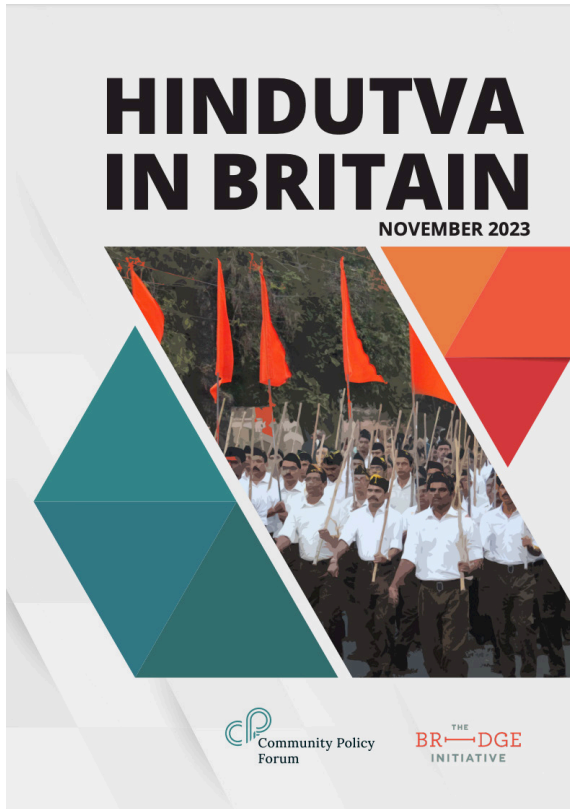


HINDUTVA IN BRITAIN

NOVEMBER 2023



Hindutva in Britain



The Community Policy Forum is an independent think-tank that seeks to promote evidence-based and community-centred approaches to policymaking surrounding the structural inequalities that face Muslim communities in the UK.

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The Bridge Initiative is a multi-year research project on Islamophobia housed in Georgetown University, Washington D.C. (United States). The Bridge Initiative aims to disseminate original and accessible research, offers engaging analysis and commentary on contemporary issues, and hosts a wide repository of educational resources to inform the general public about Islamophobia.

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Introduction

In August and September 2022, the English city of Leicester provided the backdrop for the convergence of international and local dynamics as unrest erupted between the city's Hindu and Muslim communities. The events that unfolded highlighted the existence of Hindu nationalism and Islamophobia in the United Kingdom, and how online voices (both locally and globally) used social media platforms to inflame tensions and spread mis/disinformation.

Hindu nationalism from India collided with a deeply entrenched Islamophobia¹ in one of the most diverse cities in Europe.² It was quickly apparent in the days that followed the violence in Leicester – as the local authority, police, and community tried to grapple with the events that had occurred – that many were not aware of the international politics that had likely factored into these events. Initial responses attributed the violence to a cricket match between India and Pakistan, with even the City's Mayor presenting this view.³ However, further investigations revealed underlying issues within the communities long before the cricket match. This unawareness and inexperience was compounded by the abundance of voices seeking to use this opportunity to amplify Islamophobia.⁴ British Muslims are already the targets of the highest proportion of religious hate crimes in the country⁵, and this response by some appeared to take advantage of that environment to shift the narrative away from dangers of Hindu nationalism.⁶ The impact of this has been heavy on a city like Leicester, as residents have expressed an atmosphere of distrust emerging amongst communities.⁷

The events in Leicester and the conversations around it introduced a relatively new term to local and national discourse: Hindutva. While this term may be new to many, as an ideology, it has been around for decades. Hindutva is distinct from Hinduism – it is an ethno-nationalist movement that seeks to establish Hindu hegemony in India and should not be confused simply with the religion of more than a billion people.

This report will examine the historical and contemporary context that has cultivated the complex landscape in which Hindu nationalist influences have materialised in the UK. It will discuss the history and background of Hindutva. It will then examine how British voices who have long played a role in spreading Islamophobia have aligned themselves with Hindu nationalist narratives, which often employ anti-Muslim tropes. This report will also profile several organisations that function within the UK and have expressed or supported Hindu nationalist sentiment, which serves as evidence against those who argue against the presence of Hindutva ideology in the country. Lastly, it will assess how the existence of

1. Naved Bakali and Farid Hafez, "Understanding Islamophobia across the Global North and South in the War on Terror," *Jadaliyya*, 14 September 2023, <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/45316>.

