

PATRIARCHAL MORAL POLICING, COMMUNALIZATION AND POLITICIZATION OF LOVE AND MARRIAGE*

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ABSTRACT

Communalism operates and sustains through patriarchy and use of violence. Various Right Wing Organizations are not only attempting to polarize society along the religious lines at the public / political level, but also trying to control the personal and everyday realm. Moral policing and organized violence against couples in the public places, on the eve of Valentines' Day, instigation of family members against imminent marriage of couples of different faith are such routine form of violence. Any deviation to the self defined morality and appropriate behavior of women is sought to be punished in the name of preservation of Hindu culture or Hindu society. Besides, organized campaign like love jihad is not only communalizing love and marriages through propagating suspicion and hatred among different religious communities but also seriously challenging the rights of individuals, particularly the freedom of woman to assert her sexuality and choice in those matters.

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, communal mobilization has led both ideological and organizational move to counter relationship between couples courting and marrying across communities. Various Hindu Right organizations are operating at both private and public realms to extend its control into socio-cultural sphere of everyday realm. The control of women's movement, her day to day interaction along with surveillance against her courtship and marriage across boundaries and religious conversion can be described as a way of assertion of both communal identity and patriarchy. This also serves the political agenda of *Hindutva* groups to draw sharp lines between people of different religious communities.

Patriarchal family, community and state collaborate in the function of regulation of women's sexuality and reproduction. This regulation incurs instances of different kind of violence and violation of rights of women not only in the time of collective violence like war and riot but also in the ordinary and everyday realm.

Historically, such instances of violence could be cited from the time of partition. During the partition violence, men killed their kinswomen and daughters for fear of being raped and converted to other religions. Women committed suicide individually or collectively in the ideological environment where death was preferred over sexual access to men of rival community. Clearly,

such acts of 'sacrifice' were assumed as an act of bravery and 'manliness' which could elevate the family and community to a higher plane. The familial control splits into the hands of state when the existence of 'abducted' women of both Hindus and Muslims were seen as a matter of national shame and inability of the state to give protection. After partition, the Indian state took upon itself the task to retrieve its kidnapped and abducted women from Pakistan. However, such 'rescue' operations were conducted without consideration of women's agency to exercise their right to choice in determining whether they wanted to return to India or continue their family with Muslim men. (Butalia, 1993, Bhasin, 1996)

In Independent India, the same legacy of assertion of communal identity and patriarchy through violence and 'rescue operation' can be seen in the activities and propaganda of various right wing organizations.

These organizations propagate its self defined morality and appropriate behavior and use violence in case of any deviation. In the name of protecting Hindu culture or Hindu identity, the members of various organizations like Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Bajrang Dal, have indulged in organized violence against courting couples on the eve of Valentine's Day and assaulted women in Mangalore Pub. This day to day moral policing are conducted with the complicity of state machinery. Direct involvement of state in moral policing can be seen

in the activities like 'Operation Majnu' in Meerut and similar other routine operations of different areas.

Besides, various right wing organizations and lawyers are actively involved in instigating the male members of family of a Hindu girl about her inter-religious marriage by tracking the public notices in the Marriage Registrar's office. Since 2009, these organizations have been spearheading an organized campaign namely 'Love Jihad' to prevent inter religious marriages and conversion. It has been also conducting violent 'rescue operation' of Hindu girls from their Muslim lovers/husbands and propagating suspicion and communal hatred between Hindu and Muslim communities to further their political agenda. Besides, it is seen that during the time of communal riots inter-religious couples are selectively targeted to inflict brutal kind of violence against them. Many Hindu girls were kidnapped or forcibly converted or made to abort their pregnancy out of inter-religious marriage especially after the Gujarat carnage in 2002. Such activities and campaigns are resulting in gross violation of human rights of women and religious minorities and preventing them in exercising their right to choice in marriage. The manner and reasons of such instances of violence is illustrated in the following.

- **Violence in the Public Places on Valentine's Day:**

In the name of protecting Hindu culture, various organizations affiliated to *Hindutva* politics use to attack public places like restaurants, card shops and florists and humiliate and physically assault couples courting on Valentine's Day. This violence is being defended in the name of restricting the growth of 'westernized' and 'obscene' way of expression of love. There are many reported instances of such violence.

