Beware the Demon of Love Jihad! The Gendered and Sexual Abjectification of Muslim Masculinities by Hindu Nationalists on Twitter

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In this paper, I examine the Twitter accounts of right-wing extremist groups (RWEGs) in India, arguing that the abjectification of Muslim masculinities is central to the narratives of Hindu supremacist groups. The abjectification process on Twitter serves as a rhetorical device to: a) criticize and problematize Muslim masculinities; b) idealize and glorify Hindu and white masculinities; c) promote Hindu and white masculine nationalist projects; and d) unify Hindu supremacists against Muslim others. By analyzing the gender ideologies expressed implicitly or explicitly on the Twitter accounts of RWEGs, and using the "Love Jihad" conspiracy case as a focal point, I demonstrate how the abjectification of Muslim masculinities is constructed in opposition to the idealized Hindu masculinities. This study highlights the intersection of gender and nationalism in the digital discourse of Hindu supremacist groups, offering insights into the mechanisms through which social media platforms are used to reinforce and propagate Islamophobic ideologies.

Keywords: Muslim masculinities, Hindu supremacy, conspiracy theory, social media, right-wing extremism

Introduction: The Power and Horrors of Islamophobic Abjection

Since 9/11, the image of "threatening" and "hypersexual" Muslim men has become well-established across popular and political social media sites, particularly in North America and Europe (Sian, 2018; Sian, Law, & Sayyid, 2013). Men with Arabic backgrounds who are (nearly always) perceived as Muslims are often projected as "brute murderers, sleazy rapists, religious fanatics, oil-rich dimwits, and abusers of women" (Shaheen, 2001, p. 172). The representation of Muslim men as dangerous (Archer, 2001), sexually barbaric (Quraishi, 2017), and as potential, if not actual, terrorists or jihadists has occupied the public interest at domestic and international levels, causing Muslim men to be viewed as the new international "folk devils" (Cohen, 2011). These negative depictions hardly ever take the historical or social locations of Muslim men into account, omitting how Muslim men have been discriminated against in the labor market and workplace (Helly, 2004), and how they have been relentlessly targeted by racial profiling (Khalema & Wannas-Jones, 2003).

While this negative reaction to Muslim men in the global North since 9/11 can be easily understood in the frame of white supremacist ideologies, these negative figurations are equally and abundantly alive and well in

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India and Indian diasporas, particularly online. Given these modes of digital, Islamophobic demonization, this paper poses several questions. First, how is the demonization of Muslim masculinities[1] produced, and what purpose does such vilification serve, particularly for right-wing extremist groups (RWEGs) online? Secondly, and in light of this collection specifically, this paper also asks: How does this abjection and demonization of Muslim men and masculinities play out specifically in India and across what we might call Indian—especially Hindu-nationalist—digital diasporas? That is, what is gained by such demonization, both against Muslims and, relatedly, in favour of Hindu right-wing extremists[2]?

While abundant scholarship exists detailing negative representations of Muslims and Islam in Indian mainstream media (Ahmed, 2010; Narayana & Kapur, 2011), and research concerning negative depictions of Muslims in digital media has also begun to be produced (Awan, 2016; Awan & Zempi, 2017; Farokhi, 2021), and has generated scholarly interest (Sian, 2018), there is still a need for scholarship which examines how the othering of Muslim masculinities specifically occurs through Twitter, particularly through the accounts of Hindu right-wing extremists. In addition, the impacts of such negative, affective persuasion through practices of rhetorical, digital abjection of Muslim masculinities also require further study. This paper aims to address these gaps.

Monstrous Others, Idealized Selves: The Rhetorical Uses of Gendered and Sexual Abjection

Following Katherine Pratt Ewing (2008), I argue that the online stigmatization of Muslim masculinities by Hindu RWEs and RWEGs manifests as a form of abjection in which Muslim masculinities occupy a "zone of uninhabitability" (Butler, 1993). In her classic text, Julia Kristeva (1982) referred to abjection as a state of being cast off; those who are abjected exist in and experience a state between that of a subject and that of an object. Importantly, while the abject threatens the subject's sense of self, the abject itself cannot entirely be objectified or done away with. Instead, the abject stands in between the subject and its object and, unlike an object, the abject cannot be separated from the subject. As Kristeva (1982) described, "from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master" (p. 2). In this way, the abject serves to establish a

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[1] From the outset it is worth noting that by "Muslim masculinities", I am referring to the ways in which Muslim men, through right-wing extremist group (RWEG) discourse and rhetoric, become represented as figurations of various (negative, aggressive, or even paradoxically weak or corrupt) masculinities. Largely, these are representations or projections of mainstream hegemonic masculinity which deems normative masculinity superior to other masculinities (e.g., white or Hindu masculinities over Muslim masculinities).

