dialectical Anthropology*, 2000, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 61-76.

⁴ Frederic M. Bennett, "Muslim and Hindu: The Sensitive Areas", *The Atlantic*, February 1958; Ajay Verghese, "Did Hindu-Muslim Conflicts in India Really Start with British Rule?", *Scroll*, 5 June 2018.

⁵ Babur, 2000, p. 64, see above note 3.

⁶ Ranbir Vohra, *The Making of India: A Political History*, Routledge, 2013, pp. 75-79.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁸ P.P. Abdul Razak, "Census Modality and The Making of Muslim Community of Malabar", in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 2008, vol. 69, pp. 771-780.

⁹ Vohra, 2013, pp. 99-103, see above note 6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 130-131.

¹¹ 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.

Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh ('RSS') were two sister organizations at the forefront of the Hindu nationalist movement. The RSS is the ideological counterpart of the BJP, India's ruling political party today. The ideology of Hindu nationalism was first codified in 1922, when Vinayak D. Savarkar, a leading figure of the Hindu Mahasabha, published his polemic titled 'Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?', which "perfectly illustrates the mechanisms of Hindu nationalist-identity building through the stigmatization and emulation of 'threatening Others'".¹² Madhav S. Golwalkar was a prominent leader of the RSS and became its president in 1939. Savarkar and Golwalkar greatly contributed to the development of the Hindutva ideology, and it is their thoughts and views that continue to influence contemporary hate rhetoric against Muslims in the name of Hinduism.

3. Themes in Contemporary Hate Speech

3.1. 'Othering of Muslims' and the Need to Unite Hindus in the Fight against a 'Common Enemy'

The idea of the Muslim 'other', that is now reverberant in right-wing Hindu rhetoric aimed at attacking Indian Muslims, can be traced back to Savarkar's conceptualization of India as a Hindu land. The term 'Hindutva' was used by Savarkar to describe the quality of being a Hindu in ethnic, cultural and political terms. Hindus, he believed, constituted the Indian nation which existed since time immemorial, and were descendants of Aryans who he believed had settled in India at the dawn of history. Savarkar believed in the idea of "primordial nations" tied strictly to pieces of land with pure, ancient races and the need to purge the land of impure people.¹³ Savarkar conceptualized Hindus as an ethnic race and as persons who regard India as their motherland, their fatherland as well as their holy land (that is, the land where their religion was born).¹⁴ This was a convenient definition, as clearly Muslims and Christians would be precluded from this definition of a Hindu.

Golwalkar saw three internal threats to the formation of a Hindu nation – Muslims, Christians and Communists. According to him, these three were akin to demons and Hindus were the avenging angels tasked with slaying them and restoring the goodness and purity of the motherland, that is, India.¹⁵ He stated that only a handful of foreign Christian missionaries and Muslim invaders came to India, but their population had grown manifold – this, he believed, pointed to the fact that many people were taken away from the Hindu fold and converted to Islam and Christianity. In this way, he seemed to indicate the dangers posed by Muslims and Christians in India. He accused Muslims of pursuing an aggressive strategy in two respects: (i) the creation of the state of Pakistan carved out of the motherland of Hindus; and (ii) of increasing the population of Muslims by "systematically flooding" strategic areas such as Kashmir, Assam, Tripura and Bengal.¹⁶

3.2. Excessive Use of the Term 'Jihād'

Contemporary hate speech against Muslims in India has seen the evolution of several terms or labels, suffixed by the term 'jihād'. The term *jihād* is used loosely by Hindu extremists to describe a purported conspiracy on the part of Indian Muslims against Hindus, which can allegedly be carried out through several means, as elucidated below. The actual meaning of *jihād* has many interpretations, but a direct translation of the term from Arabic would mean 'to struggle' and can be traced to the Qur'an's command to 'struggle or exert' oneself in the path of God. Scholars have described two forms of *jihād*: the lesser *jihād* or external struggle against enemies of Islam and idolators, and the greater *jihād*, that is, a struggle for self-improvement, to become a better Muslim. In certain situations, it could also include physically standing up against

oppressors in the absence of any alternatives.¹⁷ *Jihād* does not preclude the possibility of non-violent resolution of issues.¹⁸

The obsession with using the term *jihād* in hate speech rhetoric against Muslims appears to be a combination of three factors: (i) the Hindu right-wing's need to identify a common enemy against which Hindu masses could be mobilized and their unity strengthened – Muslims served this purpose; (ii) the use of the term *jihād* by radical Islamic outfits in order to frame their cause and justify their militant methods, which can be traced back to the second half of the twentieth century; and (iii) the portrayal of all Muslims as terrorists by the Western media in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 terror attacks.¹⁹