For example, in 2000, activists of right wing students' organizations like Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) and Kanpur Student's Union (KSU) warned the local government that to discourage the celebration of Valentine's Day by the young couple they were declaring curfew in the Kanpur city. Despite, this warning the administration did not take sufficient measure. Eventually, in the Kanpur, one restaurant was vandalized and in many other places, faces of couple were blackened and they were physically assaulted by goons of these two organizations. Public demonstration of their vandalism and humiliation found worst expression when two girls were forced to parade in the Mall Road with their blackened faces. Other restaurants, card shops and florists were ransacked and courting couple were attacked. (The South Asia Times)

Similar activities were reported in Delhi and other cities of North India in the following years.

- **MORAL POLICING IN PUBLIC PLACE**

- I. Operation Majnu:**

On December 21, 2005, acting as upholder of public morality, the Meerut police publicly humiliated and physically assaulted couples and women who were sitting in the public parks like Surajkund, Ram Park, Victoria Park, Gandhi Park, and Company Garden under the police drive 'Operation Majnu'. Various described as drive against sexual harassment or curbing obscenity in public places and eve teasing, the drive was particularly aimed to teach a lesson to young couples. The police called the reporters of local and national television channels to gain publicity of their acts which they assumed would enhance their reputation as 'custodian' of public morality. Men and women both were targeted and abused, slapped repeatedly and forced to turn their face towards the TV cameras. While giving testimony of the incident, one victim described that area inspector repeatedly slapped her, pulled her *dupatta* and kicked her on chest and abused her by calling her 'whore'. When she went to local police station to file a case against the policewomen, officers refused to register her complaint. After the incident, many victims did not return to their homes and were untraced for several days. The incident was followed by angry public demonstration and condemned by political leaders across parties and National Commission for Women and National Human Rights Commission. (Times of India, 22 Dec 2005) However, later such drives of police were reported in various cities including Muzaffarnagar, Aligarh and Ghaziabad of Uttar Pradesh.

In the Ghaziabad, a police team led by SO conducted a three days operation to pick up young couples in parks and malls. These couples were asked to explain their conduct and the police impart them punishment in the spot. Explaining the rationale behind Operation Majnu, Alka Pandey reportedly said: "Our actions flow from instructions received from the administration to provide maximum security for women. There are a lot of eve-teasers and they stand outside girls' schools and colleges to trap unwitting girl."

Defending her actions in the parks, which for her places of 'mental peace', she explained: "*Agar larka-larki kuch galat kare, toh woh sundarta kahan rehegi? Chhoti-chhoti larkiyon ko yeh log fasa lete hai.*" (If couples indulge in bad (vulgar) activities, they spoil the beauty of the place. Men trap very young girls)

The SSP of Ghaziabad reportedly defended the act that such minor aberrations are necessary for upholding the greater issue of safety of women. (Times of India, 30 Nov 2011)

Mangalore Pub attack:

On January 24, 2009 around 40 men barged into a pub in Mangalore. Raising slogans like '*Bharat Mata ki Jai*', '*Jai Sri Ram*', '*Bajrang Dal ki Jai*', '*Sri Ram Sena ki Jai*' they started beating mercilessly women guests who were involved in a party there. They made worst kind of verbal abuse to the women, and molested some of them. The attackers also targeted the men who come forward to rescue the girls. Some women were stripped and dragged and beaten up. Similar kind of physical assault was reported by Bajrang Dal goons in a different party in Mangalore.

After the incident, Sri Ram Sena's founder Pramod Muthalik and Vice President Prasad Avtara not only took responsibility of the attack but also justified the act which was according to them conducted in the interest of Indian society. The leaders asserted that the activists acted like 'brothers' and as such there was no need of asking apology for an act done with good intention. Interestingly, this planned attack was performed in front of certain sections of media persons who were informed beforehand by the goons. Consequently, there was wide scale condemnation of the act as well as the role of the BJP state government who was silent on the issue surfaced.

