**Between love and life**

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Subramanian Swamy, a hardline BJP leader and member of the Rajya Sabha, gave a shocking statement in an interview last year with an American media outlet. “(If) Muslims become more than 30 percent (of the population), that country is in danger”, Swamy told Isobel Yeung of VICE. All people, according to him, are not equal. Muslims “were not in an equal category”, he declared.

Since partition, Hindu nationalists have been plotting to make India an ethnically Hindu-only country. Their ideology, called Hindutva, views Hindus as the only legitimate inhabitants of this vast territory of land. The non-Hindus have no place here. The programme, often dubbed the ‘saffronisation of India’, is based on divesting minority communities of all rights and privileges which are solely reserved for Hindus.

Muslims, who constitute India’s largest minority group are frequent targets of hate and violence perpetrated by extremist Hindus. This communal hatred is not just constrained to street thugs. Instead, it is also echoed loudly by political leaders like Swamy.

[Johnson & Johnson applies for EU approval of its vaccine](https://nation.com.pk/17-Feb-2021/johnson-johnson-applies-for-eu-approval-of-its-vaccine)

The enmity against Muslims did not just arise from partition. It is in fact a much older relic of the past, dating back several centuries. Several hundred years of Muslim rule that witnessed the spread of Islam in the sub-continent and consolidation of Muslim power in the plains of Delhi continue to haunt radical Hindus to date. From the depths of the Arabian Sea to the heights of the Himalayan mountains, the Muslims ruled almost all over India that otherwise had a Hindu majority.

The Hindu nationalists have reviled this period of Muslim domination. After partition, groups such as the RSS concentrated their efforts in uprooting Muslims from Indian soil. The BJP acts as their political arm and mostly rubber-stamps decisions taken in Nagpur-the place where the RSS has its headquarters.

To achieve their ends, Hindu nationalists not only rely on coercive power but also on fabricated tales to malign Muslims. One of the popularised myths revolves around so-called “Love Jihad”.

[Security forces kill three terrorists in North Waziristan : ISPR](https://nation.com.pk/17-Feb-2021/security-forces-kill-three-terrorists-in-north-waziristan-by-security-forces-ispr)

Over the years, Hindu extremists have stoked fears of an apparent rise in the number of Indian Muslims resulting allegedly through marriages between Muslim men and Hindu women. These men are accused of luring innocent Hindu girls into love and conversion to Islam.

Several states in India have enacted laws to deal with so-called Love Jihad. Uttar Pradesh, for example, has passed a law declaring illegal marriages that are perceived to involve forced conversions. The person found guilty of trying to contract the marriage through forced conversion shall be liable to fine and imprisonment. While the law does not specify any particular religion, for many it is clearly aimed at the Muslims. The Supreme Court of India has also declined to stay these laws enacted in various states.

In several cases where Muslim men have been tortured by Hindu vigilante groups and arrested by police on allegations of so-called “Love Jihad” there is no evidence to back claims of any wrong-doing, seduction or luring by the accused. Nevertheless, even in cases where Muslim men and Hindu women have fallen in love and genuinely desired to get married, families of these women have been pressured to give statements against the men and to have them prosecuted.

[Biden vows 'repercussions' for China over rights abuses](https://nation.com.pk/17-Feb-2021/biden-vows-repercussions-for-china-over-rights-abuses)

Evidently, the BJP is also exploiting the age-old customs that do not encourage marriages outside caste or family. By exploiting these sentiments, India’s ruling party aims to draw widespread support in favour of its policies and use “Love Jihad” laws to harass, intimidate and persecute Muslims.

Even though some Congress Party members have denounced “Love Jihad” laws, the opposition party itself has an abominable track record when it comes to minority rights. The truth is that the BJP and Congress Party are in fact two sides of the same coin. Both these parties are committed to preserve Hindu domination in India.

Whereas the BJP is more brazen in its approach, the Congress Party pulls this off in a subtle manner under the façade of secularism. Which is why Muslims have suffered perpetual violations of their basic rights, notwithstanding who holds power in Delhi.

Love Jihad is part of the wider agenda enshrined in Hindutva. To cite Indian police itself, it is a “campaign with no substance”. Yet, it gives Hindu extremists enough ammunition to launch attacks on any Muslim man or family. It is a hideous means to overcome the historical sense of shame built over centuries of Muslim rule in India.

[Pakistan reports 1,165 new coronavirus cases in one day](https://nation.com.pk/17-Feb-2021/pakistan-reports-56-deaths-by-coronavirus-1-165-new-cases-in-one-day)

Despite criticism from human rights organisations that have denounced these laws as gross violation of personal freedoms, the BJP is unmoved and unwilling to relent. In such laws, it sees fulfilment of a long-cherished dream of freeing India of all nations except the Hindu. Yet, only time will tell whether this dream comes true or turns out to be India’s worst nightmare. By fanning communal hatred, the BJP is playing with fire-a fire that it has ignited but cannot necessarily control.

However, for the time being, the Indian Muslim man faces a stark choice between the instinct to live and the longing to love.