Today, hate rhetoric against Muslims in India delineates several modes of so-called *jihād* – *land jihād*, *love jihād*, *corona jihād*, *thook jihād*, *civil services jihād*, and *redi jihād*. *Land jihād* is the allegation that there is an underground conspiracy among Indian Muslims to acquire land across the country, especially in areas that are predominantly Hindu-populated, as a means to "take over the country".²⁰ *Civil services jihād* refers to the alleged Muslim infiltration in the Indian civil services. A far right-wing Indian news channel called Sudarshan News broadcast a show in which it was alleged that Muslim aspirants are favoured in the Indian civil service exams by virtue of the provision of several benefits to the exclusion of Hindu aspirants.²¹ While the Supreme Court of India initially refused to issue a pre-broadcast injunction against the airing of the show, after a few episodes of the show were broadcast, the Supreme Court temporarily restricted the airing of further episodes.²² The matter is currently *sub-judice*.

Thook jihād refers to an alleged conspiracy by Muslim eatery workers against Hindus which involves the contamination of food served at eateries by spitting into it. These allegations emerged as a result of a video purportedly shot by members of the Hindu Raksha Dal (a far-right Hindu group) on 15 November 2021, in which a Muslim eatery worker in Loni, Ghaziabad, in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, is allegedly seen to be spitting into food that he was preparing to serve. This video was widely circulated on social media, with the hashtag #ThookJihad.²³

Corona jihād is a term of hate speech that emerged as a result of a large-scale vilification of the Muslim community as being 'super-spreaders' of the novel coronavirus in the country in 2020. In March 2020, at the nascent stages of the pandemic in India, the Tablighi Jamaat, a revivalist Muslim organization, held its annual congregation at its headquarters in the Nizamuddin Markaz in New Delhi. The congregation was attended by delegates from around the world. Later that month, it was reported that there had been a cluster outbreak of the novel coronavirus at the conference.²⁴ In the weeks and months that followed, news outlets vilified the Tablighi Jamaat for being involved in an alleged conspiracy to spread coronavirus in the country. Right-wing news channels in India such as Republic TV and Sudarshan News also spread fake news and misinformation regarding the Tablighi Ja-

¹⁷ Brian Handwerk, "What Does 'Jihad' Really Mean to Muslims?", *National Geographic*, 24 October 2003.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Brendon Tagg, "Jihad, Race and Western Media, Post-September 11", in *Societies Without Borders*, 2009, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 317–342.

²⁰ Alishan Jafri, "Is Uttarakhand Government's 'Demographic' Probe of Property Deals a Play on 'Land Jihad' Bogey?", *The Wire*, 5 December 2021.

²¹ Pooja Chaudhuri, "A List of All the False Claims Made in Sudarshan TV's 'UPSC Jihad' Show", *The Wire*, 24 September 2020.

²² Supreme Court of India, *Firoz Iqbal Khan v. Union of India and Others*, Order, 15 September 2021, (2021) 2 SCC 591 (<https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/0rs2yz/>).

²³ Alishan Jafri, "'Thook Jihad' is the Latest Weapon in Hindutva's Arsenal of Islamophobia", *The Wire*, 20 November 2021.

²⁴ Vidya Krishnan, "Modi Government's Targeting of Minorities for COVID Repeats Old Mistakes of HIV Pandemic", *The Caravan*, 2 May 2020.

¹² Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1998, p. 25.

¹³ Bhagvan, 2008, p. 885, see above note 11.

¹⁴ Vinayak D. Savarkar, *Hindu Rashtra Darshan*, 1949, p. 5.

¹⁵ Ramachandra Guha, "The Hindu Supremacist: M.S. Golwalkar", in *The Makers of Modern India*, Penguin India, 2012, p. 371.

¹⁶ Madhav S. Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts*, Vikrama Prakashan, Bangalore, 1966, Part II, Chapter XVI "Internal Threats".

maatis.²⁵ Suresh Chavhanke, the head of Sudarshan News, in his show *Bindaas Bol* on 31 March 2020, exhorted the Modi government to ban the Tablighi Jamaat and referred to its members as “human bombs carrying coronavirus are roaming around freely” who were involved in “corona jihad”.²⁶ Hashtags with the words #BioJihaad, #CoronaTerrorism and #CoronaJihad began to circulate on Twitter.²⁷

Love jihad is alleged to be a large-scale conspiracy by Muslim men to lure and deceptively marry innocent Hindu women and then force them to have a large number of children, thereby exponentially increasing the population of Muslims in India.²⁸ In this manner, the theory of *love jihad* takes away the agency of Hindu women in choosing their life partners and presents them as vulnerable creatures in need of protection, notwithstanding their voluntary consent to engage in interfaith relationships and marriages.

