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## Digital platforms, Hindutva, and disinformation: Communicative strategies and the Leicester violence

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### ABSTRACT

The digital infrastructure of Hindutva seeds, circulates and amplifies Islamophobic hate, interacting bidirectionally with brick-and-mortar violence. This paper examines the circulation of Hindutva on digital platforms (Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Telegram) around the intercommunal violence that emerged in Leicester in September 2022. Based on a digital ethnography of Twitter, interconnected digital platforms, and Hindutva media (Hindutva-related digital video channels such as Citti Media on YouTube, mainstream broadcast media such as NewsX, and text-based digital platforms such as OpIndia), the analysis theorizes the global flow of Hindutva across geographically dispersed contexts, connecting the diaspora with India, creating an uninterrupted communication infrastructure around the frame of the “Hindu in danger,” simultaneously intersecting with white supremacy in producing and amplifying Islamophobic hate.

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Misinformation, referring to information that is false or misleading, and spread through online channels, negatively impacts democratic processes by altering the recipient’s perception of reality (Ha et al., 2021). Distortions of an original event in the form of alteration of knowledge of facts about the event as it happened in reality, tend to spread rapidly online, posing threats to social cohesion and communal harmony (Chun, 2021; González-Bailón & Lelkes, 2023). Disinformation, described as misinformation that is intentionally created and circulated to mislead or misinform people with an underlying agenda, is a vital ingredient in the mobilization of hate online (George, 2016). The digital infrastructure of hate works through the circulation of disinformation that targets minority communities, turning them into threats and dehumanizing them (George, 2016).

One example of the mobilization of the Internet to disseminate hate to secure hegemony is Hindutva, the political ideology of Hindu nationalism that seeks to construct India as a Hindu nation (Jaffrelot, 2017). The majoritarian ideology of Hindutva

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spreads digitally through the marking of the Muslim as “the other,” deploying a plethora of strategies to target Muslims.<sup>1</sup> In the Indian diaspora globally, the majoritarian ideology uses the appeal of an ethnic minority status to play victim, while perpetuating the politics of hate (Mukta, 2000). Reddy (2011) describes Hindutva as praxis, “not merely a political ideology, but a (troubling) way of thinking through and addressing social problems and community concerns” (p. 412). In this sense, Hindutva constitutes everyday practices of community life across the Indian diaspora. In the UK, Hindutva has organized through youth and religious community spaces since the 1960s, replicating the organizational structures of Hindutva organizations in India and growing to incorporate a diverse range of Hindu organizations within the Hindutva structure since the 1980s (Bhatt, 2000). This paper examines the interplay of the performance of victimhood and the simultaneous deployment of hate in the Indian diaspora, situated in the backdrop of a series of events constituted around the organizing of Hindutva in the diaspora. In doing so, it attends specifically to the role of digital platforms, and specifically social networking sites (SNSs) in the global flows of Hindutva, focusing on how an online community is both drawn upon and simultaneously constituted around inter-communal tensions in the diaspora.

On September 17, 2022, almost 200 mostly masked and some armed men, marched through the streets chanting “Jai Shree Ram,” amidst communal tension that erupted between Hindus and Muslims in Leicester, one of the most diverse cities in the UK that prides itself for its multicultural heritage (Omer, 2022). The masked procession started from Loughborough Road, making its way to the largely working-class Green Lane Road. It emerged as a spectacle, circulated and retweeted across Twitter<sup>2</sup> handles, serving as an account of Hindu-Muslim tensions in Leicester, UK. This essay draws on 86 hours of ethnographic observation of the digital networks of Hindutva that sprang up in the context of the Leicester violence, carried out between September 13 and September 27, 2022, and located within a broader academic-activist collaboration resisting Hindutva in the diaspora. It also builds on my participation in developing activist interventions in partnership with Muslim communities and progressive Indians in the diaspora resisting Hindutva over five years, my participation in two global activist networks resisting Hindutva, and in-depth interviews with activists in the diaspora (including activists in Leicester).

Based on the culture-centered approach (CCA) that examines the interplays of culture, structure and agency in the erasure of voice (Dutta, 2018), and turns to voices at the margins as the basis for developing interpretive frames around events, I attend to the communicative strategies deployed by Hindutva-related digital platforms (public social networking platforms Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, and the cloud-based instant messaging app Telegram) and their intersections with brick-and-mortar organizations. The manuscript locates the communicative strategies of Hindutva in relationship to the disinformation networks of white supremacy, exploring the ways in which the underlying Islamophobia creates symbiotic opportunities for digital infrastructures of hate. It contributes to the growing body of scholarship on online Hindutva by exploring the relationships among digital disinformation, offline violence, and the disinformation circulated by Hindutva media in India, referring to Hindutva-related digital video (such as Citti Media, YouTube platform), mainstream broadcast (such as NewsX), and text-based digital platforms (such as OpIndia).

## Digital hate and Hindutva

The ideology of Hindutva is disseminated through a network of Hindutva organizations, operating in/from India, and mirrored in organizational structure in the Indian diaspora, mediated and networked through digital platforms (Banaji, 2018; George, 2016; Therwath, 2012). These organizations, including the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal (BD) form the network of the Sangh family (Sangh Parivar) (Jaffrelot, 2017). Both traditional and digital media work in complementary ways in disseminating the Hindutva ideology regionally, nationally, and globally (Therwath, 2012; Udupa, 2018). Among the wide range of digital platforms, social networking sites (SNS) form the infrastructures of communication that constitute an imagined community of Hindus, connecting Hindus across spaces and rooting them in the idea of the monolithic motherland (Bhatia, 2021), weaved together by the organizing concepts of Hindu rashtra (Hindu nation), Hindu sanskriti (Hindu culture), and Hindu jati (Hindu race) (Dutta, 2021).<sup>3</sup>

de Souza (2022) documents the ways in which the affordances offered by digital infrastructures shape the long-distance nationalism underlying Hindutva. Specifically examining the role of Twitter in establishing and propagating the hate infrastructure of Hindutva, Bhatia (2022) suggests that the discursive architecture of Hindu nationalism is “enabled by Twitter’s technical features and user-generated protocols” (p. 2). Therwath (2012) discusses the role of the digital infrastructure in reproducing the organizing structure of Hindutva originating from India in the US, coining the term “cyber Hindutva” to depict this online organizing structure. Moreover, she attends to the technologically mediated processes that reproduce Hindutva in the diaspora while simultaneously evading scrutiny and deflecting sanctions. The role of the US, with the largest number of Hindus in the diaspora globally, is crucial in the dissemination and organizing of Hindutva in the diaspora. Social media hate circulated by Hindutva fit into wider and older networks, reflective of the organizing structure of Hindutva that have infiltrated institutional structures, including in the diaspora (Banaji, 2018; Ohm, 2014; Therwath, 2012).

Technology, and more particularly, digital platforms, have formed critical communicative resources in the strategic propaganda deployed by Hindutva, integral to the recruitment of new members and the growing of the movement. In her ethnographic study, Udupa (2016) offers a descriptive account of the digital practices of what she terms “Internet Hindus,” depicting the ways in which Hindu nationalism online draws out and in turn constitutes digital cultures. Salient in Udupa’s (2018) work is the description of the strategies of abuse, intimidation, and aggression in the online rhetoric of Hindutva to target minority communities at the margins. She describes the concept of “enterprise Hindutva” as formed around digital cultural practices in urban contexts, shaped by the affordances of social media and experienced as “argumentative ... and fun” (p. 453; as cited in de Souza, 2022).

Although the existing literature offers an excellent conceptual framework for exploring the role of digital media in disseminating the Hindutva ideology and in constituting community organized around Hindutva, there remains a gap in the literature in exploring the role of digital infrastructures in narrating and organizing violence. This manuscript specifically looks at the role of digital platforms, and more specifically Twitter, accompanied by Instagram, Telegram, and YouTube in circulating disinformation and

hate around a violent event. It thus depicts the role digital platforms, including SNS, play in catalysing, magnifying, and reproducing the discourses of othering amidst communal tension and violence. The manuscript thus delineates the linkages between the online and offline, depicting the role of online violent discourse in the context of offline communal tension and violence.