While these normative characteristics of masculinity are rewarded and promoted among Hindu nationalists the same qualities are coded by RWEGs as problematic for Muslims. For example, RWEGs tend to project Muslim masculinities as aggressive and patriarchal, even while applying to themselves a traditional, patriarchal masculinity which must fight for their race.

I use "Muslim masculinities" in the plural throughout this paper, following scholars of gender, to signal that masculinity does not cleave to one single or simple attribute, much less is any one gender type ever fixed. Thus, as I argue throughout this paper, RWEGs seek to both vilify and lock Muslim men into categories of masculinity that are represented as bad, dangerous, or otherwise menacing, while at the same time, RWEGs employ such vilification to secure their own representations of white and Hindu masculinity as good, heroic, and necessary. As a feminist scholar, I understand that this is hardly how gender operates, however, in my pursuit of tracing and analyzing RWEG tactics of gendered Islamophobia, I frame these gendered, Islamophobic logics through the normative frameworks and rhetorical strategies RWEGs operate within. Thus, following scholars like Michael Kimmel (Angry White Men, 2013), when referring to my theorization and analysis of the abjectification of Muslim men (as a figuration), I use the plural "masculinities". When referring to RWEG's abjectification of Muslim men, I use the singular "masculinity".

[2] For the remainder of this paper I use RWE/s to refer to right-wing extremist/s and RWEG/s to refer to right-wing extremist group/s. I'd also like to note that this research came from my doctoral research in which I compared RWEGs in India, Canada and the United States. In this paper, however, I focus on the case in India and online, Indian diasporas as represented on Twitter.

border between inside and outside: "It is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of 'one's own and clean self'" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 53).

While abjectification can be understood in one sense as an act of degrading someone to the status of a "mere" object and thus removing agency, reducing them to a status controlled by others, abjectification also refers to the act of othering. In this way, the abject is not only seen as the opposite of what is normal but also as a threat to normality. The abject lurks between the boundaries of what is assimilable and what is unassimilable. While the abject can stay in proximity to what is "normal", it is not able to be incorporated into an idealized "us". Of course, this otherness that comes from within has to be constantly rejected and expelled—that is, made abject—in order to protect imagined and idealized cultural and racial demarcations. At the same time, the abject holds an uncanny fascination for the subject, demanding its attention and desire, ceaselessly "challenging its master" by its very existence (Kristeva, 1982, p. 2).

Following Kristeva's (1982) argument that the abject is both outside and also constitutes the boundary between normal and other, I also align my argument regarding the abjection of Muslim masculinities with Judith Butler's (1993) work. Butler (1993) argued that gender identities are similarly constructed through regulatory practices in which certain identities are excluded and abjected while others are exalted. These regulatory practices function to perpetuate the dominant hegemony (e.g., heterosexuality) while rejecting identities that are perceived as problematic (e.g., homosexuality). Thus, individuals who fail to follow the established rules of gender (and thus, sexuality) are labelled as abject, coming to occupy the "unlivable" and "uninhabitable" zone, representing identities that are deemed ungrievable, unintelligible, and illegitimate (Butler, 1993).

Crucial to this paper, this process of gendered and sexual abjectification not only excludes certain bodies (i.e., Muslim men), but also functions to reinforce the identities of those who are perceived as "normal" subjects (i.e., Hindu national supremacists). In other words, the establishment of what constitutes a "normal" national subject in India is contingent upon the status of the existence of those who are deemed abject, that is, Muslim men. By their very nature as illegitimate "others", abjected Muslim men reinforce the boundaries for "acceptable" Indian (read: Hindu) subjects, contributing to the provision of representative examples of what "normal" subjects are and are not.

By drawing upon Kristeva's (1982) and Butler's (1993) conceptualizations as an analytical frame, I argue that, through their exploitation and weaponization of affective rhetoric on Twitter against Muslim men, Hindu supremacist groups are actively othering and abjectifying Muslim masculinities. In doing so, these RWEGs work to abject Muslim men and their masculinities while also seeking to entrench and idealize hegemonic Hindu nationalist masculinities. This process of gendered and sexual abjection occurs on two levels. First, Muslim men are portrayed as hypersexual monstrous figures. This line of rhetoric argues that Muslim men are extremely violent beasts with uncontrollable sexual urges, seeking to rape or otherwise sexually subdue Hindu women in India. Second, in Hindu supremacist ideologies, Muslim men are perceived as the archetypal terrorist villain, untamed and devouring, who seeks to destroy the power and privileges of Aryan nations[3]. As I will demonstrate, these lines of anti-Muslim rhetoric aimed at Muslim men operate in tandem to vilify Muslim

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[3] In my research I also discovered that RWEGs' efforts to abject Muslim men and masculinities is an economic strategy as well, but I do not have space to include this aspect of their rhetorical project here.

masculinities as always already abnormal, dangerous, and unacceptable, at the same time as they shore up Hindu masculinities as normal, protective, and acceptable—indeed, even exalted.