Thus, the usage of the term *jihad* has now become commonplace in hate speech rhetoric propagated by Hindus against Muslims, in order to connote alleged conspiracies by Muslims in various forms which pose, in the eyes of right-wing Hindus, a legitimate threat to Hindu interests in India.

4. Language Used

The manner in which the term ‘*jihad*’ is used to denote alleged conspiracies by Indian Muslims against Hindus has been seen in the previous section. Below are a few more examples of how the themes of ‘othering’ of Muslims and the purported conspiracies they are involved in against Hindus underlie contemporary hate rhetoric against Muslims. It may be noted that the events alluded to in this paper are in no way exhaustive accounts of the instances of hateful utterances and violence against Muslims in India. Rather, these events are merely illustrative of the broad manner in which Hindu extremists frame the alleged threat posed by Muslims.

4.1. Labelling Anti-Citizenship Amendment Act Protestors as Anti-Nationals and Traitors

In December 2019, the Indian Parliament passed the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 (‘CAA’).²⁹ The CAA was viewed as a law that discriminates against Indian Muslims. The CAA proposes to provide a pathway to Indian citizenship to Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Christians, Parsis and Sikhs who had migrated to India from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan prior to 2014. However, Muslims were conspicuously excluded from this list and the reason cited was that Muslims do not comprise a religious minority in the above-mentioned three countries, unlike the other groups. However, the exclusion of Muslims despite the situation in neighbouring countries such as Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan would seem to be otherwise motivated.

Protests erupted in Delhi and other parts of India against the CAA. Anti-CAA protestors, who were predominantly Muslims, were painted as anti-nationals and terrorists, and accused of posing a threat to the unity of India. They were termed by Hindu right-wing groups as “*tukde tukde gang*”;³⁰ that is, a gang that wants to divide the country. Muslims were reminded that they comprised a mere minority of the population in comparison to the 80 percent majority that Hindus enjoy and that they would face dire consequences if they protested against the CAA. Hindu nationalists impressed upon the protesting Muslims time and again that if they were unhappy with the legislation, they could go and

²⁵ Ayan Sharma and Chahak Gupta, “Audit of Bigotry: How Indian Media Vilified Tablighi Jamaat over Coronavirus Outbreak”, *NewsLaundry*, 27 April 2020.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Rana Ayyub, “Opinion: Islamophobia Taints India’s Response to the Coronavirus”, *The Washington Post*, 6 April 2020.

²⁸ “Love and Faith in India – 101 East”, *Al Jazeera*, 27 January 2022 (available on *YouTube*).

²⁹ India, The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, 12 December 2019 (<https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/6tus7j/>).

³⁰ “People in Delhi Must Teach ‘Tukde-Tukde’ Gang a Lesson: Amit Shah”, *The Quint*, 26 December 2019.

reside in Pakistan.³¹

The communally-charged environment in Delhi as a result of anti-CAA protests was further exacerbated during the run-up to the Delhi Legislative Assembly elections which took place on 8 February 2020. Several speeches with communal and Islamophobic overtones were made by political parties during the election campaign. At an election rally held by the BJP on 27 January 2020, a Union Minister was caught on camera leading a crowd of supporters to chant “*goli maro saalon ko*” (shoot the traitors).³² With respect to a sit-in protest against the CAA, comprising mostly Muslim women, in a locality named Shaheen Bagh in Delhi, it was alleged that these protests sites were like “mini-Pakistans”.³³ Anti-CAA protestors were accused of using the Shaheen Bagh protestors to “run an ISIS-like module here, where women and kids are used”.³⁴

4.2. Communal Violence During the Delhi Pogrom

Communal violence erupted in North-East Delhi on 23 February 2020 in Maujpur, between a Hindu mob and protestors opposing the CAA, which marked the beginning of three days of communal violence in various parts of the city.³⁵ The pogrom resulted in the death of 53 people (the majority of them being Muslims), approximately 250 people were injured and around 2,000 people were displaced.³⁶ On 23 February 2020, BJP member and former Member of the Delhi Legislative Assembly, Kapil Mishra, took out a pro-CAA protest rally in Jaffrabad, New Delhi, less than a kilometre away from the sit-in protest in Shaheen Bagh.³⁷ He urged people through Twitter to gather at the location and “prevent another Shaheen Bagh” protest from taking place. He also issued an ultimatum (through a tweet) to the Delhi police to clear the roads of anti-CAA protestors.³⁸ He addressed the rally (in the presence of the Deputy Commissioner of Police (‘DCP’) for North East Delhi):

This is what they wanted. This is why they blocked the roads.