## Methods

I participated in a digital ethnography, observing posts on Twitter, Telegram, YouTube, and Instagram around the Leicester violence (see Kaur-Gill & Dutta, 2017; Pink et al., 2015), as part of a broader academic-activist collaboration on challenging Hindutva in the Indian diaspora that spans 13 countries including the UK and housed under the umbrella of the Center for Culture-centered Approach to Research and Evaluation (CARE) (Dutta, 2021). The umbrella intervention brings together academics and activists in co-creating digital community-led interventions, building digital literacy workshops, developing physical and online campaigns, co-creating public dialogues including parliamentary briefings, and writing white papers and policy briefs, spanning five years. This partnership is supported by a physical ethnography that spans five countries, involving participant observations and in-depth interviews with Muslims on their experiences of Islamophobia (Murthy, 2008). Drawing on the three-year guideline of the CCA that suggests academics start writing for an academic audience after having spent at least three years developing community-led interventions seeking to bring about structural transformations, this is one of the first academic pieces emergent from the broader work at CARE.

As part of the work of developing offline and online interventions to challenge Hindutva, I have participated in two global activist networks, *Hum Dekhenge* and *Ekta* (names of these networks as well as the platforms on which they work are anonymized to protect their identities), supporting the networks with data analysis, white papers, policy briefs, and meetings with policymakers based on my research. Amidst crises created by Hindutva propaganda, such as in the instance of the Leicester violence (other instances include Hindutva-driven violence in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, the release of Hindutva propaganda films, the banning of the documentary on Modi by the British Broadcasting Corporation, the visits by ideologues of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh [RSS] to the diaspora, attacks of Hindutva propaganda on filmmakers, academics, and businesses), I support activists and civil society organizations with research, that often takes the form of white papers. For my activist work, I have been targeted by the Hindutva networks both online and offline, and my response to the online hate as well as the ongoing targeting further renders visible the online Hindutva network spanning the diaspora (Hill, 2021; Tan, 2021). Specifically in the context of the Leicester violence, the Hindutva propaganda portal Stop Hindu Hate Advocacy Network (with the Twitter handle @HinduHate and an anonymous website that runs propaganda campaigns targeting academics, activists and organizations critical of Hindutva) ran a network analysis naming me and connecting me with activists in the diaspora and in the UK resisting Hindutva, blaming us for the violence in Leicester and suggesting we were giving cover to Islamists.

The human ethics application and study design for the project covering Leicester violence were peer-reviewed by activist partners, the academic advisory group comprising of

academics researching Hindutva online, and deemed low risk. Based on multiple rounds of consultation, it was decided for the purpose of analysis to disclose the Twitter accounts that carried out public interventions and appeared publicly on discursive spaces as influencers. Disclosing the identities of these Twitter handles was deemed critical to developing a theoretical understanding of the networks of disinformation and hate. Moreover, activists reviewing the method noted the public responsibility of the research in naming the influential public handles in the analysis. During the emergence of the Leicester violence, in addition to the online participant observation, I participated in collaborations with the activist network in developing an online strategy including creating counter hashtags, tweets, and messages, posted online, and created two white papers for policymakers. The data that support this manuscript were also critical to writing policy briefs used by activists in the network. The online participant observation was supported with in-depth interviews conducted with nine activists, each taking between 90 minutes and two hours each time, carried out online and conducted between one and three times to make sense of the participant observations. Before the interviews, I shared the information sheet with the participant, outlining the research, explained the informed consent process and the anonymity of the interview transcripts to be drawn in for analysis and report writing. Consent was secured verbally. Moreover, my interactions with activists resisting Hindutva in the diaspora pointed me to hashtags, memes, threads and media reports that the activists noted of critical concern to them.

I began the participant observation on Twitter with initial observations of six continuous hours on September 17 when the violence broke out in the latest phase, although accounts suggest that the communal tensions had been building in Leicester for the preceding six months. Initially, I followed the Twitter hashtags, #LeicesterViolence and #LeicesterCity, gathering tweets under the hashtags and following the threads, retweets, quote tweets, and comment threads. Kaur-Gill and Dutta (2017) recommend following digital posts/threads in context to observe patterns of digital behavior. The initial six hours of participant observations were followed by randomly selected windows of participant observations on Twitter and associated digital platforms in two four-hour clusters each day, spread across 24-hour cycles, between September 18 and September 27, resulting in 80 hours of participant observations. In these windows of observations, I followed the initial threads and initial Twitter handles posting on Leicester, as well as identified new twitter handles, building a dynamic database of tweets embedded in context. Additional hashtags, #LeicesterHindusAttacked, #LeicesterHindus #HinduHumanRights #HinduHate were added based on the emergent findings from the initial context-based observations. Associated digital platforms were identified on the basis of the posts on Twitter, and these platforms included Telegram, Instagram, and YouTube. Moreover, the analysis of Twitter threads led to Hindutva-related digital video (such as Citti Media, YouTube platform), mainstream broadcast (such as NewsX), and text-based digital platforms (such as OpIndia).

Hindutva-aligned posts were identified by one or multiple combinations of three characteristics: (a) the post projected Muslims as invaders, in instances referring to Muslims as Islamists; (b) the post projected Hindus in danger; and (c) the Twitter or other platform handle was directly connected to other Hindutva-promoting accounts and/or was connected to a recognized Hindutva organization, or directly promoted a recognized Hindutva organization (the Bharatiya Janata Party, Rashtriya Swayamsevak

Sangh, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, etc.). The digital participant observation led to media texts presented on Hindutva-aligned platforms, both text-based platforms as well as mainstream broadcasting media spreading the Hindutva ideology. The Twitter posts led to these platforms and connected with the content on the platforms. Each of the posts were entered in an excel sheet, and screenshots were gathered, resulting in a total of 1972 posts for analysis.

As the posts were being gathered, I started carrying out critical analysis of the emergent themes, driven by the organizing framework of the CCA, attending to the interplays of culture, structure, and agency in shaping the construction of voice (Dutta, 2018). Drawing on culture-centered analysis of discourse enabled me to pay close attention to the communicative processes of erasure, situating the erasure in context, interrogating for the presence of Muslim, Dalit, and other minority voices that are the targets of Hindutva. Moreover, the analysis attended to the interplays of power and control in the construction of the communal tension in Leicester. Specific posts were closely studied in context, examining the conversational threads, and the intertextuality with other media platforms. Particularly salient in the analysis was the construction of cultural tropes, constituted amidst the structures, attending to the deployment of communicative strategies in upholding Hindutva. Moreover, the ethnographic participant observation while carrying out the culture-centered analysis attended to the interplays of communicative strategies that worked toward the erasure of Muslim voices and the pathologization of Muslims, legitimizing and circulating calls to violence directed at Muslims. The emergent analytic frames were placed in conversation with the in-depth interviews and journal notes, crystallizing the themes.

## **Findings**

This manuscript presents four key interpenetrating strategies that are deployed by Hindutva in imposing a narrative frame over the Leicester violence: (a) the polarizing role of a slogan; (b) manufacturing and reproducing the other; (c) communicative inversion; and (d) interplays of Hindutva and white supremacy. While the first three strategies specifically refer to the content of the messages presented in the digital and Hindutva media, the fourth strategy draws out the relationship between two ideologies that otherize Muslims. These communicative strategies are intertwined in the silencing of Muslim voices that forms the basis for the perpetuation of Islamophobia.

### **The polarizing role of a slogan**

The slogan “Jai Shree Ram” was raised on the streets of Leicester, with Hindutva-aligned mob of mask-wearing youth walking in a predominantly Muslim area chanting the slogan (Bhatt, 2022). The chanting of the slogan is noted as having catalysed the communal tension in Leicester. Hindutva-linked twitter accounts raised and repeated the slogan, “Jai shree ram,” around the Leicester violence, with a number of accounts legitimizing and amplifying the slogan, depicting it as the right of Hindus to raise the slogan. The slogan “Jai shree ram” however has a deep-rooted history attached to Hindutva and the mobilization of offline violence in India (Gupta & Sharma, 1996; Jain, 2010). The year 1991 formed a critical register in the public discourse in India (Basu et al., 1993).

Thousands of foot soldiers of the far-right Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) recruited and organized publics around the nation, mobilizing these publics around the slogan “Jai Shree Ram.” The slogan therefore is read discursively as a call to attack Muslims, constituted within the communicative register of the 1991 Hindutva mobilization across India around the demolition of the sixteenth century mosque, Babri Masjid, based on the narrative construction that the mosque was built on the birthplace of the Hindu God Ram. The slogan is constituted amidst its mobilizing role in communal violence across India in 1991 and 1992. Referring to the role of “Jai Shree Ram” in mobilizing violence, noted Rafeeq, a Muslim activist based in Leicester:

We have not seen this happen in the community here before. Gradually though, things have been changing (referring to the period since the election of Narendra Modi in India). More and more Muslims are being targeted with this hate propaganda that is directly from the Hindutva way of creating communal tensions in communities. In India, Hindutva mobs chanting “Jai Shree Ram” in Muslim areas create the tensions that then lead to the violence, which largely affects Muslims at whom the violence is targeted. Now, this is happening here in Leicester.