Thus, the abjection of Muslim masculinities by Hindu RWEGs on Twitter serves as a rhetorical vehicle which: (a) criticizes and problematizes representations of Muslim masculinity and justifies subjecting them to violence; (b) idealizes and glorifies Hindu masculinities; (c) advances Hindu masculine nationalist projects; and (d) works to unify Hindu supremacists in India and across Indian diasporas together as allies against abjected Muslim others. While it is Muslims as a (stereotypically homogenous) category who are understood as a lethal "threat", it is Muslim men, specifically, who are perceived as the primary manifestation of this threat and who are thus the principal targets of Hindu supremacist rhetorics of gendered abjection. In this way, Hindu supremacist ideologies become contingent upon the violent eviction of Muslim men from public spaces and social media ecologies. Equally, Hindu RWEGs are reliant upon the abjection of Muslim men for the reproduction of their own (heterosexist, patriarchal) gender and (mono) racial hierarchies as they—at least partially—understand themselves as dominant in relation to subordinate Muslim (male) abject others. As I shall demonstrate, Hindu RWEGs construct their social identities as Hindu "nationalist" men by simultaneously positioning themselves against Muslim men who are seen as outside of their social, cultural, and political (read: nationalist) collectives. As Katrine Fangen (2003) argued: "Identity is always defined in contrast to those one does not identify with" (p. 205).

The Consequences of Abjection

I focus and maintain my attention on these tactics of gendered and sexual abjectification not only to illuminate and analyze how such tactics of digital Islamophobia are produced and maintained, but because of the very real danger such rhetoric and discourse creates for Muslim communities. The Islamophobic weaponization of social media hyper-exposes Muslims to various forms of violence, not least of which include killings via vigilante and/or mob "justice" and even lynching. For example, under the name of saving cows in India, cow vigilantes, who tend to be upper-caste Hindu men, lynch Muslim men on account of their trade, slaughter, or consumption of beef (Mukherjee, 2020). These horrific acts of lynching of Muslim men function as a bonding mechanism, a vehicle for imagined, nationalist and Hindu supremacist intimacy through the humiliation and even killing of Muslim men. For the vigilantes, the cruel and performative act of lynching is a mechanism through which Hindu RWEs, who always already perceive themselves and their masculinity to be facing existential threats, can work to recuperate and entrench their normative masculinities through the abjection of Muslim masculinities (Mukherjee, 2020).

Research Questions

Given the unrelenting and virulent abjection of and violence towards Muslim men both on- and off-line, in this paper, I investigate how masculine gender norms and ideologies and Islamophobia intersect through digital media and affective rhetoric to align Hindu supremacists against Muslim men who are perceived as the "common enemy". To do so, I examine the role of masculine gender norms and ideologies and Islamophobia in the construction and interaction of global Islamophobic RWEG rhetoric on Twitter. To this end, I ask the following questions: (a) How are Muslim masculinities abjected and demonized on Twitter accounts of Hindu RWEGs? (b) What kind of gendered, affective threats are Muslim masculinities perceived to pose to Hindu

supremacists? And lastly, (c) how does the gendered and sexual abjectification of Muslim masculinities serve Hindu supremacists to advance their masculinist, nationalist projects?

Methodology: Twitter's Love Affair with #LoveJihad

Data collected for this article come from Twitter and are part of a broader research effort which examines the social media uses of right-wing extremist movements in Canada, the US, and India. I focus on Twitter for many reasons. In my research, I have identified how the very architecture of Twitter itself produces a form of "digital governmentality" (Badouard, Mabi, & Sire, 2016) that lends itself well to the swift spread and far reach of digital Islamophobia and the creation of digital echo chambers. These affordances are easily exploited by RWEGs to promote the spread of anti-Muslim hate and offer few ways to combat or resist anti-Muslim rhetoric. These structural affordances include elements such as: hashtags, limited characters, and retweets, to name only a few.

For the purposes of this paper, it is sufficient to note that these structural affordances play a crucial role in reproducing and disseminating negative images of Muslim masculinities and the attendant violence they contribute to. Weaponizing the baked-in architectural design and mechanisms of Twitter, Hindu RWEGs not only produce and amplify anti-Muslim rhetoric, but also speak directly to audiences who sympathize with their causes. Using affective language and Islamophobic memes—including the sharing of recorded lynching of Muslim "cow killers"—RWEGs create a participatory space on Twitter in which users are encouraged to actively engage with their rhetoric, to disseminate and amplify RWE discourse, and even to transgress the norms of political correctness and, ultimately, the basic rights of Muslim civilians by killing them outright. In this way, RWEGs, with the support of their audiences, foster a community where "dark participation" (Quandt, 2018), such as the dissemination of misinformation and hate speech, is encouraged and audiences are motivated to repeat the tropes that depict Muslim masculinities as a direct threat to Hindu men (and their women). By exploiting the affordances of Twitter, RWEGs establish a dialogic relationship with those who share their values through the "affective" labour that their audiences and RWEGs engage in.