That’s why a riot-like situation has been created. From our side not a single stone has been pelted. DCP is standing beside us. On behalf of all of you, I am saying that till the time [US President] Trump goes back [from India], we are going to go forward peacefully. But after that, we will not listen to the Police if roads are not cleared after three days.³⁹

Within hours of Kapil Mishra’s speech, violence broke out in several parts of North-East Delhi. His incendiary speeches are widely regarded as the trigger for the violence and bloodshed that ensued in Delhi from 23 to 27 February 2020.⁴⁰ Over the course of these days, Muslims were subject to targeted, organized and systematic violence.

³¹ “BJP MLA ‘warns’ anti-CAA protesters, says ‘we are 80% and you just 17%’”, *India TV*, 4 January 2020.

³² Aishwarya Paliwal, “EC orders BJP to remove Anurag Thakur, Parvesh Sahib from Star Campaigners List for Delhi poll”, *India Today*, 29 January 2020.

³³ “Delhi Elections: India vs Pakistan Match on February 8, Tweets BJP Leader Kapil Mishra”, *Scroll*, 23 January 2020.

³⁴ “Won’t Allow Delhi to Become Syria, says BJP Leader Tarun Chugh on Shaheen Bagh Protest”, *National Herald*, 30 January 2020.

³⁵ Sagar, “Delhi Violence Unmasked: Part One”, *The Caravan*, 1 March 2021.

³⁶ Aiman Khan and Ishita Chakrabarty, “Why the 2020 Violence in Delhi was a Pogrom”, *Al Jazeera*, 24 February 2021.

³⁷ Delhi Minorities Commission, “Report of the Fact-Finding Committee on the North-East Delhi Riots of February 2020”, p. 30 (<https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/vbvghc/>).

³⁸ “BJP’s Kapil Mishra has Issued an ‘Ultimatum’ to the Delhi Police. But Who is He?”, *The Wire*, 24 February 2020.

³⁹ “Won’t listen after 3 days: Kapil Mishra’s Ultimatum to Delhi Police to Vacate Jaffrabad Roads”, *India Today*, 23 February 2020; “Kapil Mishra among these 4 videos Delhi High Court Made Police Watch on Hate Speeches by Politicians”, *YouTube*, 27 February 2020.

⁴⁰ Delhi Minorities Commission, “Fact-Finding Report 2020”, pp. 33, 99, see above note 37.

4.3. Calls for Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing of Muslims

In the last one year alone, at least three different public, large-scale events were organized by Hindu right-wing groups in which genocidal sloganeering against Muslims was rampant. One such event took place in Delhi on 19 December 2021, during which the attendees took an oath to “fight, die and if required, kill” in order to transform India into a Hindu *Rashtra* (nation) at any cost.⁴¹

From 17-19 December 2021, a *Dharam Sansad* (religious parliament) was held in Haridwar in the Indian state of Uttarakhand during which time several Hindutva leaders and Hindu priests made Islamophobic statements and called for ethnic cleansing and genocide of Indian Muslims.⁴² In April 2021, Yati Narasinghanand, a Hindu militant priest who heads the Dasna Devi temple in Uttar Pradesh, made Islamophobic statements and insulted the Prophet Mohammad at a conference held at the Press Club of India in New Delhi, stating that the Prophet was “a plunderer, thief and dacoit, that he is a rapist and has engaged in the trafficking of women”, and that if Muslims knew the truth about the Prophet Mohammad, they would renounce Islam.⁴³ At other events, statements were made suggesting that Muslims were given a separate state at the time of the Partition of India in 1947 and that they ought to go to Pakistan or be treated as second-class citizens of India, and that their voting rights ought to be taken away.⁴⁴