The depictions of the Leicester violence are accompanied by the portrayal of the threat posed by Muslim invaders, offering the justification for the slogan as a rightful response of Hindus. For instance, a twitter handle posts in Hindi, “The “Jai shree ram” slogan is so powerful that not only in India, but across the world, non-followers get shaken.” An account, @sd\_saurav<sup>4</sup>, frequently offering Hindutva-based commentary on the Leicester violence posts, “If you fall into the trap of constantly linking #JaiShreeRam to “Hindu supremacy” you need to expand your reading and stop taking your talking points from known Hinduphobes trying to gaslight westerners who know little about Indian history and politics.” In response to the post, another account comments, “JSR may not be a terror slogan, yet if Hindus are attacked by Muslims, they must be willing to fight back at the risk of being called terrorists. It is not a crime to fight in self-defense. Hindus have suffered a lot at the hands of Ms-partition, direct action and sundry genocides and rapes at the hands of invaders, love jihad crimes in this day and age. Globally also Islam is a nuisance as the pic shows,” posting a meme with images of Muslims allegedly engaged in violence. Memes are defined as “any form of online post – audio, visual, or text-based, that can be (re)created and can be spread rapidly using SNS” (Bhatia, 2022, p. 10). The memes in the Twitter space around Leicester violence serve a key role in the polarizing narrative crafted by the “Jai Shree Ram” slogan. Note how the slogan is crafted as a necessary response to the threat posed by Islamists in the form of genocides and rapes carried out on Hindus, producing the narrative of the Hindu in fear (more on this in the next section). The fear then serves as the justification for calls to violence as self-defense.

Here’s another post, “We all want India as Hindu Rashtra. There are lot of islamic countries why not a Hindu country? Think twice Hindu and wake up unit and declare India as Hindu Rashtra,” accompanied by the hashtags #JaiHind, #JaiShreeRam, #HindusUnderAttackInUK, #Leicester, and #QueenElizabethIIMemorial. Here’s another tweet, “Hindus fought the invaders for 400 + yrs bravely but not treacherously nor in the name of God like jihadis / terrorists. Denigrate as much as you can but #JaiShreeRam cannot be

sullied! #Leicester.” Another account, @GirlForJustice posts, “Hindu, stop being afraid about saying “Jai Shree Ram”. Because one can say “Oh Jesus”, “Allah Hu Akbar” and nothing is provocative so how come is yours? Don’t fall for the narrative, stick to your roots.” The post generated 113 Likes and 47 retweets, with a number of comments repeating “Jai Shree Ram.” It is critical to note here the multi-directional flow of the “Jai Shree Ram” slogan, from the chanting of the slogan offline in Leicester captured on video and shared on platforms such as Twitter and Instagram, to the calls to Hindus to wake up and fight back, to the utterance of the slogan on Twitter threads and as hashtag. The Twitter architecture amplifies the slogan exponentially, legitimizing its use and simultaneously obfuscating the hate attached to the slogan.

During the period of analysis, four key Twitter handles, @SarahLGates1, @RanbirS11414092, @OpIndia and @UnSubtleDesi were central to the organizing of hate. Note here that two of the Twitter handles (@OpIndia and @UnSubtleDesi) are geolocated in India and are part of the Hindutva propaganda infrastructure producing hate. The @SarahLGates1 account is based in Australia, and the @RanbirS11414092 account is based in the UK. The digital infrastructure of Hindutva works in tandem with the physical infrastructure of Hindutva. Across the Indian diaspora globally, Hindutva has mobilized through temples, schools, student associations, and service organizations, replicating the model of “shakhas” in circulating hate, and situating “interpretational authority” in the narrative infrastructure of Hindutva (Ohm, 2014). According to Sara, an activist who has been challenging Hindutva in the UK,

Understanding the context around “Jai Shree Ram” is so critical. When you look at the Gujarat riots and what has happened with Babri Masjid, the slogan galvanized Hindus from across India to violence. The slogan is inviting Hindus to fight, to protect themselves. It creates this climate of fear, which then leads to the violence. Here, various organizations have been directly promoting Hindutva and what we are seeing now is an expression of that fear.

Hindutva in UK is held up by brick-and-mortar organizations such as Hindu Council UK, the National Hindu Students Federation, and the National Council of Hindu Temples.

Activists in the UK point me to the history of Hindutva organizing in the UK, and document the speaking tour in temples organized by Hindu organizations in the UK with the Hindutva ideologue Sadhvi Rithambara, notorious for her Islamophobic hate speeches calling for Muslim genocide (see Sahgal, 2020), in September, building up to the Leicester violence. They note that Rithambara is a key architect in the massification of anti-Muslim genocidal hate. Her speeches calling for the murders of Muslims circulated large scale on cassettes building up to the destruction of the Babri Masjid. It is critical to point out here that the Indian police arrested Rithambara over her role in inciting the communal violence that led to the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 and the communal violence that led to the death of 2,000 Muslims in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Activist collaborators pointed to the report of the Liberhan Commission, a 17-year investigation commissioned by the Indian government into the Babri mosque demolition and subsequent violence, released in 2009. The report concluded that Rithambara was one of the key architects of the communal discord. The tour of Rithambara in the UK was organized by Param Shakti Peeth, a charity organization co-founded

by Rithambara, registered in the UK and positioning itself as participating in “Interfaith Harmony, Education training, General Charitable purpose.” Shares Jonaid:

For Indian Muslims, the violence of the Babri masjid destruction is etched on memory. When you leave India, you hope that you have left these memories of violence behind. So when you have someone like Rithumbara who actively instigates violence against Muslims and was instrumental in the destruction of the Babri masjid, when you learn that she is here delivering lectures, the pain and the fear, it’s all activated. As a Muslim, you start re-living the language of hate and the vilification of Muslims.

## Manufacturing and reproducing the other

The call “Jai Shree Ram” is mobilized around the production of the Muslim as the other. The othering of Muslims is carried out through the depiction of Muslims as inherently violent. As noted in the previous section, the communicative infrastructure of Hindutva is built on the depiction of the Muslim invader (Dutta, 2021). The narrative of the Muslim invader is at the center of the portrayal of Hindus under attack (more on this in the next section). Note here the following post from the Twitter handle of Nupur J. Sharma, the editor of the far-right Hindutva platform OpIndia that disseminates hate speech (Manuvie & Maurya, 2020) on September 19, “From Leicester to Lakhimpur, Islamists behave in a manner that “does not represent Islam in anyway”. The violence they perpetuate against idolators is a result of them being the “real victims”. They are victimized by the very fact that Kafirs have the temerity to exist.” The post deploys irony, moving from portraying Islamists to portraying Muslims, and painting Islam to be a religion that is at war with other religions outside of it. The tweet is retweeted 1,842 times, quote tweeted 26 times, and generates 5,116 likes. An account responds to the post, “Qur’an and Hadith don’t represent Islam,” reproducing the deployment of irony to otherize. Another account posts, “Attack kafirs because they’re not compliant with their religion. Disown attackers/terrorist publicly, as a lip service, that they weren’t following True Islam. Support terrorist with lawyers, support the terrorist’s family monetarily. Repeat these steps.” Memes are generated, drawn upon, and re-tweeted in response that draw on quotations from the Quran to depict the supposed inherent violence and intolerance of Islam. Note here that tweets from Nupur J Sharma and OpIndia are among the most circulated and responded to in the dataset.

Muslims as the “other” are shown as taking over spaces because of the violent nature of Islam. A twitter post notes, “If you want to understand how almost all non-muslims have been chased away from Arabia, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh etc, just look at what is happening in #Leicester right now where Islamist mobs are terrorising Hindus. Gradually afraid of these thugs ... Hindus and other non-muslims will start moving to safer places. With time, there will be no non-muslims left and #Leicester will become a sharia zone, a no-go zone for non-muslims. That is how Islam works.” Similar twitter posts portray Muslims taking over countries, often drawing in examples from different geographic contexts and connecting Leicester to these spaces. Examples of Muslim majority countries are offered to depict the threat posed by Muslims. Critical here is the suggestion that Leicester will become a sharia zone. Another twitter account then goes on to expand, “s Mz take undue advantage of Tolerant NonMuslims(NMz), enter NM areas, settle there & gradually grow their population to such a

level that d whole NonM society is seized by even 10–20% of M population! They deport NonMz from those areas & don't allow new NonMz re-enter!"

