

LOVE JIHAD CONSPIRACY THEORY

IMPACT: Love Jihad is a widely debunked conspiracy theory promoted by Hindu nationalists in India to incite fear, animosity, and violence against the country's 200 million Muslims. The theory claims that Muslim men are luring Hindu women into marriages to forcibly convert them to Islam. This conspiracy theory has been heavily promoted by Hindu far-right groups, right-wing media, and the leaders of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). As a result of this conspiracy theory, Muslim men have been imprisoned, faced violent attacks, and killed.

- The term **"love jihad"** began gaining prominence in the late 2000s and early 2010s, particularly in the Indian states of Kerala and Karnataka. According to [Outlook Magazine](#), the term was first used by members of **Hindu Janagaruti Samiti (HJS)**, a militant Hindu nationalist group, in 2007 while policing interfaith couples in public spaces. In 2009, during a court case in Kerala involving two non-Muslim girls who had eloped with their Muslim boyfriends, the term surfaced again. Initially expressing their desire to remain with their partners, the girls later changed their statements during subsequent hearings, stating they wished to return to their parents.
- While hearing bail petitions for two Muslim youths involved, the presiding judge ordered a police investigation into what was **termed** the **"Romeo Jihad/Love Jihad movement."** This marked the first legal mention of the term. A subsequent police inquiry found no evidence supporting the existence of such a movement.
- According to the Indian news website [Scroll.in](#), Kerala's Catholic Church has also played a prominent role in amplifying the term "love jihad." **In 2009, the "Kerala Catholic Bishops Council claimed that up to 4,500 women" had been "conned into converting."**
- In 2009, in Karnataka state, the High Court [directed the police to investigate](#) allegations of "love jihad" related to an interfaith marriage case. Following a [thorough investigation](#), the police concluded that "there seems to be no prima facie evidence of 'love jihad'"
- In 2017, the concept of **"love jihad" garnered significant attention across India due to the marriage of a Hindu homeopathy student in Kerala, Akhila Asokan, who had adopted the name Hadiya after converting to Islam** and subsequently marrying a Muslim man named Shafin Jahan. **Hadiya's father KM Asokan contested the marriage before the Kerala High Court, alleging that she was coerced into converting to Islam.** The court invalidated the marriage, placing Hadiya under her parents' custody. Shafin Jahan challenged this ruling in the Supreme Court of India.
- In March 2018, the [Supreme Court ruled in Hadiya's favor](#), affirming her right to choose her religion and spouse. During the legal proceedings, the Supreme Court also [directed](#) the National Investigation Agency, India's premier counter-terrorism law enforcement agency, to probe the alleged "love jihad" aspect of the case. **In October 2018, the NIA investigation concluded that there was no coordinated conspiracy to convert girls of other faiths to Islam.**
- In recent years, **Hindu far-right groups and senior BJP leaders have heavily promoted and weaponized "love jihad" to promote fear and hate against Muslims. Several states, predominantly those governed by the BJP, have implemented anti-conversion laws aimed at curtailing 'love jihad.'** According to the Indian news outlet [The Wire](#), as of January 2023, a total of **11 out of 28 Indian states, including Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Madhya Pradesh, have enacted such laws.** These laws could render interfaith marriages, allegedly entered into for the sole purpose of conversion, [null and void](#), carrying penalties of up to 5-10 years in prison.
- In February 2020, Union Minister of State for Home G Kishan Reddy, while [speaking](#) in the Indian parliament, said that "no such case of 'Love Jihad' has been reported by any of the central agencies."

- Independent journalist **Shweta Desai**, in her article for the *New Lines Magazine*, wrote that these laws bear a “striking resemblance to the 1935 rules forbidding marriages between Jews and German citizens.”
- A January 2022 piece for the *Guardian* noted that in the state of Uttar Pradesh alone, between November 2020 and August 2021, the police arrested 208 individuals under the new anti-conversion law, all of whom were Muslims.
- The **conspiracy theory has resulted in discrimination and violence against Muslim men involved in interfaith relationships.** In May 2017, a Muslim man was murdered by the members of the far-right group Hindu Yuva Vahini over allegations that he had helped a relative elope with a Hindu girl. In September 2021, 24-year-old Arbaz Mullah was killed, and his body dismembered by the member far-right group Hindu Shri Ram Sena Hindustan for having an affair with a Hindu woman.
- Far-right groups have also used cinema to normalize “love jihad.” **In May 2023, a Hindu nationalist filmmaker Sudipto Sen, released an Islamophobic movie, The Kerala Story, which propagated unfounded claims that Hindu and Christian women were entrapped by Muslims to join Islamic State (IS).** The film's trailer sensationalized the issue, claiming to depict the “heart-breaking and gut-wrenching stories of 32,000 females” allegedly converted to Islam and forced into joining IS. AltNews, an Indian fact-checking website, debunked this claim by citing various reports, including one from the United States Department of State, which stated that as of November 2020, there were 66 known Indian-origin fighters affiliated with IS. The matter was brought before the Kerala High Court, prompting the filmmaker to take down the trailer and amend the exaggerated figure to “three.”
- Despite its Islamophobic content, the film received substantial promotion from the BJP, including Prime Minister Modi, and obtained tax waivers in multiple states. The film has also resulted in sectarian violence, according to TIME.
- **According to India Hate Lab, a Washington DC-based group that documents hate speech, out of 668 documented hate speech events in 2023, 420 (63%) of the events included references to various conspiracy theories, primarily love jihad.** A poll conducted by the news channel India Today found that **54% of respondents believed in the “love jihad” conspiracy theory, while only 36% disagreed with this notion.**
- In November 2023, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, at an election rally in Chhattisgarh state’s Bemetara district, claimed that the region had become a center of “love jihad.”
- **Senior BJP leader and Chief Minister of Uttarakhand state Pushkar Singh Dhami has consistently promoted the “love jihad” theory.** In an interview with the news channel India TV, Dhami stated, “Incidents like Love Jihad are very bad. Such incidents are not at all acceptable in Uttarakhand. There is no place for Love Jihad in Devbhoomi. Our Devbhoomi must remain sacred.” **He has also directed the state police to crack down against Muslims, alleging a surge in “love jihad” cases.**
- Additionally, **BJP leaders like T Raja Singh, a legislator from Telangana state, have openly called for violence and the killing of individuals involved in “love jihad.”** In February 2023, while speaking at an event in Latur, Maharashtra, he said, “No love jihadi should remain alive on the soil of Maharashtra.” At another event in Solapur, Maharashtra, Singh issued a veiled threat, warning that if the government doesn’t pass laws on love jihad, then “Hindus will take law into their own hands and use swords.”
- Some Hindu far-right diasporic groups in the United States have also promoted the ‘love jihad’ theory. Global Hindu Heritage Foundation (GHHF), a Frisco, Texas-based group that publishes discriminatory and inflammatory content about Islam and Christianity, wrote in July 2023 that “Muslim youth are groomed to act like Hindu, dress like Hindu, look like Hindu, adopt Hindu name and spend liberally to attract the Hindu Girls. Lot of money is pledged to the Muslim youth to trap and marry and convert to Islam.” GHHF has also published literature to promote “love jihad” and distributed it among Hindus in India’s Assam state.

This factsheet was produced in collaboration with Raqib Hameed Naik, the founder of [India Hate Lab](#).

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