4.4. Ghar Wapsi Programmes

The alleged conspiracy of *love jihad*, elucidated above, may be juxtaposed with the *ghar wapsi* (homecoming) programme propagated by the Hindu right-wing. This idea stems from the belief that India is the homeland of Hindus alone and that members of other religious communities in India were originally Hindus but were lured away from the fold of Hinduism and forced to embrace other religions. *Ghar wapsi* then refers to the idea of bringing members of other religions (back) into the fold of Hinduism. In fact, it is not even acknowledged to be conversion, because it is represented as a form of *shuddhi* or ‘purification’, rather than as conversion. As such, members of minority religions are understood to have been defiled by the ‘other’ religion, rather than as belonging to it. *Ghar wapsi* serves a dual purpose: as a means of dealing with the unwanted minorities (seen as a more viable alternative to wide-scale mass-killing or ethnic cleansing of minorities) while simultaneously increasing the population of Hindus through conversions.⁴⁵ In reality, *ghar wapsi* programmes across the country have been characterized by intimidation, violence and bloodshed for decades. The goal of these programmes has not been so much as to instil converts (or re-converts, as Hindu nationalists view them) with knowledge about the tenets, scriptures and beliefs of the Hindu religion, but rather to ensure a de-Islamization or de-Christianization of

⁴¹ “In Delhi, Hindutva Groups Vow to ‘Fight, Die & Kill’ to Make India Hindu Rashtra”, *The Quint*, 23 December 2021.

⁴² Waqar Hasan, “‘Can Kill 20 Lakh of Them’: Call for Muslim Genocide at Haridwar Event Attended by 50 Hindu Monks”, *Maktoob Media*, 23 December 2021.

⁴³ “Yati Narsinghanand Saraswati Sparks Another Controversy, Abuses Prophet Muhammad in Press Conference”, *The Logical Indian*, 3 April 2021 (available on *YouTube*).

⁴⁴ “Hate Speech: Bihar BJP MLA Says Take Away Muslims’ Voting Rights”, *Maktoob Media*, 25 February 2022.

⁴⁵ Prem K. Vijayan and Karen Gabriel, “Hindutva’s Psychological Warfare: The Insidious Agendas of ‘Ghar Wapsi’”, in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2015, vol. 50, no. 11, pp. 22-24.

the targeted communities.⁴⁶

5. The Responsibility of *De Facto* Hindu Leaders

The Hindutva project of Hindu nationalists has gained momentum since 2014, especially under the aegis of the BJP-led national government. The Hindu right-wing’s efforts in ‘othering’ Muslims have resulted in the development of a false sense of victimhood among Hindus and triggered feelings of alienation and anxiety in the Muslim community in India.⁴⁷ The various forms of hate speech and expressions against Muslims in the name of Hinduism follows a common theme: Muslims pose an imminent threat to Hindus in India, and seek to undermine Hindu interests through a number of conspiracies. Thus, Hindus must unite against their common enemy, that is, Muslims.

The Indian legal framework contains provisions to deal with hate speech. However, both law enforcement agencies and the BJP-led Indian government have allowed the utterance of hateful expressions and the commission of hate crimes against Muslims to continue with impunity. As such, there is a need to devise alternate mechanisms for addressing the problem of hateful expression and violence against Muslims in India.

Measures of self-regulation of hateful rhetoric within religious communities must be explored and implemented. In the absence of a central authoritative religious figure for Hindus, measures can be taken to identify *de facto* religious leaders who have sufficient religious authority in local communities within cities, towns and villages, and impress upon them the need to impose informal sanctions against those members of the community who engage in hateful expression and violence in the name of religion. Outreach programmes may also be conducted in local contexts to rationalize baseless hatred, hostility and stereotypes against Muslims.

The present policy brief has analysed the nature, underlying themes and historical and cultural connotations of some of the contemporary language used in religion-based and -related hate speech against Muslims in the name of Hinduism in India. It is sincerely hoped that these reflections contribute to efforts to identify effective means through which religious leaders may be engaged in combating the endemic of hate speech against Muslims.

Medha Damojipurapu is a CILRAP Fellow and an Advocate enrolled with the Bar Council of India. She holds a B.A., LL.B. (Hons.) degree from NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad, India. She has previously worked as a Law Clerk-cum-Research Assistant to late Justice Mohan M. Shantanagoudar at the Supreme Court of India. This policy brief draws heavily on the author’s chapter submitted for the TOAEP anthology Religion, Hateful Expression and Violence (*forthcoming at the time of publication of this policy brief*). TOAEP simultaneously publishes an early version of that chapter as Occasional Paper Series No. 11 (2022).

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⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Nissim Mannathukkaren, “The Slow Poison of Hate Speech Harms in Obvious and Insidious Ways”, *The Wire*, 8 April 2022.



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