Rather than terming the violence as moral policing for preserving Indian culture, the act of such violence should be seen as attack on freedom and security of women in the public sphere. The hooligans attacked not the 'pub culture', rather targeted the women for 'crossing' the code of conduct defined by these thugs. Groping over women's bodies in a pub, slapping, pushing and shoving women in public places, threatening and abusing women and violating their bodily integrity seems to be 'cultural' and 'Indian' for these so called 'brothers'. The highly gendered and discriminatory nature of violence could be seen as imposition of moral order on women only. Besides, worst kind of punishment was made against deviations aimed for setting an example in front of other women. (Hindustan Times, 7 Feb 2009)

• LOVE JIHAD CAMPAIGN

Love Jihad, as described by Charu Gupta, is an organized campaign or political fantasy of right wing groups to counter the growing threat of inter-religious

marriages and conversion to Islam. By repeatedly propagating the campaign against love Jihad organization, these groups seek to transform a myth into a reality in the public mind and constantly polarize the society on communal lines to further their political agenda. The construction also helps to prevent the growing autonomy of women to assert her sexuality and choice in matters of marriage as well as aims to streamline her reproductive capacity exclusively for Hindu community. Such campaign creates images of sexually charged and violent Muslim men and victimized and foolish Hindu women and appeals for protection of such women by strong Hindu men. Consequently, it seeks to eradicate any possibility of women's agency, in exercising her legitimate right to choice, love and conversion. (Economic and Political Weekly, XLIV15, p13-15)

Hindu Right organizations like Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS), Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), Sri Ram Sena, Hindu Janajagruti Samiti, Bajrang Dal, Durga Vahini have been involved in propagating campaign about the existence of love Jihad organization, funded by Muslim fundamentalist organizations abroad, to convert Hindu girls into Islam through expression of false love. Through holding meetings, distributing pamphlets and publicizing such campaigns through internet, these organizations are performing the task of 'restoring' such girls into Hindu fold.

Many Christian religious organizations like Kerala Catholic Bishops' Council (KCBC) also joined with the Hindu Right organizations and started claiming that Christian girls too are victims of forceful conversion in the coastal regions of South India.

It was argued by these organizations that love jihad is a conspiracy of Muslim fundamental organizations by devising plans for deceitful religious conversions of Hindu and Christian girls who were lured by Muslim guys by feigning love. Handsome Muslim guys were funded to purchase costly cell phones, bikes and fashionable cloths and strict timeline to woo Hindu girls and forcefully converting her to Islam. The girls who married these guys after conversion had to bear as many children to increase the Muslim population outnumbering the majority community. These girls were also used as human bombs in various terrorist activities and sold in the flesh trade market in abroad.

The campaign rose in prominence since 2009 and centered on Kerala, Karnataka, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. In

2009, Hindu and Christian Right Organizations started making hype against the increasing numbers of conversions to Islam from their community and claiming different figures of religious conversions as a proof to the existence of alleged 'Love Jihad' organization. The Muslim fundamentalist organizations like Popular Front of India and Campus front had been blamed for promoting such campaign. During this time, some criminal cases of rape and forceful conversion of Hindu girls surfaced, which were used like weapons to propagate communal hatred against Muslims. Through public demonstrations, these organizations pressurized the state authorities to take strict legal actions against such Muslim youths. Sri Ram Sena declared that it would launch a nationwide 'Save Our Daughters, Save India' campaign to counter the 'love jihad'(Times of India,31 Oct 2009)

Muslim organizations in Kerala denied any such attempt and argued that these fabricated campaigns were aiming to undermine Muslim community.(Times of India,2 Nov 2009)

Responding to the campaign, in October 2009, the Karnataka government announced a CID probe into the issue of love jihad and matter associated with it. This followed from the Karnataka High Court order which expressed concerns over the alleged 'Love Jihad' attempts and directed the government to investigate the matter.(Deccan Herald,22 Oct 2009) In its final report, the Director General of Police Jacob Punnoose dismissed claims of any organized attempt by any group or individual using men 'feigning love' to lure women to convert to Islam. The large number of conversion to Islam by Hindu girls had performed with their own will. Subsequently, Justice M. Sasidharan Nambiar of Karnataka High Court closed the investigation by suggesting that inter-religious marriages are legal and common phenomenon in India.(Times of India,27 Oct 2009) Similarly, in January 2012, Kerala police claimed that Love Jihad was a 'campaign with no substance'. It also suggested legal proceeding against the website hindujagruti.org for 'spreading religious hatred and false propaganda'.(The Hindu,23 Apr 2010)

In 2014, before the Assembly election, the issue of love jihad resurfaced in Uttar Pradesh and turned into violent controversy when various public statements were made by BJP MPs alleging the Muslims for forcefully converting Hindu girls by luring them. It was claimed that India was a target of an international conspiracy of love jihad. Besides, it was alleged that *Madrasas* had been involved in instigating Muslim boys for 'Love Jihad' by

promising monetary reward which ranges from 7-11 lakh depending on the community of the concerned girl who would be converted into Islam.

