

STATE OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN INDIA

(December 2021 - January 2022)



India is governed today by an administration for its avowed affiliation to Hindutva or Hindu nationalism. This ideology seeks to turn India into a Hindu Rashtra (Hindu Nation) and paints religious minorities (Muslims, Christians etc.) as a threat to its autocratic and majoritarian vision for Indian society. Since Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in 2014, the influence of Hindutva leaders, groups, and rhetoric has become pervasive in Indian government and society. This has resulted in the polarization of society through hate speech and the prevalence of discriminatory policies and violence targeting these religious minorities.

Perpetrators who commit acts of discrimination and violence against religious minorities often have the backing of local and state actors and enjoy a culture of impunity which only emboldens their statements and actions. December 2021 and January 2022 saw a continuation of this pattern as right-wing Hindutva leaders and groups in India continued to spread hate speech, enact discriminatory policies, and carry out violence against Muslims and Christians. Over these two months, significant events of hate speech and violence occurred in Uttarakhand, Delhi, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Assam, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, and Uttar Pradesh. Additionally, December 2021 saw an escalation of hate speech to explicit calls for genocide of Muslims at several dharma sansad events.



Hate Speech and Calls for Genocide

At a dharma sansad (Hindu Religious Parliament) held from December 17-19, 2021 in Haridwar, Uttarakhand, Hindu-nationalist speakers not only painted Muslims as a violent threat to Hindus, but asserted that the only solution was to convert India into a Hindu Rashtra (Hindu nation) by killing Muslims. At the event, the president of the right-wing Hindu Raksha Sena Swami Prabodhanand Giri asserted, "...every Hindu must pick up weapons and we will have to conduct this cleanliness drive...There is no solution apart from this." The Delhi chapter of the right-wing Hindutva group Hindu Yuva Vahini (founded and led by chief minister of Uttar Pradesh and BJP leader Yogi Adityanath) also organized an event on December 19, 2021 where oaths to fight, die, and kill to establish a Hindu nation were administered to a crowd of 250 as well as children in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh schools. In all instances, after taking the oath, all raised their right arm in the Nazi "Sieg Heil" salute.

On December 25-26, 2021 Hindutva leaders held a similar dharma sansad at Raipur, Chhattisgarh to discuss how to achieve a Hindu nation as well as address the issue of Muslims stealing and slaughtering cattle and the religious conversions of Adivasis and Dalits to Christianity. Chief of Arya Samaj, Acharya Anshu Dev asserted that there was an “urgent” need to reconvert Adivasis and dalits back to Hinduism to achieve a purely Hindu nation. Hindu Monk Ram Balak Das was endorsed by Congress leader Pramod Dubey when he preached to the crowd that the way to stop cow slaughter and religious conversions was to “chide them, and if it doesn’t work... shoot them.” Another speaker, Triveni Das, then attacked Muslims by calling Islam a violent religion and claiming that “Muslims have unleashed mass murders in the world.”

In response, two FIRs have now been filed naming speakers at Haridwar and Uttarakhand police have formed a special investigation committee to probe the Haridwar event. However, both FIRs fail to mention the calls for genocide and instead cite offensive comments made towards Islam and the Prophet as cause for the FIR. So far, only two arrests have been made in connection to the Haridwar dharma sansad and one in connection with the Chhattisgarh event. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) still have yet to condemn these events.



Violence Against Muslims

Hate speech propagated by Hindutva leaders vilifying Muslims has prompted incidents of mob violence resulting in the beating, arrest, and murder of Muslims. This hateful rhetoric includes spreading the myth of “love jihad” in which Muslims supposedly pose a threat to Hindus by seducing Hindu women with the aim of converting them to Islam. Notably, over the past two months, claims of “love jihad” resulted in the beating of two Muslim men by Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) members in Madhya Pradesh and the assault and arrest of a Muslim man in Uttar Pradesh by a Hindu mob. Hindutva rhetoric also relies on claims that Muslims are stealing and slaughtering cows in order to justify acts of violence including mob lynching of Muslims. For example, news outlets reported an incident in which a mob lynched a Muslim man accused of stealing cattle in Bihar.

Other reported incidents of right-wing Hindutva violence over the past two months involve Muslims simply being targeted for their religious identity. These incidents include but are not limited to: the stabbing of a Muslim man by Bajrang Dal members in Karnataka, lynching of a Muslim teen by RSS members in Karnataka, beating to death of a Muslim man in Haryana and Dehli, the beating of a Muslim man in Jharkand as he was forced by BJP members to chant “Jai Shri Ram,” and the beating of a Muslim man in Delhi.

In addition to direct physical assaults on Muslims, homes and businesses belonging to

Muslims have been subject to vandalism and boycotts carried out by Hindutva leaders and groups. In Madhya Pradesh, two Muslim families were attacked and their houses burned down.



A video emerged of a group in Chhattisgarh taking oaths to boycott Muslim businesses and refuse service to Muslim customers. A Hindu mob also shut down a Muslim-run juice shop in Uttar Pradesh claiming that the store was the site of a “love jihad” operation. Online, Muslim women also faced harassment through a GitHub-based app called “Bulli Bai” in which the photographs of over 100 women (including prominent female politicians,

actresses, activists, and journalists) were posted to the app “for sale.” Police have taken limited effective action to investigate these incidents of harassment and violence against Muslims and prosecute those responsible. Furthermore, news outlets have reported incidents of police brutality against Muslims. A Bengaluru inspector assaulted a Muslim man and forced him to drink his own urine while another Muslim man had his arm amputated after being beaten in Bengaluru police custody. In Jharkhand, police beat and tortured a Muslim couple in their custody.