Thus, for data collection, I identified two RWEGs that most actively produced and circulated Islamophobic content: ShakhNadd and Hindu Janajagruti Samiti. To automatically capture and extract data, I utilized Crimson Hexagon (CH), also known as Brandwatch. I then conducted a content analysis of the tweets to categorize the themes of the messages included. After manually thematizing the data, I used Critical Discourse Analysis to evaluate how the discursive rhetoric of tweets is weaponized to invoke particular emotions through the targeting of Muslims. All tweets, retweets, and related online posts are quoted verbatim.

In this paper, I draw specifically upon the case of "Love Jihad" from my data collection to illustrate how abjected Muslim masculinities (as treacherous, violent, voyeuristic, etc.) are emotionally evoked to characterize Muslim men as boogeymen, savages, and monsters whose sexual desires are animalistic and who thus should be feared. "Love Jihad", a campaign instigated by RWE Hindu nationalists in 2009 alleges that Muslim men seduce and feign falling in love with non-Muslim women in order to then marry them and convert them to Islam (Gökarıksel, Neubert, & Smith, 2019). The proponents of this conspiracy assert that innocent Hindu women are converted to Islam precisely in order to increase the Muslim population, thereby waging a jihad (that is, a holy war) against Hindus (Gökarıksel et al., 2019).

This paper is composed of three main parts. In Part 1, I begin by explaining specific case studies of how Muslim men are viewed as sexual monsters in Hindu nationalist and RWE discourse. In Part 2, I explain how RWEGs in India use Twitter to perpetuate the stereotypes of Muslim men as dangerous terrorists and villains. Finally, in Part 3, I discuss how these gendered and sexual abjectifications of Muslim men and masculinities occur through the weaponized use of Twitter accounts and affective strategies of Hindu supremacist groups to authorize violence against Muslim men. In combination, these various examples underline how the use of gender politics and extremist representations of Muslim masculinities is crucial for Hindu RWEGs' anti-Muslim projects: that is, the exploitation through Twitter of gendered Islamophobia.

Part 1: Muslim Men as Sexual Monsters: Weaponizing Love Jihad and the Vulnerability of Hindu Women

Since 9/11 and the so-called "War on Terror", the myth of dangerous, hypersexualized Muslim men has ever more widely circulated, resulting in state-based legitimization of racist narratives against Muslims (Bhattacharyya, 2009). Although the idea of threatening racialized others has always been a central feature in the (his)stories of Indian nationalism (indeed, nationalist project everywhere), such representations associated with Muslim men possess unique qualities in comparison to other racialized groups and even Muslim women. For instance, Muslimness and its associated sexual threats are most often situated in the bodies of Muslim men in Hindu nationalist discourses. Through the Twitter accounts of Hindu RWEGs, Muslim men are framed as the embodiment of hypersexual others, and RWEGs in India envision themselves as embattled against the "masculinizing force" of Muslim men. Imbued with phallic and other libidinal imagery of Muslim men as hypersexual threats, Hindu RWEG rhetoric emphasizes how their own threatened masculinities are endangered by Muslim men and must be abjected and thus suppressed. While perhaps not in the minds of average citizens or sympathizers to extremist discourse, this abjection of Muslim men also works to maintain the masculine dominance of RWEGs. In what follows, I provide detailed examples of such discursive arguments against Muslim men in India which frame Muslim men as rapist demons and Hindu RWE men as the "saviours" of Hindu women in order to evidence how these forms of gendered abjection of Muslim men promote a sense of collective, allied endeavour between Indian RWEGs and the Hindu populace at large.

Beware the Demon of Love Jihad!

The demonization and vilification of Muslim men's sexuality lies at the dark heart of the Hindu nationalist movement in which the depiction of Muslim men's sexuality as a despicable and dangerous element of the Muslim other establishes the fundamental possibility of upholding Hindu masculinities; that is, the subordination and abjection of Muslim men enables the construction and maintenance of Hindu masculine exaltation. For Hindu RWEGs, the bodies of Muslim men function as warning signs of dangerous sexual perpetrators that threaten both Hindu men and women. As characterized in Figure 1, in the case of the "Love Jihad" conspiracy movement, Hindu women are warned against dangerous, rabid, sexually aggressive Muslim men who will attempt to lure them in with an invitation to a movie or an ice-cream date, pretending to fall in love with them only as a ruse to seduce and trap "vulnerable" Hindu women.