The narrative constructing Muslims as violent invaders is accompanied by narratives of the culture of sexual violence perpetrated by Muslims. Posts a twitter handle, "Islamists Lovers @BBCNews, @guardiannews don't make this #Leicester incident Hindu Vs Muslims. It's Islamists Vs Hindus #Hinduphobia, Islamists vs Jews #Antisemitism, Islamists Vs young British girls #Grooming. It's always been Islamists vs Others. And then Islamists play victim." A Twitter handle posting white supremacist content posts, "Now a news outlet such as @GBNEWS is exposing and reporting the Muslim Pakistani grooming gang scandal and the #Leicester religious gang violence I do think that Muslims and Islam in general will be regarded as something not welcome here in the UK." Here's another post, "So whats the common link between the below incidents in UK: Attack on Hindus, Jews Grooming gang targeting Sikh/white/Hindu girls. Sexual abuse of teenage girls. Time to call spade a spade. #HindusUnderAttackInUK #JewsunderAttack #Leicester #Birmingham." The othering of Muslims works through the interpenetrating tropes of jihaad that depict Muslim threats of violence to Hindu, Jewish and White civilizations to Muslim threats of sexual violence directed at women in these contexts. As we will see in a later section, this trope of the violent Muslim other serves as the infrastructure of social media solidarity between Hindutva and white supremacist twitter posts.

### Communicative inversion

Communicative inversion, the turning of materiality on its head through narratives (Dutta, 2018), phrases, images, and slogans, is a key element in the disinformation infrastructure of Hindutva, underlying the process of othering of Muslims. The disinformation networks of Hindutva communicatively invert narratives to produce the Muslim other, manufacturing the threat of the Muslim attacking Hindus, and in doing so, silencing the articulations of the violence being experienced by Muslims across India and in the diaspora as targets of Hindutva hate. In the context of India, the "fear of the Muslim" narrated as "Hindu khatrein mein hain" (Hindu is in danger) is deployed to target Muslim minorities. Slogans such as "Jai shree ram," (hail lord ram) are voiced amidst this communicative inversion, as the rallying cry of Hindus seeking to be united against the Muslim threat posed to a monolithic Hindu civilization. In other words, the strategy of crafting communicative inversions lies at the center of the mobilizing efforts of Hindutva. Communicative inversion reflects the turning of the oppressive marginalizing practices of Hindutva directed at Muslims, dalits and other minorities as claims for social justice. The communicative inversion plays out in narrating the Muslims in Leicester as the sources of violence while denying and/or whitewashing the role of Hindutva. Consider for instance the circulation of a poster in Hindutva networks, supposedly created by Muslims (referring to an instagram account called apnamuslims) calling for protests outside a Hindu temple. The poster was amplified by Hindutva influencers such as @SarahLGates1, @OpIndia and @UnSubtleDesi (more on this poster in the section on the intersections between Hindutva and white supremacy). OpIndia created a news story around the poster that was amplified manifold by accounts on Twitter. The OpIndia post of the story was retweeted 270 times, quote tweeted 2 times, and generated 434 likes.

Journalists who have documented the role of Hindutva-based Islamophobic hate are targeted with disinformation and hate (see for instance Posetti & Bontcheva, 2022). It should be noted here that journalists such as the Guardian reporter Aina Khan and Channel 4 Home Affairs correspondent Darshna Soni became the targets of communicative inversions, being framed/labelled as Hinduphobic, which became the basis of the violent threats and abuse directed at them. Responding to the Hindutva hate directed at her, noted Soni, “Had a lot of haters coming at me over #Leicester. Most ridiculous (apart from those telling me to “go home”) are men telling me I must be married to a Muslim. Sorry to break it to you, we women have minds of our own and can see/hear/report what’s going on for ourselves.” Similarly, noted Khan, “Since Sunday, I’ve had a torrent of sexist, racist, and Islamophobic messages telling me to blow myself up, calling me a whore, and accusing me of condoning extremist Muslims. I’ve had a video and opinion hit piece critiquing my journalism. The saddest thing? I expected this.” OpIndia carried a story targeting Khan, stating:

Similar has been the case with leftist media outlet The Guardian’s Aina Khan. She, aided by full-time Islamists goes on streets of Leicester, creates a narrative that it is the “BJP/RSS goons’ and “Hindutva goons’ who are spreading terror when visuals have clearly shown the involvement of rabid Islamists who have a history of giving hateful speeches. She somehow makes Hindus appear like aggressors when clear evidence shows a terrifying mob taking to the streets and targeting Hindus (Mehta, 2022).

The article, posted on the OpIndia Twitter handle, generated 292 retweets, 1 quote tweet, and 870 likes. The same article, posted by the OpIndia editor Nupur J. Sharma, generated 1598 retweets, 17 quote tweets, and 4851 likes. Note here the framing of Khan as a collaborator with Islamists, generating responses such as “Medieval savages respect only one thing – force!! Hindus should remember this,” and “.#HindusDoNOTHarm is the biggest problem!” The violence targeting Khan was extreme, resulting in the Guardian having to issue a statement directed at OpIndia for its targeting of Khan. Worth highlighting here is the communicative inversion performed by Hindutva, deploying sexually violent threats directed largely at women of color journalists while portraying Islam as the religion that perpetuates sexual violence.

Articulations of the experiences of hate experienced by Muslims targeted by Hindutva are termed Hinduphobic. The following twitter post is reflective of the communicative inversion, “How fake news has been deployed by the Pak and Islamists in #Leicester to generate the victim-hood narrative, while simultaneously unleashing violence on others over the past few weeks. Leicester: A case study.” The post is accompanied by an image that spells out misinformation in bold red and white colors, juxtaposed over the concerns expressed by Muslim community members regarding the presence of Hindutva organizations and Hindutva attacks on Muslims. The communicative inversion works through the portrayal of Muslim concerns regarding the presence of Hindutva in Leicester targeting Muslims as “fake news,” while accusing Muslims of crafting the victimhood narrative. The denial of the marginalization experienced by Muslims in the face of Hindutva works as communicative inversion to portray the victimhood of Hindus while otherizing Muslims.

Hindutva works through the framing of dissenting voices as Hinduphobic, as spreading the fear of the Hindu. As an exemplar of communicative inversion, critics of

Hindutva are blamed for causing the Leicester violence. Here's a post, "#Leicester events show alarming trends in #Hinduphobia Attacks on #HinduMinority across the world, but perpetrators & supporters justified it using #Hindutva boogiemán. This is exactly what we academics cautioned when they/some politicians spread "Hinduism Vs. Hindutva fad." Projecting the social vulnerability of Hindus draws on communicative inversion of victimhood, turning the Hindu into the victim to legitimize the violent discursive infrastructure of Hindutva.

Note similarly the narrative crafted by the Australian Hindutva propagandist Sarah L Gates appearing on NewsX, a right-wing Hindutva-aligned broadcast media platform in India (see NewsX, September 24, 2022). In the interview, Gates connects the Leicester violence to the "Dismantling Global Hindutva" conference, a conference that was organized by academics at leading universities globally to draw attention to the destructive effects of Hindutva on global democracy and that became the target of a global Hindutva-driven disinformation and hate campaign, with participating academics receiving death and rape threats (see Masih, 2021). The initial targeted trolling directed at me by Hindutva accounts, including by Gates, was connected to a lecture I delivered online on the CARE platform around the conference and CARE's sponsorship of the conference (Hill, 2021; Tan, 2021). In discussing the Leicester violence, responding to the question asked by the anchor, "How are you reacting to this violence? What is the possible cause for it? ..." responds Gates,

... I want to take this back a little bit. I think we are all familiar with what we hear from these hate speeches. I do recall that Hindus made a big song and dance around an academic conference which around the same time which happened to coincide with 9/11, called "Dismantling Global Hindutva" and at that time, we all said, this is targeting Hindus. They say, they are targeting the RSS. They say, they are targeting the BJP. They say, they are targeting VHP. They say, they are targeting Hindutva and extremism, but there is no line between what makes up their definition and ordinary cultural practices. And we said to them, this is going to lead to hate crimes. This is hate speech. And this should not be allowed in Ivy League institutions ...