2. Robyn Vinter, "'Diversity Is a Beautiful Thing': The View from Leicester and Birmingham," *The Guardian*, 30 November 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/nov/29/leicester-birmingham-first-super-diverse-uk-cities-census>.

3. "Violent Unrest in Leicester Forces Local Authorities and Community Leaders into Emergency Meeting," *ITV News*, 7 September 2022, <https://www.itv.com/news/central/2022-09-07/violent-unrest-in-leicester-sparks-an-emergency-police-controls>.

4. Nafeez Ahmed, "Conservative MP Blaming 'Islamist Extremists' for Leicester Violence Funded by Organisations Tied to Hindutva Militants," *Byline Times*, 27 September 2022, <https://bylinetimes.com/2022/09/27/conservative-mp-blaming-islamist-extremists-for-leicester-violence-funded-by-organisations-tied-to-hindutva-militants/>.

5. "Hate Crime, England and Wales, 2022 to 2023," GOV.UK, 5 October 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2022-to-2023/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2022-to-2023>.

6. Charlotte Littlewood, "Hindu-Muslim Civil Unrest in Leicester: 'Hindutva' and the Creation of a False Narrative - Henry Jackson Society," (Henry Jackson Society, 4 November 2022), <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/publications/hindu-muslim-civil-unrest-in-leicester-hindutva-and-the-creation-of-a-false-narrative/>.

7. Megan Specia, "Leicester Tensions Have Roots in India," *The New York Times*, 2 October 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/02/world/europe/leicester-violence-uk.html>.

Hindutva is impacting the harmony and cohesion between South Asian communities in the UK, and in particular, in Leicester.

As highlighted by Dr. Fatima Rajina, a sociologist at De Montfort University in Leicester: *“You will not understand the events of Leicester if you do not pay attention to what’s been happening in India and how Hindutva has been playing out across the diaspora.”*⁸ A century-old ideology developed by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in 1922 is now shaping the politics of the world’s largest democracy, but also having a reverberating impact in countries like the UK and the United States. In the absence of any formal review of the Leicester unrest being completed as yet, this report will offer the opportunity to understand Hindu nationalism and its manifestations on the streets of Leicester.

8. Megan Specia, “Leicester Tensions Have Roots in India,” *The New York Times*, 2 October 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/02/world/europe/leicester-violence-uk.html>.

WHAT IS HINDUTVA?

**A brief history of the
movement and its
global presence**



What is Hindutva? A brief history of the movement and its global presence

Hindutva, or Hindu nationalism, is a modern political ideology that believes in the hegemony of Hinduism in India, and ties Hindu-ness to the identity of the nation as its followers seek to establish India as a Hindu-only nation.⁹ Today, Hindutva or Hindu nationalism is the official platform of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and his ruling right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Under Modi's government, Hindu nationalism has become assertive, militant, and increasingly violent. Countless reports have documented the drastic rise in hate speech¹⁰, open calls for violence¹¹ against minorities (primarily Indian Muslims), increasingly discriminatory legislation¹² rendering Muslims second-class citizens, and government actions such as the renaming of towns¹³, erasure of history in education¹⁴, and razing of mosques¹⁵ to reconstruct India into a Hindu-only nation.

It is important to stress that Hindutva is not Hinduism. Hindutva is a modern political ideology, used by individuals and groups to carve out an exclusive identity and justify discrimination and violence against minority communities. Hindu nationalists seek to create an ethno-religious state known as the Hindu Rashtra (Hindu nation), claiming that their Hindu-ness is integrally tied to the land they reside on (the secular nation-state of India).¹⁶ In stark contrast to this exclusionary viewpoint, Hinduism is a religion "characterised by an overlapping set of practices, cultural values, and norms", with the main purpose of human life being "to get closer to God so that one's soul can be released from a cycle of human suffering, death, and rebirth and achieve unity with the divine."¹⁷ It is one of the world's oldest religions, dating back over 5,000 years, and today has over a billion adherents, with the vast majority residing in India.