These sorts of images portray Muslim men as deceitful and sexual monsters who only see "Hindu women as objects to fulfil their lust" (see the following tweets). To combat these "monsters", precautionary measures are demanded in order to "save lives", to preserve Hindu "cultural heritage" and the "valuable treasure of

Hindu girls", and to make certain that Hindu women will "not fall prey to this demon of Love Jihad". Exemplary posts of such narratives include:

O Hindu girls, remember that Jihadis consider Hindu women as objects to fulfil their lust #LoveJihad #5thHinduAdhiveshan (@HinduJagrutiOrg, 2016)[4]

'Love Jihad' is a war declared by Jihadis against Hindus and Christians through the medium of deceptive love. Today it has become need of the hour for Hindus to take proper precautions so that Hindu women should not fall prey to this demon of Love Jihad. #LoveJihadIsAReality (@HinduJagrutiOrg, 2020)[5]

In these tweets, while negative tropes such as "lust" and "demon" portray Muslim men as "sexual predators", vocabulary such as "object", "victim", "lured", "save", and "protect" characterize Hindu women as docile victims who are susceptible to exploitation by supposedly sexually aggressive Muslim men. These tweets narrativize and construct Muslim men as lecherous, insatiably rapacious, and sexually avaricious. Such narratives aim to construct the masculinities of Muslim men as unacceptable and uncontrolled, while projecting Hindu masculinities as acceptable, under control, and necessary in order to protect Hindu women. Equally, these depictions vilify Muslim men, portraying them as untrustworthy and malicious, while projecting Hindu men as moral and virtuous.

Furthermore, posts such as "LoveJihad… save our cultural heritage by preserving the valuable treasure of Hindu girls" (see Figure 1) insinuate another line of important Islamophobic and highly gendered RWE rhetoric that Hindu women (not Muslim women) are the true symbols of the Indian nation whose role is to embody Hindu values and transmit Hindu culture to the next generation[6]. As such, female Hindu bodies are perceived as safeguarding group continuity and, therefore, must be "saved" from Muslim perpetrators. Such narratives also perpetuate the idea that women are perceived as weak, vulnerable, and naive individuals who do not have the agency or wisdom to make informed decisions regarding their own lives, let alone their sexuality (Tiwari, 2020). By harnessing and exploiting these perceived gender differences, Hindu women are infantilized while their male "saviours" are moralized and held up as heroically resisting the Muslim threat of "Love Jihad" (Tiwari, 2020). Thus, Hindu women's vulnerable bodies become representative and determinations of Hindu masculinities at risk and Muslim masculinities as abject and threatening. To Hindu supremacists, interfaith relationships threaten the borders between Hindu and Muslim worlds that must not be crossed, at the same time justifying the control of Hindu women's sexuality by Hindu men. Thinking with Kristeva and Butler, this "ceaseless" abjectification of Muslim masculinities works to establish the very boundary between and allege normalcy or rightness of Hindu masculinities over their Muslim counterparts. Unfortunately, these affectively charged rhetorical strategies online have violent consequences for Muslim communities offline.

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[4] @HinduJagrutiOrg, Twitter Post, June 24, 2016, 2:46 AM, https://twitter.com/HinduJagrutiOrg/status/746233106445668353.

[5] @HinduJagrutiOrg, Twitter Post, January 17, 2020, 10:04 PM, https://twitter.com/HinduJagrutiOrg/status/1218368462617 116674.

[6] The image of veiled Muslim women, for instance, cannot be used to symbolize these nations, as their bodies do not accord with the image of Hindu nations; that is, presumably secular. For instance, see Melissa Brittain, "Benevolent invaders, heroic victims and depraved villains: White femininity in media coverage of the invasion of Iraq". In *(En)Gendering the War on Terror: War Stories and Camouflaged Politics*, ed. Krista Hunt and Kim Rygiel (Routledge, 2016). Also see: Claire Sjolander and Kathryn Trevenen, "One of the boys? Gender disorder in times of crisis". *International Feminist Journal of Politics, 12*(2) (2010).

Figure 1. "Hi, I am Munna!" Source: @HinduJagrutiOrg, January 24, 2019.

The Violent Heartache of #LoveJihad

Due in part to Hindu RWEs' emotionally charged and weaponized discourse online, the creation of a fear-mongering moral panic around Muslim perpetrators has contributed to the establishment of "anti-conversion" laws that criminalize religious conversion by marriage. Such laws were recently enacted in several Indian states (e.g., Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Madhya Pradesh) to tackle the "Love Jihad" conspiracy. Under this legislation, anyone found guilty of using marriage as a pretext to convert their partner's religion can be imprisoned for up to 10 years. For instance, in December 2020, a 17-year-old Muslim boy from Uttar Pradesh was arrested under the state's new anti-conversion law. While returning from a birthday party, the boy and his Dalit[7] girlfriend were beaten with sticks by a group of right-wing Hindu men and were forcibly taken to the local police station. The father of the 16-year-old Dalit girl accused the Muslim teenager of attempting to "induc[e] his daughter to elope with him" with the "intention to marry and convert her" to Islam (Apoorvanand, 2021). The Muslim teenager was booked under the newly passed anti-conversion law as well as