In 2015, the Hindu Right organizations of West Bengal spearheaded a campaign called 'Bahu lao, Beti Bachao (bring a daughter-in-law, save a daughter)' to counter the conspiracy of 'love jihad'. They were promoting the marriage of Muslim women with Hindu men after 'purifying' these girls. Attempts were made to rescue the Hindu girls from their Muslim partners and to bring Muslim girls to Hindu fold. After the purification program, these Muslim girls were given Hindu name and asked to join BJP along with their family members for their own safety.(Indian Express,13 Apr 2010)

Likewise the UP state convener of Bajrang Dal also declared his intention to launch the same campaign across the nation. The *Bahu Lao Beti Bachao* campaign was not only aimed at stemming the tide of love jihad, but also giving women of other communities an opportunity to experience the rich cultural tradition of Hinduism. The members of RSS and Matra Shakti Durga Vahini joined with Bajrang Dal in the awareness movement against love jihad by distributing leaflets outside educational institutions urging the girls to be cautious of mingling with Muslim boys. It was written in those leaflets that these Muslim guys change their name and wear lockets with pictures of Hindu gods to deceive Hindu girls and lure them into marriage. The leaflet also contained helpline number which can be contacted for help in 'rescue' of any 'love jihad' victim.(Times of India,20Jul2015)

• THE RESCUE OPERATION

"In every house there is a live bomb that can erupt at any time. Do you know who that is? Our daughters...Daughters are the honour of the family and the community, and to protect that is our Hindu duty and Hindu culture...Come and let's unite to save bombs...Jai Shree Ram."

"If you rescue one girl, it is the same as saving 100 cows. One daughter equals 100 holy cows."

Female sexuality, as perceived in such slogans, has the potential of 'exploding' borders of caste, class and religion mythic purity of nation. The very foundation of communalism is shaken when couple marries across religions and communities and thereby question the polarization of society on communal lines. Various fundamentalist or right wing organizations draw its sustenance from the anxiety of Hindu men about breaching

the code of patriarchy, caste and community boundaries and the resultant threat to property relations. As such, the exercise of free choice in marriage by women bears a continuous threat which is sought to be curtailed by guarding the female sexuality. Women, who deviates such guardianship by crossing the patriarchal code of behavior are punished by the community leaders who collude with patriarchal family.

The members of many Hindu Rights Organizations have been conducting 'rescue' operation of Hindu girls and breaking their marriage with Muslim boys in the name of fighting against 'Love Jihad'. The sting operation, *Operation Juli* (retrived from www.cobrapost.com/index.php/news-detail?nid) which was conducted by news website *Cobrapost* and *Gulail* came into limelight how the members of these organizations use violence, intimidation, emotional blackmail, duplicity and drugs to separate Hindu-Muslim married couple by forcefully abducting Hindu girls. It also revealed how with the nexus of certain sections of lawyers, police, judges affiliated to these organizations, the musclemen and office bearers conduct 'rescue' operation of the Hindu girls and fabricate false criminal charges against their Muslim husbands who have performed inter-religious marriages. All these act of violence are justified in the name fighting against 'love jihad'.

In this regard, we can refer to the similarities drawn by Charu Gupta of 'abduction' and conversion campaign launched by Arya Samaj and other Hindu Revivalist bodies in the 1920s in Uttar Pradesh. The present 'Love Jihad' campaign, like the campaign in 1920s, exacerbates the polarization of Hindu and Muslim communities. The idioms, language and manner of execution of both the campaigns resemble themselves. However, the present campaign operates in the context of growth of terrorism and as such; it heightens the suspicion against the Muslims in comparison to the abduction campaign of 1920s.

Thus, the analysis bring into the fore how the patriarchal moral policing of the state and communities have entrenched into the everyday realm and violating the rights and freedom of women. Besides, by organized and ideological mobilizations against consensual love and marriage, communal organizations have been purposively spreading hatred and intolerance among different communities and thereby posing a serious challenge to the democratic freedom and secularism in India.

NOTE:

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