The early ideologues of Hindutva¹⁸ were inspired by 20th century European fascist movements, namely Nazi Germany and Mussolini's Italy.¹⁹ Vinayak Damodar Savarkar is considered to be the architect²⁰ of modern Hindutva, and in 1923 he published what is considered by many to be a foundationalist text of Hindu nationalism: *Essentials of Hindutva*.²¹ In this text, Savarkar himself notes that Hindutva and Hinduism are two different terms and that the former "embraces all the departments of thought and activity of the

9. Hannah Ellis-Petersen, "What Is Hindu Nationalism and How Does It Relate to Trouble in Leicester?," *The Guardian*, 20 September 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/20/what-is-hindu-nationalism-and-who-are-the-rss>.

10. Raqib Hameed Naik, Aarushi Srivastava, and Abhyudaya Tyagi, "2023 Half-Yearly Report: Anti-Muslim Hate Speech Events in India," *Hindutva Watch*, 25 September 2023, <https://hindutvawatch.org/hate-speech-events-india/>.

11. Anagha Subhash Nair and Ananta Agarwal, "Hindu Extremists in India Escalate Rhetoric with Calls to Kill Muslims," *NBC News*, 18 January 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/hindu-extremists-india-escalate-rhetoric-calls-kill-muslims-rcna12450>.

12. "India: Government Policies, Actions Target Minorities," *Human Rights Watch*, 19 February 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/19/india-government-policies-actions-target-minorities>.

13. Lauren Frayer, "India Is Changing Some Cities' Names, and Muslims Fear Their Heritage Is Being Erased," *NPR*, 23 April 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/04/23/714108344/india-is-changing-some-cities-names-and-muslims-fear-their-heritage-is-being-erased>.

14. Hannah Ellis-Petersen, "Indian Government Accused of Rewriting History after Edits to Schoolbooks," *The Guardian*, 6 April 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/06/indian-government-accused-of-rewriting-history-after-edits-to-schoolbooks>.

15. Sara Ather, "Politics of Ruin: Why Modi Wants to Demolish India's Mosques," *Al Jazeera*, 3 April 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/4/3/politics-of-ruin-why-modi-wants-to-demolish-indias-mosques>.

16. "What Is Hindutva?," *Hindutva Harassment Field Manual*, <https://www.hindutvahasmentfieldmanual.org/defininghindutva>.

17. "The Core Tenets of Hinduism," *PBS LearningMedia*, <https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/sj14-soc-hinduism/the-core-tenets-of-hinduism/>.

18. "What Is Hindutva?," *Hindutva Harassment Field Manual*, <https://www.hindutvahasmentfieldmanual.org/defininghindutva>.

19. Christophe Jaffrelot, "The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India," (Columbia, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), <http://cup.columbia.edu/book/the-hindu-nationalist-movement-in-india/9780231103350>.

20. Vikram Visana, "Glory and Humiliation in the Making of V. D. Savarkar's Hindu Nationalism," *The Historical Journal* 66, no. 1 (2023): 165–85, [doi:10.1017/S0018246X22000255](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X22000255).

21. In 1928, this was published under the title, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*

whole being of our Hindu race".²² Savarkar argued that Indian Muslims and Christians could not be considered loyal patriots as India is not their "Holy-land," and thus their love would always be divided as they would place their "Holy-land" above the "fatherland."²³

Hindutva has been propagated in India by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh²⁴ (RSS), a far-right paramilitary organisation founded in 1925, and described by a *Guardian* piece as the "holding company of Hindu supremacism".²⁵ While it originated as part of a movement against British rule, it also virulently opposed a Hindu-Muslim unity against the British.²⁶ Today, the RSS²⁷ is the leader of the *Sangh Parivar*²⁸ (the family of the Sangh), an umbrella organisation composed of a number of chapters and offshoots all functioning under the broader ethos of establishing a Hindu Rashtra (Hindu nation).²⁹ Along with the RSS, there is an international religious wing (the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, VHP), a student wing (the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, ABVP), a trade union wing (Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh), women's wing (Rashtriya Sevika Samiti), and economic wing (Swadeshi Jagaran Manch). The Sangh also has its own political party, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), with the current PM being a lifelong member of the RSS.³⁰ The RSS and BJP share the same ideology and vision, with the RSS working at the communal levels of society and the BJP working from the political levels.