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[7] Dalit refers to people who possess the lowest social status (caste) in the traditional Hindu social structure. Dalit are an oppressed community in India who are deemed "untouchable".

on charges of abduction. Equally repugnant, he was also charged under sections of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (Apoorvanand, 2021). In another case, the police in the state of Uttar Pradesh violently attacked an interfaith marriage ceremony between a Muslim man, Mohammad Asif, and a Hindu woman, Raina Gupta (Kuchay, 2020). Despite the fact that both families supported the union, the police stopped the wedding, declaring that the families must seek the permission of officials as part of the new anti-conversion law (Apoorvanand, 2021). As is evident in both cases, by allowing the so-called "Love Jihad" laws to remain in force, these states justify and legalise invasion into the intimate domains of people's lives. Furthermore, these new laws permit and encourage Hindu vigilante groups to exploit the support of state authorities to police and harass couples who are suspected of taking part in the "Love Jihad" conspiracy (Tiwari, 2020).

In this way, we can see how the weaponization and affective strategies of virulent online discourses all too successfully propagandize Muslim men as the sexual "demons" of "Love Jihad" and thus produce very real and often very violent and life-destroying effects. Consequently, the far-right Hindu government and right-wing Hindu vigilante groups have actively and successfully weaponized online conspiracy theories with anti-conversion laws in order to demonize and disenfranchise Muslims in India and to maintain Hindu privileges and dominance. By projecting the idea that Hindu women are at risk, Hindu vigilante groups convey the message that Hindu women can only be "safe" if the source of their threat is being beaten and imprisoned (in some cases even killed). In so doing, Hindu supremacists seek to re-establish their dominant patriarchal, hegemonic masculine status by abjecting Muslim masculinity as covetous, hypersexual, and as a force intent on stealing Hindu women and even girls. Thus, under the emotionally frenzied pretext of protecting Hindu women and girls from Muslim men, the preservation of Hindu masculine supremacy is secured through Muslim men's relentless abjection. By invoking demographic fears and emotional anxieties, this campaign abjects and demonizes Muslim men and works to advance the patriarchal idea of "saving" Hindu women and girls from an imagined Muslim menace. The case study of "Love Jihad" showcases clearly how gendered Islamophobia and masculine emotionality have, through the far reach of digital media such as Twitter, come to produce new and highly effective rhetorical and affective means by which Hindu RWEGs can amplify their anti-Muslim sentiments and influence the real-life gendered and sexual abjection of Muslim men.

Part 2: Muslim Men as Dangerous Terrorists and Villains:
Hate the Muslim, Love the Nation

While the specific terminology of "Muslim men" is not always to be found directly within RWEGs' discursive terminology, the heavy and consistent use of "criminal", "terrorists", and "dangerous" commonly are. Terrorism emblematizes RWEGs' attempts to (re)articulate normative and superior "Hinduness", interpreted simultaneously along the lines of gender and sexuality. Just as Western and Indian mainstream media constantly associate reports of terrorism and violence with Muslims, especially Muslim men (Said, 1981; Poole, 2002), Hindu RWEGs consistently associate Muslim men with terror and violence in their Twitter accounts.

For example, in Hindu supremacist tweets, Muslim men are characterized as specific kinds of criminals: "Jihadi Muslims" who "can murder any Hindu at any point of time over the most trivial matters or for any Jihadi cause" (Hindu Janajagruti Samiti, 2016). Such posts not only solidify the "victimized" image of Hindus, but also function to convey the message that Muslim men are "dangerous" monsters and therefore should be feared. The reality, however, is that Muslims are more likely to be the victims of hate crime and violence than

Hindus in Indian (Kuchay, 2019; Al Jazeera, 2019). Nevertheless, as I explain below, defining Muslim men as inherently monstrous establishes them as abjected bodies and constructs the very essence of normative Hindu masculinities, if not idealized ones. In what follows, I discuss and analyze the rhetoric of Indian RWEGs in which Muslim men are projected as dangerous terrorists.