The discursive trope deployed by Gates frames the "Dismantling Global Hindutva" conference as hate speech, implying a connection between the conference and the Leicester violence. The juxtaposition of academic conversations interrogating the extremist hate infrastructure of Hindutva in the backdrop of the Leicester violence, placing it in relationship to the question "What is the possible cause for it?," attributed causality for the violence to the academic conversations, an exemplar of the communicative inversion that forms the fascist infrastructure of Hindutva. Furthermore, consider the communicative inversion performed through the articulation of the academic freedom for Hindus to study Hindu-phobia voiced alongside the narrative, "this should not be allowed in Ivy League institutions." The role of Twitter is critical to amplifying the message, with clips of the interview being shared widely. Finding myself as a part of the Hindutva narrative outlining the network of Hinduphobes connected to the Leicester violence, I had written the following journal entry, having been targeted by both the handles @SarahLGates1 and @RanbirS11414092 that were prominent in the Leicester violence:

Once the narrative of the Hinduphobe has been crafted, Tweets are critical to feeding it and according to legitimacy. I am struck by how the initial attacks on me organized by Gates around the "Dismantling Global Hindutva" conference have been transported to Leicester,

creating an entire universe of falsities around academics and activists that are supposedly part of an Islamist network plotting against Hindus. (September 27, 2022)

The narrative of Hinduphobia on Twitter is forged through constructions of crises (as conspiracies attacking Hindus) and connecting these crises to build the meta-theory of Islamist-Leftist conspiracy around the targeting of Hindus. Consider the following Twitter post, “They are trying this in USA.” @IAMCouncil used @thedemocrats in the form of @teneckdmc to do all their talking points including using the “dismantling Global Hindutva Conference” which asked for elimination of Hinduism.” A Twitter response on the thread notes, “IAMCouncil is an islamic organization that has terror links to orgs like Alqaeda, ISIS, Hamas and pakistani ISI. It is extremely important for the FBI to set up 24\*7 surveillance on their members and their activities. We don’t want another 9/11.” The Indian American Muslim Council is a civil society organization in the US that has been at the forefront of the struggles against Hindutva and its entrenched presence in the US.

The disinformation network of Hindutva leverages the affordance offered by the communicative infrastructure of Twitter to use short phrases, images, and memes to turn the attack on dissenting and critical voices questioning the hate propagated by Hindutva by marking them as Hinduphobic. Even as Hindutva organizations dehumanize Muslims through communicative inversions, they project themselves as promoters of peace and interfaith harmony, as evident in the earlier example of Param Shakti Peeth, UK, the organization co-founded by Rithumbara. The digital platforms reproduce the narrative of Hindus as peace loving, offering the discursive legitimacy to Hindutva violence as necessary defense against Islamic extremism. Consider the following tweet that reflects this communicative inversion, “STOP VILIFYING HINDUTVA YOU ISLAMIC BIGOTS and WIPE OFF YOUR VENOM SPEWING MOUTHS. Hindutva means plurality Hindutva means inner peace Hindutva means harmony Hindutva means kindness and respect Hindutva is the ONLY HOPE. #LeicesterHindusAttacked.”

### **Interplays of Hindutva and white supremacy**

The Islamophobia that “others” Muslims and forms the communicative infrastructure of white supremacy mirrors the Islamophobia of Hindutva that draws on the othering of Muslims, communicatively constructing Muslims as terrorist threats. Hindutva accounts therefore look for and craft similarities with white supremacist accounts, and vice versa, with the convergence between the ideologies of white supremacy and Hindutva rooted in the hatred of the Muslim serving as the basis of the performed connection. Consider the following poster shared on Twitter of a Muslim call to protest against Hindutva shared initially by the Twitter account @SarahLGates1 that is based in Australia and promotes the Hindutva ideology, on September 24, 2022. The poster then gets picked up by the far-right digital platform promoting the Hindutva ideology, OpIndia, (see OpIndia, 2022), including the screenshot of the tweet by the account @SarahLGates1, with the story being carried on the same date, September 24 (Note here that Australia is 7 hours ahead of India). The OpIndia story goes on to quote Gates, “In a tweet, Australian research scholar Sarah L Gates pointed out how an Instagram account had been instigating violence against the Hindu community. “So what are you going to do? Dress up like

ISIS then scream at the Hindus to denounce RSS – a non-terror entity?” she asked.” Note also here the hashtag deployed by Gates, #HinduHateUK, that forms the framing of the OpIndia story. The OpIndia story goes on to narrate the fear of an attack on the temple by Islamists, a narrative that forms a crucial discursive trope in the infrastructure of Hindutva. It states:

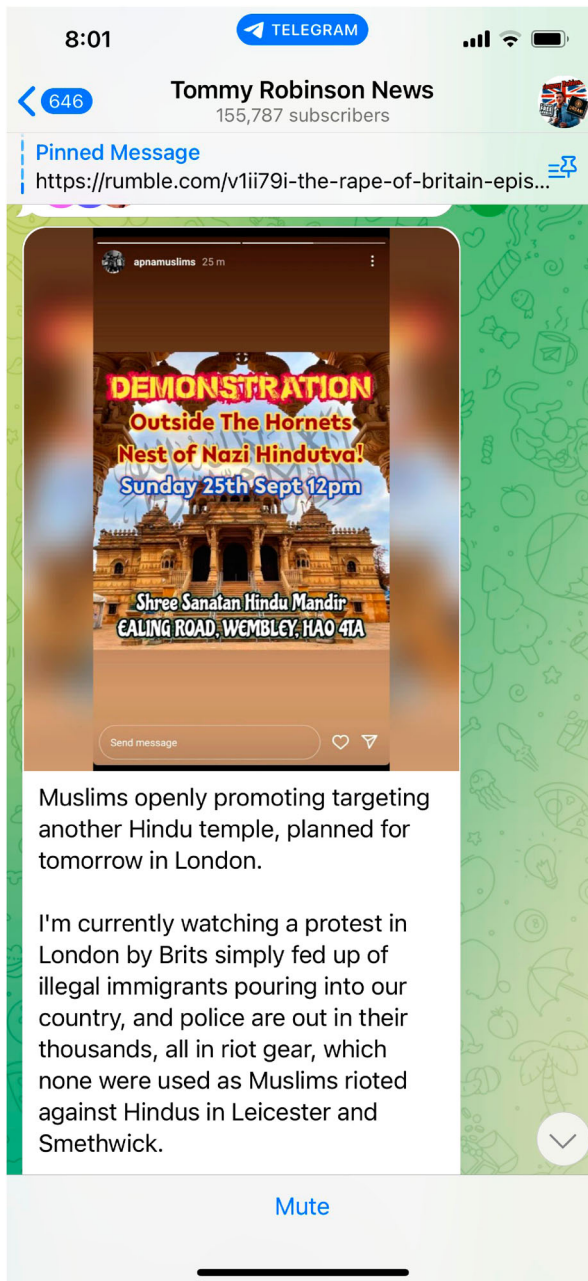
But the Islamists, who are always on the hunt for excuses to justify their crimes, are now harping on the fake information to create chaos at the Shree Sanatan Hindu Mandir in London. As the propaganda against the temple which has nothing to do with the Leicester violence grows on social media, it is possible that the temple may come under the attack of Islamists in the UK ... The temple has been built using the ancient temple architecture methods associated with Hinduism, without the use of metal. The limestone for the temple was hand-carved in Sola town in Gujarat. The temple houses 41 marble deities, also made in India.

Note here the framing of a protest against the far-right ideology of Hindutva as Islamists creating chaos. Moreover, note the creation of a narrative around potential attack on the temple by Islamists in the UK, going on to then articulate Hindu architecture used to build the temple.

The poster is also picked up by the British, far-right, anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant white supremacist Tommy Robinson, being posted on his telegram channel, alongside an Islamophobic message that targets illegal immigrants (see below). Robinson was a member of the neo-fascist and white nationalist British National Party (BNP) from 2004 to 2005, served as joint vice-chairman of the British Freedom Party (BFP), and co-founder and former leader of the anti-Muslim English Defense League (EDL). Robinson has organised and participated in offline events with recognized hate groups and figures such as Proud Boys and Gavin McInnes. For his Islamophobic hate speech on digital platforms, Robinson has been banned from platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. The post states initially, “Muslims openly promoting targeting another Hindu temple, planned for tomorrow in London,” going on then to juxtapose the Islamophobia as the backdrop of the anti-immigrant rhetoric, “I’m currently watching a protest in London by Brits simply fed up of illegal immigrants pouring into our country ...” The anti-Muslim rhetoric promoted by Robinson is convergent with the narrative of Islamist terror circulated by Hindutva accounts (see [Figure 1<sup>5</sup>](#)).