Today, the RSS functions in India as a volunteer membership organisation, with an estimated 4 million volunteers, "who swear oaths of allegiance and take part in quasi-military drills".³¹ The organisation functions both as a theological outfit as well as a political movement focused on building a Hindu nation-state. Over the course of the last century, members of the RSS have been accused of executing violent attacks, including plotting assassinations, inflaming communal tensions, and stoking riots. It was an RSS member, Nathuram Vinayak Godse, who assassinated the leader of India's independence movement, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in 1948.³² Following the assassination, the RSS was banned for a short period and Godse was executed for this crime and regarded by the general public as a traitor. However, in recent years with the mainstreaming of Hindu nationalism, his image has been rehabilitated as Hindu nationalists view him as a patriot and martyr for the country.³³

Along with Savarkar, there are two other figures that are influential in the development of Hindutva as a political ideology and organising force: Keshav Baliram Hedgewar and Madhav Sadashivrao Golwalkar. Hedgewar founded³⁴ the RSS in 1925 following extensive communal riots in northern India, which he regarded as Muslim riots as he [Hedgewar] claimed that in

22. Swatantryaveer Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, "Essentials of Hindutva," *Library BJP*, 1883, <https://library.bjp.org/jspui/bitstream/123456789/284/1/Essentials%20of%20Hindutva.pdf>.

23. Ibid.

24. "Factsheet: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)," *The Bridge Initiative*, 2 August 2023, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-rashtriya-swayamsevak-sangh-rss/>.

25. Samanth Subramanian, "How Hindu Supremacists Are Tearing India Apart," *The Guardian*, 20 February 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/20/hindu-supremacists-nationalism-tearing-india-apart-modi-bjp-rss-jnu-attacks>.

26. "Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) | History, Ideology, & Facts." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Rashtriya-Swayamsevak-Sangh>.

27. "Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh," Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, <https://www.rss.org/>.

28. "Sangh Parivar," Sangh Parivar, <http://www.sanghparivar.org/>.

29. "Transnational Hindutva Networks in United States," *United States Commission on International Religious Freedom*, <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Statement%20from%20a%20South%20Asia%20scholar.pdf>.

30. Samanth Subramanian, "How Hindu Supremacists Are Tearing India Apart," *The Guardian*, 20 February 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/20/hindu-supremacists-nationalism-tearing-india-apart-modi-bjp-rss-jnu-attacks>.

31. Ibid.

32. Dhirendra K. Jha, "Historical Records Expose the Lie That Nathuram Godse Left the RSS," *The Caravan*, 1 January 2020, <https://caravanmagazine.in/reportage/historical-record-expose-lie-godse-left-rss>.

33. Hannah Ellis-Petersen, "Mahatma Gandhi's Killer Venerated as Hindu Nationalism Resurges in India," *The Guardian*, 17 January 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/17/mahatma-gandhis-killer-venerated-as-hindu-nationalism-resurges-in-india>.

34. "A Great Son of Mother India?: Here's What RSS Founder KB Hedgewar Said about Muslims," *Scroll.in*, 8 June 2018, <https://scroll.in/article/881894/a-great-son-of-mother-india-heres-what-rss-founder-kb-hedgewar-said-about-muslims>.

every single case, "it is they [Muslims] who start them."³⁵ In 1927, one of the co-founders of the RSS, Dr. B.S. Moonje described the organisation as an institution which could produce "the military regeneration of the Hindus" and unify the people in line with "the idea of fascism."³⁶

Following Hedgwar's death, Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar became the leader of the RSS in 1944, and is widely regarded as the ideological architect of the Sangh. In his book, *We, or, Our Nationhood Defined*, he maps out a vision of a "Hindu Rashtra" (Hindu nation), and was very clear about his inspirations. He praised Nazi Germany, stating:

*"To keep up the purity of the Race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic races -- the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindusthan to learn and profit by."*³⁷

