

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières > English > Asia > India > Caste, Dalits & Adivasis (India) > Dalits & Other Backward Castes (OBC) (India) > **India: 'Idea of 'love jihad' is not simply about the Hindu-Muslim divide. (...)**

# **India: 'Idea of 'love jihad' is not simply about the Hindu-Muslim divide. It's intrinsically tied to the caste system'**

Thursday 28 January 2021, by [RAI Indrajeet](#), [VAIDIK Aparna](#) (Date first published: 24 December 2020).

**Historian Aparna Vaidik, associate professor at Ashoka University, has researched the evolution of the idea of 'love jihad'. She shares her views with Indrajeet Rai:**

## **Has the 'love jihad' discourse moved to the mainstream?**

The current discourse is at the core of Hindu identity as it was forged from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. It was always mainstream, manifesting in the form of social attitudes and rules of social engagement. Its becoming a state law now is making us think of it as a novelty and it having moved from fringe to mainstream.

The idea of 'love jihad' is not simply about the Hindu-Muslim divide but is intrinsically tied to Indian caste system with its roots in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when some Muslim and Christian organisations were able to convert several lower castes such as sweepers, Chandals, Chamars, Doms, and Lai Begis in various towns of Uttar Pradesh. The publicists of the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha lamented these conversions as they felt the Hindu 'numbers were declining' and launched a massive campaign against conversion to Islam (and Christianity). At the heart of the 'love jihad' is the upper-caste Hindu man's fear of the lustful Dalit or Muslim man who is supposedly after the Hindu woman. It is the sexual potency of the Dalit/ Muslim man that is feared, one that makes the Hindu man feel insecure and inadequate. In this discourse, it is the Hindu man who is the victim. The lusty Muslim did not stop at stealing their women but also attacked the cows and the lower castes and untouchables by means of conversion. Thus the Hindu fear of losing their women (love jihad), their cows (gauraksha) and their numerical strength to the conversion of the lower castes to Islam (ghar wapati) were all tied to the Muslim/ Dalit man.

## **How did the myth of non-violent society come into being?**

This myth comes, first, from the invisibilisation of caste violence over centuries by the composers of Hindu religious texts. Even most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century reformers and thinkers, such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Vivekananda, presented the caste system as a reflection of India's tolerance. Second, it is the result of the centrality of the Gandhian nationalist movement in historical writing along with the valorisation of some other facets of India's history such as the conversion of the ancient Emperor Ashoka Maurya to Buddhism and his adoption of non-violence as a state policy in 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, the peaceable Bhakti and Sufi movement, and the existence of composite culture, the Ganga-Jamuna tehzeeb. Violence, if at all, is spoken about as an episodic phenomenon such as wars and riots. Seeing violence in this manner pathologises it as an aberration or turns it into an exception in need of an explanation. On the other hand, it reinforces the presumption that Indian society is fundamentally peaceful, non-violent and tolerant. Even the liberal public intellectuals

always present India as a land of tolerance. But in doing so they simply feed the idea that violence is not something Hindus intrinsically indulge in.

### **Did the myth of a non-violent society help create a sense of majority victimhood?**

The non-violence myth provided the necessary camouflage for majoritarian violence. First, it helped deny the existence of caste violence and, second, it projected violence outwards on to other communities. The belief was that it was the Muslims, the foreigners who came to India from outside, who were the ones who indulged in violence. It was the Hindu who was the victim of others' violence.

### **Will an open discussion about India's violent past help or worsen things?**

Not talking about violence is a way of maintaining the faultlines and ensuring the status quo. This violence has historically maintained caste and gender privilege and therefore is not allowed to be spoken about. The first social reformer to raise questions about inherent violence of Indian society was Jyotiba Phule. He was lifting the iron weight of several generations of tradition that forbade questioning. Phule was the one to lay the foundations of an alternate discourse that led to the rise of leaders such as Iyothee Thass, Maraimalai Adigal, Periyar, and Ambedkar in the 1930s and 1940s, who took the cause of the 'depressed classes' or Dalits up to a wider regional and national level. Why was it that notwithstanding the substantial gains of lower caste assertion, it was the non-violence myth that eventually prevailed? Why did the non-Sanskrit and the non-Aryan tradition come to be seen as the 'low tradition' and thereby lose visibility in the 'mainstream' public sphere? What happened to Phule's writings? Did we read Phule, Ambedkar or Periyar in school and college education? How is it that Gandhi's Hind Swaraj is taught but Ambedkar's Annihilation of Caste is rejected as mere polemics? A conversation about India's violent inheritance is overdue.

---

**Aparna Vaidik**  
**Indrajeet Rai**

*[Click here](#) to subscribe to ESSF newsletters in English and or French. You will receive one email every Monday containing links to all articles published in the last 7 days.*

---

**P.S.**

The Times of India

[https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/the-interviews-blog/idea-of-love-jihad-is-not-simply-about-t  
he-hindu-muslim-divide-its-intrinsically-tied-to-the-caste-system/](https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/the-interviews-blog/idea-of-love-jihad-is-not-simply-about-the-hindu-muslim-divide-its-intrinsically-tied-to-the-caste-system/)