The post on Telegram was viewed 30.5 K times at the time of the initial analysis in September 2022, generating 605 “angry” responses and 59 “likes,” eliciting Islamophobic hate responses such as “It’s the mosques that are pigsty,” and calls to anti-Muslim violence, “Where are the brave fighters I’ve always heard about in the UK?” “1000 British men willing to fight and go places within a 24 hours notice is what we need. We deploy to areas where Muslims cause problems like the cinema, the school or the Hindu temple ... When Muslims begin to riot in a few years when the government cracks down, men need to have agreed to fight. Someone start a club ffs please.” Note the ways in which the post catalyzes the calls to violence in the responses to it, including calls to fighters, prompting men who are willing to fight. The portrayal of the Muslim as the common enemy forms the basis of the call to solidarity with Hindus ([Figure 2](#)).

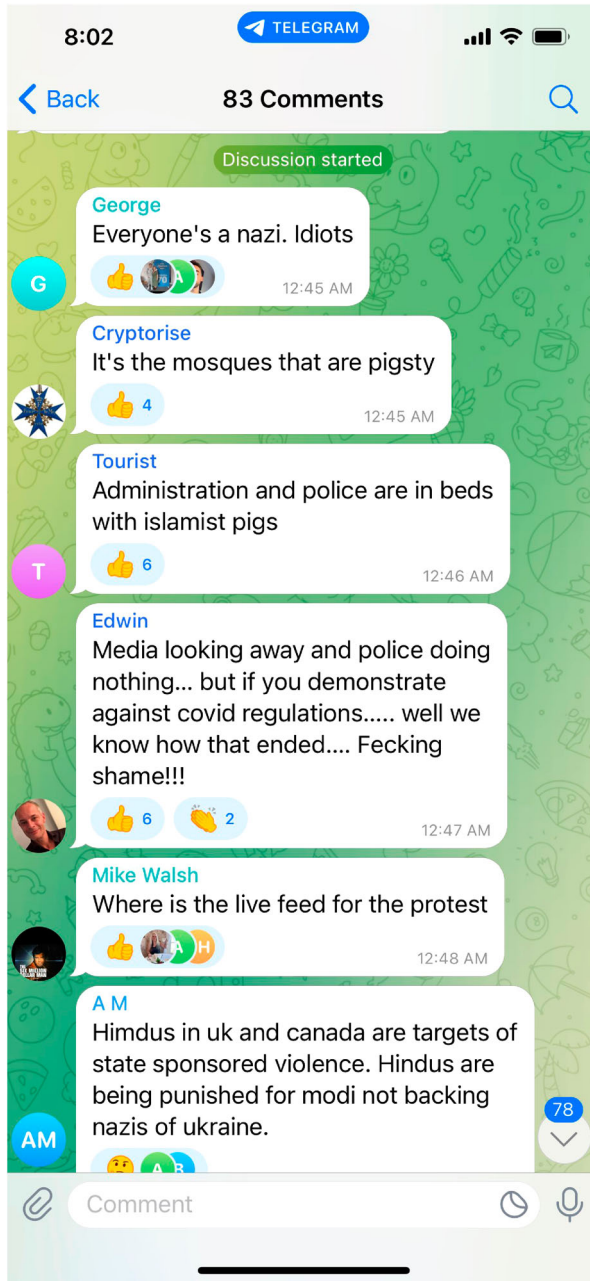
Moreover, the comments deploy dehumanizing language targeting Muslims, often referring to them as animals. Consider for instance the reference to “Islamist pigs.” Across multiple tweets, Muslims are compared to animals. Mosques are portrayed in



**Figure 1.** Telegram post by Tommy Robinson.

dehumanizing language. The framing of mosques in dehumanizing language is crucial in the discursive infrastructure of hate as offline violence gets directed at mosques as the spaces where Muslims worship (Figure 3).

Salient here are the threats to wipe out Muslims on the Telegram platform hosted by Robinson, with responses such as “These bastards need wiping out” and “All of them need to be removed! Can’t wait until they start fighting the real British people! Come



**Figure 2.** Responses to Telegram post by Robinson.

on u bastards ur fucking having it u bunch of bacon hating arseholes? Revolution.” The abuse directed at Muslims with dehumanizing language is placed alongside the declaration of violence as the necessary strategy to respond to the Muslim threat.

A video narrative done by Tommy Robinson on the Leicester violence talks about Pakistani Muslims attacking Hindus and going after Hindu women and is shared on



**Figure 3.** Responses to Telegram post by Robinson.

Twitter by a handle supporting white supremacist groups and posting memes around love jihad (Muslims targeting, grooming and raping white women). The post draws in Hindutva supporters, foregrounding the framing of radical Islamists as threats to civilization. The Leicester violence introduces multiple Hindutva-aligned twitter handles to Tommy Robinson's anti-Muslim ideology. This serendipitous opening becomes the basis

for narratives crafting solidarities between white communities and Hindus, under attack by Muslim invaders (Figure 4).

Consider in the above excerpt the sense of serendipity expressed by Hindutva Twitter handles in learning about Tommy Robinson through the video that was shared on Twitter. Hindus narrate becoming aware of Tommy through the solidarity expressed



Figure 4. Hindutva aligned Twitter post reposting a post that includes a video by Robinson.

by Tommy, connected by the underlying common hatred toward the Muslim. Similarly, other Hindutva accounts ask whether Tommy has a Twitter account, raising questions such as “What happened to his Twitter account?” and the white supremacist handle points them to the Gettr and Telegram accounts. Shares a Hindutva-aligned Twitter handle, “Thank you Tommy Robinson! Islamist bought the western media and silenced you! We still support you.” Another Hindutva account responds, “Thanks, Tommy. Nationalist Christians should come forward and protect their Hindu neighbors. In return we all Hindus are ready to help Christians in all situations. Deport all radical Islamists. We Hindus want peace in the UK.” The serendipitous solidarity goes both ways. The white supremacy supporting twitter handle that posted the Tommy Robinson video reshapes tweets made by Hindutva accounts. For instance, the handle shares the following Hindutva tweet, “Not just Hindus, they will come after every other community which is helping in nation building. Save Britain from these zombies.” Along these lines, in a response to the “Jai Shree Ram” twitter posts discussed earlier, posts an account that describes itself as “proud and white,” “Jai shree ram ... Did I write the right??? Sorry if not I mean no disrespect! Id rather hear that 100,000 times than allah fxxking dirty ass Akbar,” replete with emojis depicting vomit and the flag of the UK.

The serendipitous solidarity with white supremacists however also becomes the site of debate within the Hindutva Twitter ecosystem. For instance, Nupur J. Sharma, the editor of OpIndia, the far-right Hindutva platform, had earlier invited Tommy Robinson for an interview on the platform. Sharma has on multiple occasions uttered and posted hate speech targeting Muslims (Nandy, 2021). Here’s a tweet by Sharma referring to the dialogue with Robinson, which according to Sharma, she decided to not share because of concerns expressed by Hindus in the UK (Figure 5).


The initial post by Sharma frames the interview with Robinson as offering insights into “how this malaise came to be in the UK,” aligned with Robinson’s anti-Muslim ideology and drawing on it to offer the Hindutva frame. The follow-up post by Sharma declares the decision to defer the release of the interview based on articulations made by British Hindus that Islamists would use the interview to target and attack them. She points to caring for the safety and reputation of British Hindus, while simultaneously reiterating the message that she doesn’t think Robinson was attempting to hijack the issue. Blaming global media as being aligned with Islamists, she positions the decision as one based around security of Hindus abroad, simultaneously maintaining the affective affinity with Robinson and the Islamophobic ideology of white supremacy. Let’s look further into the twitter conversation that ensues between Sharma and Gates (see Figure 6), framing the communication strategy around the connection with white supremacists.