In addition to his praise of European fascism, Golwalkar also deeply mistrusted Indian Christians and Muslims, claiming they could never be loyal to India.³⁸ When it came to Indian Muslims, he not only questioned their loyalty but also employed anti-Muslim tropes³⁹ to characterise them as being innately hostile to Hindus, arguing that this hatred was "so deep-rooted that whatever we believed in, the Muslim was hostile to it. If we worship in the temple, he would desecrate it...If we glorify woman as a symbol of sacred motherhood, he would like to molest her. He was tooth and nail opposed to our way of life in all aspects."⁴⁰ He further argued: "Ever since that evil day, when Moslems first landed in Hindusthan, right up to the present moment, the Hindu Nation has been gallantly fighting to shake off the despoilers."⁴¹ While questioning their loyalties and seeing them as perpetual foreigners who were a threat to the Hindu majority, Golwalkar also argued that the forefathers of Indian Muslims were Hindu and thus they should return to Hinduism.⁴² This is the underpinning of the "Ghar Wapsi" (returning home/reconversion) initiative conducted by the RSS and its allies today where they persuade and influence Indian Muslims, Christians, and followers of other religions to "return" to Hinduism.⁴³

35. "Factsheet: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)," The Bridge Initiative, 18 May 2021, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-rashtriya-swayamsevak-sangh-rss/>.

36. Pieter Friedrich, "From Christchurch to India: How India's RSS Inspires White Nationalist Violence," *CounterCurrents*, 4 April 2019, <https://countercurrents.org/2019/04/from-christchurch-to-india-how-indias-rss-inspires-white-nationalist-violence/>.

37. "Golwalkar Drew Lessons from Hitler's Germany," *The Hindu BusinessLine*, 27 November 2015, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/national/golwalkar-drew-lessons-from-hitlers-germany/article7924161.ece>.

38. Ajaz Ashraf, "Why Pranab Mukherjee Should Urge the RSS to Rewrite Its Guru MS Golwalkar's 'Bunch of Thoughts,'" *Scroll.in*, 6 June 2018, <https://scroll.in/article/881407/why-pranab-mukherjee-should-urge-the-rss-to-rewrite-its-guru-ms-golwalkar-s-bunch-of-thoughts>.

39. "Factsheet: Common Anti-Muslim Tropes," *The Bridge Initiative*, 4 December 2018, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-common-anti-muslim-tropes-2/>.

40. Ajaz Ashraf, "Why Pranab Mukherjee Should Urge the RSS to Rewrite Its Guru MS Golwalkar's 'Bunch of Thoughts,'" *Scroll.in*, 6 June 2018, <https://scroll.in/article/881407/why-pranab-mukherjee-should-urge-the-rss-to-rewrite-its-guru-ms-golwalkar-s-bunch-of-thoughts>.

41. Arundhati Roy, *My Seditious Heart*, (Haymarket Books, 2019).

42. Ajaz Ashraf, "Why Pranab Mukherjee Should Urge the RSS to Rewrite Its Guru MS Golwalkar's 'Bunch of Thoughts,'" *Scroll.in*, 6 June 2018, <https://scroll.in/article/881407/why-pranab-mukherjee-should-urge-the-rss-to-rewrite-its-guru-ms-golwalkar-s-bunch-of-thoughts>.

43. "RSS Chief Asks Hindus to Pledge to Ensure 'Ghar Wapsi' of Those Who Have Converted," *The Wire*, 16 December 2021, <https://thewire.in/communalism/rss-chief-asks-hindus-to-pledge-to-ensure-ghar-wapsi-of-those-who-have-converted>.

Throughout its existence, RSS members have carried out violent attacks, including being involved in the 2002 anti-Muslim pogroms in Gujarat. Today, the RSS remains an important force in the country not just as a socio-cultural organisation, but one that very clearly has political aims, primarily to establish a Hindu-only state.

Current rise of Hindutva in India under the BJP

Today, the RSS is led by Mohan Bhagwat and under his leadership the group campaigned heavily for Narendra Modi in the 2014 presidential elections.