Exploiting emotional, discursive, and visual techniques, Hindu RWEGs regularly frame Muslim men as terrorists, criminals, and violent threats to the Hindu nation on their Twitter accounts. Under a tweet that reads "Jihadis murder Hindu youth in Bengal as he denied to give Muharram donation"[8] (see Figure 2), a photo features two Muslim men, both wearing Islamic skull caps and green clothes (a color that is associated with Islam). The men are depicted attacking Hindus with a sword (a symbol of barbarism that is associated with Muslims) and bombs (a symbol of terrorism that is again, all-too often associated with Muslims). The article linked to this tweet declares that a Hindu man by the name of Indrajit Dutta was "a victim of Islamic hooligans" because he allegedly "refused to give a donation… for local Muharram celebration" (i.e., an Islamic festival) (Hindu Janajagruti Samiti, 2016). Quoting the uncle of Dutta, the report states that Dutta and his family, like many other Hindu families, fled from their village as "Hindus got minority there and Muslim neighbours used to torture them on regular basis". The report asserts that the death of Dutta is evidence to the fact that Muslims are becoming the majority in Bengal, and that their "supremacy" has reached to the extent that now Muslims can kill any Hindu at any time for any "trifling matter or for any Jihadi cause". The article goes on to claim that if a Muslim is murdered, it becomes the headline of national news but "the same Media Presstitutes [i.e., Prostitutes], Political Scoundrels, Awardwapsi[9] Bastards and Human Rights Pimps are now totally silent on Indrajit Dutta... who killed in Bengal by murderous Muslims for only one cause". According to this article, the media's inattention to these cases is because the victims are Hindus and thus the media refuses to acknowledge the increasing "supremacy" of "Jihadi Muslims".

Figure 2. "Jihadis murder Hindu youth in Bengal." Source: @HinduJagrutiOrg, November 3, 2016[10].

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[8] https://t.co/SRWF1rk2UA; https://t.co/3RXkKqaFFM.

[9] A group of progressive writers and poets who, in 2015, returned their government conferred awards in protest to the rising communal violence in India following the election of Modi as Prime Minister. This group is derogatively called the "Award Wapsi gang" (Award returning gang) within the right-wing media.

[10] @HinduJagrutiOrg, Twitter Post, November 3, 2016, 1:52 AM, https://twitter.com/hindujagrutiorg/status/7940546494 60322304.

This image exemplifies the popular construction of Islam as a "religion of violence". Such negative affective, discursive, and visualized techniques circulated on Twitter evoke fear of Muslim men and have increased communal violence in Bengal over the last few years (Bagchi, 2021). The frequent posting of such narratives and graphics of Muslim men as vicious threats encourage strong negative emotions like hate and fear directed towards them. These emotional or affective forms of Islamophobic digital rhetoric should not be discounted.

Following the work of Sara Ahmed (2004), it is crucial to understand how emotions develop through cultural and social practices which demand both collective and individual bodies. However, when certain bodies are perceived as a cause of injury to the national body (i.e., Muslims), such individuals become excluded from the national imaginary, and such bodies become scapegoated for any social, political, and/or economic problems, further producing emotionally charged abjectification (Ahmed, 2004). In the above tweets, Muslim men fit the role of such scapegoats for Hindu supremacists and generate not only fear, but intense emotions of hate. Importantly, hate, according to Ahmed (2004), is linked to love (i.e., love for the nation). Love of one's nation is, of course, a key component for encouraging large-scale nationalism, particularly extreme nationalism in the case of Hindu supremacy advocated by RWEGs. Thus, this can be understood as a rhetorical strategy of Hindu national and diasporic affective alignment sought by RWEGs in India which seeks to abject Muslims, increases national love for India, and expands communal identification between Hindus around the world. For Hindu RWEGs, the construction of Muslim men as a hated group is justified by Hindus love for India and communal identification. In this way, Muslim men must be hated as their dangerous proximity can endanger or even injure the object of love (i.e., the nation), but more importantly they can also take the place of Hindus within India. Such narratives involve re-writing the history of India in favour of Hindu subjects who are perceived to be the most legitimate citizens. By projecting Hindus as the (only) rightful citizens, their love for the nation and their hate for the Muslim other, whose proximity is perceived to threaten both the history and the future of the nation, is justified.

Part 3: Discussion & Conclusion: Fear and Disgust, Hatred and Love: A Recipe for Global Islamophobia

The above examples demonstrate how the gendered and sexual abjectification of Muslim men and masculinities represents a focal point for RWEGs' Islamophobic thinking, politics, and social media discursive practices. Hindu RWEGs abject Muslim masculinities because they are perceived as hypersexual threats and violent terrorists. These caricatures of Muslim masculinities not only seek to affirm the hegemonic masculine ideal as non-Muslim (e.g., Hindus are purported to be the most moral) but also construct a symbolic opposition to the masculine other: the archetypal villain, hyper-masculine, and sexually ravenous Muslim man. Through the abjectification of Muslim masculinities, RWEGs attempt to (re)claim and (re)establish the superiority of Hindu masculinities and their authority as "real" men, rejecting the alleged hyper-sexual and hyper-visible identity of Muslims. The easily and swiftly spread and repeated representations of Muslim others as dangerous via Twitter thus assist Islamophobic RWEGs to espouse fear, disgust, and hatred towards Muslim others while championing Hindu masculinities and love of the (Hindu) nation. The abjectification of Muslims also powerfully functions to bring together Hindu supremacists against their "common enemy" in a mode of national and even diasporic affective alignment. Most importantly, this national and diasporic abjectification of Muslim masculinities authorizes a great number of different forms of extreme violence against them.