The conversation thread depicts the discussion of alignment with white supremacy as strategy, simultaneously revealing the underlying Islamophobia that connects the ideologies. The underlying Islamophobia that brings Hindutva and white supremacy in convergence also raises concerns for Hindutva activists in the Western diaspora about being seen in relationship with white supremacy. Note here that while Gates plays victim and urges Sharma to not “give them [potentially referring to critical activist voices] weapons to destroy us faster,” she doesn’t critique the Islamophobic ideology of the white supremacist Tommy Robinson. The concern for Gates is being visibilized for the ideological linkage with white supremacists (her reference is the linkage of Robinson with Proud

7:01 📶 🔋

← **Thread** Open app

🔄 भारतीय Sarah L Gates Retweeted


 **Nupur J Sharma** ✓  
@UnSubtleDesi ⋮

About the Tommy Robinson interview.

**The Tommy Robinson interview**

When I announced the Tommy Robinson interview, there was substantial meltdown from usual Islamists and Leftists. I don't particularly care about the news of those who platform ISIS/Al Qaeda supporters and deny the Hindumisia that exists globally. However, after I conducted the interview, I got SOS calls from British Hindus who believe that the Islamists would use this interview to target them physically and then justify that attack. I don't like this reasoning, but they are the victims and their opinion has to be respected. The global media, being sympathetic to Islamists, will play along and vilify the diaspora. I would not want Hindus abroad and their physical safety to be compromised. I don't believe Tommy Robinson was trying to hijack the issue. I also don't think that the Left will ever be sympathetic to the Hindu cause, no matter who the Hindus disassociate with. However, I am going to respect the opinion of British Hindus who are genuinely scared for their safety and reputation (due to the Left media) in UK and defer the release of the interview.

- Nupur J Sharma





 **Nupur J Sharma** ✓ @UnSubtleDesi · Sep 21

I will be interviewing Tommy Robinson tomorrow. The link of the interaction should be up soon. It's time to call out the blatant Islamic violence in Leicester against Hindus and understand how this malaise came to be in the UK. #Leicester #LeicesterHindusAttacked

[Show this thread](#)

11:14 PM · Sep 22, 2022 · Twitter Web App

453 Retweets   45 Quote Tweets   1,730 Likes

🔒 twitter.com

**Figure 5.** Twitter post by the Hindutva ideologue and Oplndia editor Nupur J. Sharma referring to interviewing Robinson.

Boys, declared a terrorist organization in Aotearoa New Zealand; see Phillips, 2022). This form of equivocation is essential to the survival of Hindutva in the Western diaspora, depicting the ways in which Hindutva circulates Islamophobia while simultaneously carefully crafting a narrative of religious pluralism and tolerance. Pay close attention here to the politics of visibility reflected in the alarm Gates raises about being identified



**Figure 6.** Twitter re-post by the Australian account @SarahLGates1 referring to Nupur J. Sharma's engagement with Robinson.

with white supremacist groups such as Proud Boys linked to Tommy Robinson, connected to the Capitol riots in the US, and banned in countries such as Aotearoa New Zealand as terrosim. In the discussion thread posted above, the concern expressed by both Sharma and Gates then turns to the portrayal of Islamist propaganda, the key frame that is deployed by Hindutva to silence the interrogation and criticism of the

Islamophobic ideology of Hindutva. Note further the engagement with the conversation by other Twitter handles: (Figure 7).

Earlier, on September 21, Gates had shared an article from the Islamophobic website, “Focus on Western Islamism,” (FWI) posting, “Who are the Islamists of Leicester and Birmingham, and other towns planning the anti Hindu mobs?” The FWI platform is published by Daniel Pipes, who along with other influential figures such as the bloggers Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer, the thinktank president David Horowitz, and the Dutch politician Geert Wilders construct the narrative of the Islamic threat to western civilization, a core ingredient in the Islamophobic anti-immigrant infrastructure of white supremacy (Cainkar, 2019). What is evident here is the discursive confusion created around the crisis of reputation management for Hindutva supporters in the West with the evident/visible convergence and linkage between the Islamophobia of Hindutva and the Islamophobia driving white supremacy. Even as Hindutva accounts rally around disinformation and hate, they continually negotiate their relationship with white supremacy. While Hindutva and white supremacy mirror each other in the Islamophobic hate they draw upon, distancing from white supremacy in public registers is a vital element in Hindutva’s maintenance of its legitimacy in Western democracies, particularly with the increasing attention to white supremacist violence, extremist acts, and terrorism in Western democracies (Goodwin, 2020).

## Discussion

This manuscript further builds on the scholarship of Bhatia (2022) to document the ways in which the communicative infrastructure of Hindutva is held up digitally by platforms such as Twitter, seeding and circulating disinformation. The affordances of the platform (Twitter) catalyze the rapid movement of othering discourses across geographic spaces. The findings depict the ways in which online networks of Hindutva spread globally draw on disinformation and circulate the disinformation, leveraging the affordances of Twitter. Moreover, it depicts the role of Hindutva accounts located in India, Australia, US and globally in the context of the disinformation and hate infrastructure of Hindutva, linked to a specific incidence of communal violence in Leicester, UK. Digital platforms such as Twitter mediatize and mediate communal violence offline, recording and amplifying it, framing it through ideologically-based accounts, and scripting it to craft an overarching narrative of hate (Banaji & Bhat, 2022; Banaji et al., 2019). The intercommunal tension and violence in Leicester creates a narrative frame for Hindutva to craft the “Hindu in danger” to fuel further Islamophobia and recruit members into its folds. Intercommunal tensions thus emerge as rhetorical devices in the global infrastructure of Hindutva. Also note here the physical infrastructure that has penetrated institutions and organizations across the diaspora, creating the material base for the digital ecosystem of hate (Banaji, 2018; Bhatt, 2000; George, 2016; Ohm, 2014).<sup>6</sup>

This offline-online linkage is depicted in the movement of the Hindutva slogan “Jai shree ram” that has been mobilized by Hindutva in the context of the demolition of the Babri Masjid (Gupta & Sharma, 1996) and the subsequent communal tensions in India into the streets of Leicester, and simultaneously into the digital platforms in the diaspora. The slogan, mediated through its chanting in Leicester, is amplified and repeated on Twitter. Juxtaposed in the backdrop of explicit calls for violence and acts



**Figure 7.** Twitter exchange among Hindutva accounts regarding Robinson.

of violence targeting Muslims, the slogan forms the communicative infrastructure in the organizing of violence. What the analysis here depicts is the communicative climate of hate that is organized around the slogan, with Hindutva-related twitter accounts juxtaposing the slogan with Islamophobic hate. Simultaneously, the Hindutva accounts depict the uttering of the slogan as the religious right of the Hindu community, erasing the history of Islamophobic violence tied to the slogan. At the core of this

offline-online flow is the role of brick-and-mortar Hindutva organizations such as the Param Shakti Peeth, a charity organization co-founded by Rithumbara, and mobilizing hate through the organizing of talks by Rithumbara at temples.

Critical to the language of religious rights deployed by Hindutva ideologues is communicative inversion, turning a symbol connected with Islamophobic hate as the symbolic basis for mobilizing for religious justice in multicultural democracies. The analysis documents the flow of the Hindutva ecosystem beyond Leicester, depicting the global flows of disinformation and hate directly connected with Hindutva media. Real-time twitter posts perpetuating the Hindutva ideology flow into Leicester and beyond, mediated and amplified by the Hindutva-based digital and media platforms in India. Simultaneously, images from Leicester, narrated through Hindutva accounts, turn into global propaganda around the Hindu in danger. Salient is the organizing role of the Hindutva platform OpIndia that is a key node in global Hindutva propaganda, serving as an interlocutor across accounts, platforms, and spaces. The analysis documents the communicative strategies through which Twitter serves as a platform for building the Hindutva community, mobilized around the disinformation and hate around offline events. The communal tensions in Leicester played key roles in mobilizing the formation and amplification of a digital Hindutva ecosystem, bring in new Twitter handles, creating Twitter influencers and networks around the Hindutva ideology.