Violence Against Christians

Hindutva propaganda exacerbating Hindu anxieties over religious conversions of Adivasis and Dalits to Christianity has resulted in harassment and violence against Christians. Claims of forced conversions have prompted right-wing Hindu mobs to disrupt church services, attack congregations and pastors, and vandalize churches as well as missionary schools. In the lead up to and aftermath of the Christmas holidays, news outlets reported a surge in anti-Christian protests and violence organized by right-wing Hindutva groups. On December 6, 300 members of the VHP and Bajrang Dal vandalized St Joseph Senior Higher Secondary in Madhya Pradesh due to claims that the school was converting Hindus. Another right-wing mob stormed a church in Rohtak, Haryana on December 9th.

A few days later, a man charged into a church in Belagavi, Karnataka with a machete. Citing this violence in the lead up to the Christmas holidays, police in Karnataka began preventing Christian gatherings, however this did not lessen the violence. In Uttar Pradesh, a group of 20-30 right-wing men gathered to protest a Christmas event while chanting “Jai Shri Ram,” ‘Dharmantran band karo’ (stop conversion), ‘Church murdabad’ (death to the church) and ‘Isai missionariyo hosh mein ao’ (Christian missionaries come to your senses).

On Christmas Eve, a statue of Jesus was destroyed in the Holy Redeemer Church in Haryana’s Ambala Cantonment. Members of the Bajrang Dal also forcibly entered a church in Silchar, Assam in order to shut down midnight mass celebrations. In Agra, members of the Bajrang Dal set an effigy of Santa Claus on fire while shouting “Santa Claus Murdabad”

(death to Santa). In Madhya Pradesh, eight Christians were pelted with stones and attacked with sticks and axes by members of the Bajrang Dal while they were out caroling. After members of the Bajrang Dal assaulted Pastor Deepak Chaudhary in Bihar, a mob of 100 people descended upon Chaudhary's congregation on



December 26th to stop prayers. On December 29th, 30 members of the Sri Ram Sena broke into a church in Tukkanatti village, Karnataka, disrupting Christmas celebrations. That same day, another Hindutva group attacked Pastor Akshaykumar Karaganvi's family for "converting" their neighbors in the Belagavi district of Karnataka. Additionally, on January 9th, a mob of 200 stormed a church service in Chhattisgarh and attacked the congregation and pastor. After the attack, members of the VHP then forced members of the congregation to convert to Hinduism.

In response, police have taken little effective action prosecuting those responsible and are even complicit in arresting those accused of alleged forced conversions in states with anti-conversion legislation. Karnataka recently passed the Protection of Right to Freedom of Religion Bill which criminalizes religious conversions of minors, women, and members of lower castes with sentences up to 10 years imprisonment for conversion through "fraud and inducement." Karnataka now joins Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand which already have anti-conversion or "Freedom of religion" laws in place. These laws give legal justification for officials to disproportionately target Christians (as well as Muslims) for alleged forced conversions.

Jammu and Kashmir

Since August 2019, the Muslim majority region Jammu and Kashmir has experienced an intense military crackdown. During this time, Human Rights Watch has reported abuses committed by Indian security forces which include "routine harassment and ill-treatment at checkpoints, arbitrary detention, torture, and extrajudicial killings."

Security forces also continue to use the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) "to detain those deemed critical of the government, from lawyers and activists to journalists, priests, poets, academics, civil society members, and Kashmiri civilians." Recently, Indian authorities have denied Muslims entry to Jamia Masjid, the grand mosque of Srinagar



for Friday prayers and kept the mosque's chief priest detained in his home. The Muslim Gujjar Bakerwal tribe have also become the victim of an eviction drive carried out by Indian officials. Citing "illegal encroachments," officials of the Jammu Development Authority with the aid of 200 police surrounded the tribe's locality and refused to let anyone leave while they demolished the tribe's homes.

Recommendations

Hindutva ideology classifies Indian society into "us and them"--"us" being Hindus and "them" being non-Hindu religious minorities. In light of the genocidal rhetoric at Haridwar, Delhi, and Raipur, this polarizing ideology when combined with the continual and escalating pattern of wide-spread hate speech, discriminatory policies, and violence against Muslims and Christians puts India at great risk for genocidal sentiments to become genocidal actions. In order to de-escalate the current situation and prevent an impending genocide, the following recommendations should be implemented:

- As state parties to the 1948 Genocide Convention, the international community, and the Indian government are obligated to take the recent calls for genocide and mass violence against Muslims and Christians at Haridwar, Delhi, and Raipur seriously, condemn the genocidal sentiments, and hold those who made the speeches responsible.
- The police complaints filed against speakers at these events should accurately reflect the severity of the events and include the calls for mass violence and genocide in the report. Police in Uttarakhand, Delhi, and Raipur should also be sure to invoke applicable laws in order to arrest and try those responsible for genocidal rhetoric.
- As signatories of the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief and UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, the international community as well as the Indian government has a responsibility to ensure that police effectively investigate, prosecute, and prevent instances of harassment and violence committed against Muslims and Christians.
- States should repeal their "Freedom of Religion" or anti-conversion laws which have been used to disproportionately target religious minorities and justify harassment and violence.
- In particular, the President of the United States has the ability to place sanctions on individuals who have committed, directly aided, ordered, or are complicit in gross human rights violations through the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act. These sanctions include barring entry to the US or blocking any transactions relating to property or interests held in the United States. With regards to recent

calls for genocide at events like Haridwar, the President could place sanctions on those responsible. These sanctions could also be applicable to those responsible for or complicit in the ongoing human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir.

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