Because the online sphere easily crosses borders, the myths of sexual and violent threats about Muslim men in India have serious consequences for Muslim men across the world—both in and outside of Indian diasporas. The proliferation of these myths via social media ensures that Muslim men increasingly become targets of harassment and violence, whether by vigilantes or government officials. In India, there has been a recent surge in the lynching and killing of minorities, the majority of these being Muslims, who are accused of eating, slaughtering, or trading beef which is illegal in many Indian states because cows are sacred to Hindus (Al Jazeera, 2019). Under the pretext of protecting cows, cow vigilantes, the majority of whom are upper-caste Hindu men, aim to police the behaviours of Muslims and Dalits (Ahuja, 2019). While cow vigilantes' main motivation is to establish and reinforce the superior religious-cultural identity of Hinduism and to demonize and demoralise Muslims (and Dalits), given that India is one of the largest exporters of beef and the fifth largest consumer of beef in the world, they are, paradoxically and rather ironically, also concerned with the protection of India's beef industry (Ahuja, 2019). In combination, these economic ramifications, along with their religious significance and rampant Islamophobia, have resulted in positioning the "sacred" animal as a rallying point against Muslim communities. Between May 2015 and December 2018 alone, under the name of protecting cows, Hindu nationalist vigilantes killed at least 44 people—36 of them Muslims—and injured an estimated 280 people (Marlow, 2019). The effects of digital RWE discourse cannot be discounted from these horrific actions.

While similar anti-Muslim sentiments are mundanely circulated and consumed across the globe (e.g., through mainstream media, pamphlets, etc.), the architecture of Twitter facilitates an immense intensification of the redistribution, dissemination, and reinforcement of uninformed opinions and hateful tweets regarding Muslims, and this weaponized use of Twitter exposes such content to much broader audiences. In this way, Twitter as a platform does not just limit itself as a site on the periphery or as a set of discourses that operate in India alone. Rather, the exploitation of Twitter by RWEGs plays a significant and direct role in establishing the central image of Muslim masculinity as a negative nexus of problematic sexuality, aggressive and latent violence, and criminality in public discourse. By making available the ability to constantly tweet about the threat of Muslim masculinities, Twitter serves Hindu supremacist RWEGs to sustain and advance their racial and gendered privileges and to establish the abjectification of Muslim masculinities and, ultimately, to authorize violence against them both in and outside of India.

In addition, the gendered and sexual abjectification of Muslim masculinities through the weaponization of Twitter serves Hindu supremacists to form a sense of solidarity and cohesion and present themselves "as the injured party; the one that is 'hurt' or damaged by the 'invasion' of others" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 43). This collective solidarity and cohesion is particularly evident through the creation of shared intimacy provided by public lynching and the distribution of recordings of such violent crimes. By collectively producing, sharing, and directing their hate of and violence towards Muslim others through mechanisms of digital Islamophobia, RWEGs in India and across Indian diasporas construct ever more resilient and aggressive forms of national and diasporic affective alignment through tropes of Islamophobic fear, disgust, and hate, and, as I have argued, even nationalist love.

As my research demonstrates, gendered Islamophobia is essential to the fostering of such alignments. The two tropes of Muslim men as sexual predators and terrorist killers provide a compelling basis for alignments between those living in India and those living aboard who share beliefs in Hindu supremacy and a Hindu nation. This is especially evident in how such tropes align Hindu men as the injured parties but also as

representatives of a pure race and the saviours of Hindu women the world over. The affordances of Twitter, weaponized through anti-Muslim abjectification and rhetorics of affective accumulation against Muslim men become the necessary ingredients in the manifestation of such alignments. This paper thus contributes importantly to the feminist analysis of digital Islamophobia by drawing attention to the masculine element, as it were, of the two-sided coin of gendered Islamophobia. Anti-Muslim sentiments produced through such negative and affectively charged representations of Muslim masculinities via digital Islamophobia provide the foundation for the establishment of national and diasporic affective alignments (Farokhi, 2022). Ultimately, through the weaving together of these affective accumulations, abjectifications, and alignments, and Twitter's architectural affordances, Islamophobic echo chambers in which anti-Muslim sentiments are announced and alleged, discussed, debated, and violently incited become all too common. Given the unrelenting spread of violent rhetoric and calls for violent action advocated by Hindu RWEGs online—and the connected, if not directly causal relationship of such rhetoric to the increasing violence enacted upon Muslims—in and outside of India and across all diasporas, we must look in the mirror and ask ourselves: Who are the real monsters?

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