Note here how the process of amplification works to build sexually violent and physically violent threats directed at journalists, academics, civil society organizations and dissenting voices that question the Hindutva ideology (see Asian Image, 2022). Consider here the Hindutva hate that was amplified and targeted at Dr. Chris Allen, the academic who studies hate and was appointed to lead the review of the Leicester violence (see BBC, 2020). Although the US diaspora has historically played a pivotal role in shaping the Hindutva digital ecosystem (Basu, 2020; de Souza, 2022), it is worth noting the multiple nodes of this digital ecosystem spread globally across the diaspora. The digital ecosystem of Hindutva in the backdrop of the Leicester violence depicts the global nature of Hindutva hate, drawing in discursive interventions into Leicester from India (such as the OpIndia posts) and from other spaces in the diaspora (such as Australia). These multiple nodes, dispersed globally, enable Hindutva disinformation and hate online to operate 24X7, working continually to surveil dissenting voices, to put out disinformation-based materials that are directly available and circulated at the sites of conflict locally, and further amplified across geographically dispersed Twitter handles. This study contributes to the literature on global Hindutva by extending the scope of the literature beyond the US, and by highlighting the strategic function served by Hindutva nodes that are distributed globally and are organized around hate. Note here also the intertwined relationship between the strategies of communicative inversion and equivocation. Hindutva Twitter handles and allied propaganda infrastructures construct Muslims as sources of violence to legitimize calls for violence targeting Muslims. They project Hinduism as a religion of peace to legitimize violence as a necessary strategy for self-protection. Moreover, the calls to violence targeting Muslims are placed alongside claims to promote peace and interfaith harmony.

Moreover, the manuscript draws attention to the symbiotic relationship between Hindutva accounts on Twitter, Hindutva accounts on other digital platforms such as Instagram and YouTube, and Hindutva media (both alternative platforms such as OpIndia

and mainstream broadcast such as NewsX and Republic TV). The digital accounts on Twitter interface with digital accounts on other platforms (such as Instagram and YouTube), and offer credibility to Hindutva media. In turn, the Hindutva media offer additional virality and visibility to the Twitter-based digital accounts, forming a networked political economy of hate. Note here the form of Twitter as a public SNS in disseminating hate rapidly. Both broadcast and digital Hindutva media platforms draw on Twitter to create content, identify and invite experts, and create scoops. The currency of coverage is built through Twitter interactions, with Twitter playing a key role in connecting Hindutva media infrastructures to Hindutva news. With their ratings and readership drawn through the projection of the Hindu in danger, the Hindutva media platforms draw upon Twitter to identify the global issues that can serve as content fodder in televised debates (see for instance the content on NewsX and on OpIndia). In this sense, Leicester emerges as an opportunity in the Hindutva ecosystem for producing Hindutva experts who are projected as defending the cause of Hinduism across the global diaspora, turning Twitter-based disinformation and hate handles into experts. For instance, consider the Twitter handle @SarahLGates1 spreading disinformation based on the Hindutva ideology turned into a scholarly expert on Hindutva-aligned YouTube platforms such as Citti Media, OpIndia, and news platforms such as NewsX. Also evident here are the complementary relationships among platforms, with the flows between digital platforms and corresponding flows into Hindutva media platforms (both broadcast and digital).

This is one of the first studies to document the interpenetrating and dialogic relationship between Hindutva and white supremacy within the context of offline communal tension and violence. It contributes to the growing literature that explores the synergies between Hindutva and white supremacy (Thobani, 2019). Beyond the discursive convergence between the ideologies, this study documents the interlinkages and flows between Twitter handles promoting Hindutva and handles promoting white supremacy. Also salient is the connection between key figures of Hindutva and White supremacy as evident in the proposed interview of Tommy Robinson by Nupur J. Sharma. The Leicester violence, mediated through Twitter, creates an opening and facilitates these connections. Further, note then the confusion and tensions around reputation management voiced by Hindutva ideologues in the diaspora amidst the public visibility of the connection. This negotiation offers a vital insight into the strategy of equivocation that is deployed by Hindutva in the Western diaspora, while aligning with the Islamophobic ideology of white supremacy, simultaneously needing to manage the visibility of the link and giving the perception of distance, given the increasing scrutiny of the violence that is carried out by White supremacist extremists. Hindutva's appeal to minority status to leverage openings for neoliberal multiculturalism in Western democracies sits alongside the hate that forms the core of its communicative infrastructure. Reflecting the strategy of equivocation, note that the digital hate accounts of Hindutva are placed alongside Hindutva research infrastructures such as Insight UK, offering the semblance of digital intelligence gathering on the violence (framed as insights) to push the Hindutva narrative. Examining closely these linkages is critical in the backdrop of the violence produced by Islamophobic white supremacy as evident in the Christchurch terrorist attack in Aotearoa New Zealand.

This manuscript focuses on the infrastructure of Hindutva disinformation and hate around the violence between Hindus and Muslims in Leicester. It therefore does not

examine the communicative infrastructures of disinformation that flowed within the Muslim community, and the ways in which that network interacted with Hindutva. Here, it is worth noting that a number of critical analyses point to disinformation that flowed through digital spaces in both Hindu and Muslim communities (Kansara & Saeed, 2022). The key point however that is raised by this manuscript is the role of Hindutva-related digital platforms, including public SNS such as Twitter in creating anxiety and fear through deployment of symbols, crafting and spreading disinformation, which in turn forms the basis of the Islamophobia spread by digital Hindutva. The timeline of analysis of the data follows the initial Hindutva rally taken out on September 17 and therefore, does not include within its scope the earlier incidences of conflict that started since May. Moreover, the digital participant observation that forms the basis for this manuscript is limited to specific time frames because of the differences in time zones across spaces.

This study has several limitations. The analysis focused on Hindutva accounts on Twitter and the communicative processes through which these accounts conversed with other communicative platforms including Hindutva media and white supremacist spaces operating on platforms such as Telegram. It is therefore limited to the analysis of the discursive ecosystem of Hindutva around the violence. It carries out the analysis over a limited window around the peak of the communal tension in Leicester. Future research ought to examine the digital posts around Leicester over a wider window of time, including the digital organizing of Hindutva targeting the review of the violence. The digital ethnography uses English keywords to gather the tweets to analyze, excluding the Twitter discussion in other languages. Finally, this is not a study that documents the causality underlying the Leicester violence. It depicts the way in which the communal tension constitutes and in turn is constituted by the digital ecosystem of Hindutva working alongside white supremacy.

So far to my knowledge, this is the first study of the digital Hindutva mobilization in the global diaspora around offline communal violence in the diaspora. The findings depict the global flows of Hindutva, demonstrating the communicative processes through which a global Hindutva ecosystem is organized around the offline violence in Leicester. The digital circulation of Hindutva intervenes into the politics of the local space in Leicester and simultaneously narrativizes Leicester as an exemplary case of the global rise of Hinduphobia, posing multiple layers of threats to social cohesion. The narrative of Hinduphobia is mobilized as a communicative inversion to otherize Muslims and produce Muslims as invaders. The Islamophobia in the digital space thus works hand-in-hand with the Islamophobia in the offline space, creating connections to strengthen the global network structure of Hindutva and linking with analogous ideological projects such as white supremacy.

## Notes

1. Although the focus of this manuscript is on the targeting of Muslims, which forms bulk of the online violence being deployed by Hindutva as in the example of Leicester offered here, I note that Dalit and Adivasi Christian and dissenting minorities have been targeted both in India and in the Indian diaspora by the same Hindutva hate machine. Historically, constructing a homogeneous nation shaped the national discourse, with nationalist leaders in

the independence movement and in post-independence India mobilizing around the idea of India that erased the heterogeneity and inequality of caste, race, religion, and linguistic differences. The project of Indian nationhood is based on the marginalization of its internal “Others,” who do not form the upper caste or middle caste Hindu elites. Since the rise of Hindutva, the dominant constructions of the Indian nation on one hand project the “unity and diversity” that homogenizes a diverse population into a single whole and on the other hand, narrate a “unified” homogenous Hindu nation. The categories of caste, race, and nation that are deployed to articulate dominant national discourses are selectively utilized and reworked as and when needed, continually (re)producing erasures and exclusions.

2. The platform is currently identified as X.
3. As a political project, Hindutva is organized around the fascist principles of mobilizing the nation around a monolithic culture (sanskriti). It places religion as the organizing basis of the political culture, constructing India as a Hindu nation (rajya). Critical here is the formulation as religion as the organizing principle for race (jati), constructing Hinduism as the Indigenous religion of India, and placing Islam and Christianity as foreign to the land.
4. Twitter handles that have a public profile and appear on public platforms have been named in this article. Otherwise, the names of Twitter handles have been kept anonymous.
5. I have used some screenshots in this essay to give a sense of the visual depictions as well as to document the communicative flow.
6. Specifically, note here Bhatt’s (2000) analysis that documents the presence of RSS in Leicester.

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