Under Modi's government, India has experienced a rapid rise in Islamophobia, with near daily accounts of harassment, violence, and discrimination targeting the country's largest minority community. BJP politicians have openly called for violence against Muslims, and have shared stages with far-right voices who have publicly called for a genocide of Indian Muslims. In addition to the open hate speech⁴⁴ and targeted violence, Modi's BJP has enacted a number of discriminatory policies that have essentially rendered Indian Muslims second-class citizens. Additionally, many commentators⁴⁵ have noted⁴⁶ that the country's democracy is decaying, as press freedom has declined and journalists and activists have been imprisoned.⁴⁷

Since 2014, there have been increasing incidents of anti-Muslim harassment and violence, with near-daily reports of mob attacks and public lynchings. Many of these episodes are recorded and published on social media by the perpetrators themselves, demonstrating the impunity they enjoy. Often, the mobs and groups involved in these attacks will shout "Jai Shri Ram" (victory to Lord Ram), a Hindu religious chant that's been appropriated by Hindu nationalists as a rallying cry.⁴⁸ Perpetrators who have brutally assaulted and even lynched Muslim boys and men have often forced their victims to chant this phrase.⁴⁹ A 2022 report by The Bridge Initiative noted that the "near daily episodes of harassment, public beatings and mob assaults, destruction of property, and lynchings that have created an atmosphere of fear for the country's 200+ million Muslims," and found the first 8 stages of genocide are present in India.⁵⁰

Hindutva abroad

As the Sangh's website states, the RSS's "sphere of influence has been spreading far and wide, not only inside Bharat [India] but also abroad".⁵¹ The Sangh has established itself in a number of countries including the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

44. "Anti-Muslim Hate Speech in India Spikes around Elections, Report Says," *Al Jazeera*, 26 September 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/26/anti-muslim-hate-speech-in-india-spikes-around-elections-report-says>.

45. "The Organs of India's Democracy Are Decaying," *The Economist*, 12 February 2022, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2022/02/12/the-organs-of-indias-democracy-are-decaying>.

46. Milan Vaishnav, "The Decay of Indian Democracy," *Foreign Affairs*, 18 March 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/india/2021-03-18/decay-indian-democracy>.

47. Shalu Yadav, "With Raids, Arrests and Hostile Takeovers, India Press Freedom Continues to Decline," *NPR*, 3 April 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/04/03/1167041720/india-press-freedom-journalists-modi-bbc-documentary>.

48. "Jai Shri Ram: The Hindu Chant That Became a Murder Cry," *BBC News*, 9 July 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-48882053>.

49. "List of Muslims Killed or Assaulted after Refused to Chant 'Jai Shri Ram,'" *Maktoob Media*, 5 August 2020, <https://maktoobmedia.com/features/list-of-muslims-killed-or-assaulted-after-refused-to-chant-jai-shri-ram/>.

50. "Is a Genocide of Muslims Underway in India?," *The Bridge Initiative*, 31 October 2022, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/is-a-genocide-of-muslims-underway-in-india/>.

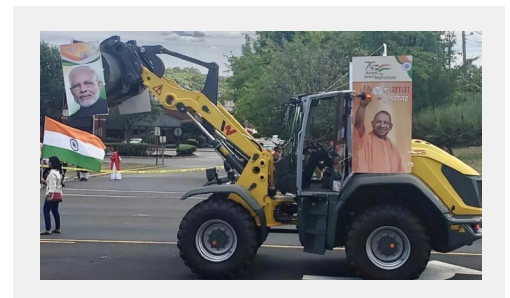
51. "Vision and Mission," Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 13 March 2015, <https://www.rss.org/Encyc/2015/3/13/Vision-and-Mission.html>.

A 2022 report⁵² by the South Asia Citizen Web examined the infrastructure and influence of Hindu nationalist organisations in the US between 2014-2021. It found that “between 2001-2019, according to available tax returns, seven Sangh-affiliated charitable groups reportedly spent at least \$158.9 million on their programming, sending much of it to groups in India”.⁵³ This money was used to support Hindu nationalist projects in India, including “influencing legislation on the context of textbooks and academic output related to religion and history”.⁵⁴ Some of the groups identified by the report as being “Sangh influencers”⁵⁵ in the US included the All India Movement (AIM) for Seva, Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of America, India Development and Relief Fund, Param Shakti Peeth, PYP Yog Foundation, Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America⁵⁶ and Sewa International.

A number of events have occurred in the United States that highlight the strength of the Sangh in the country and how Hindu nationalism has gone global.⁵⁷ In 2019, the Texas India Forum organised the “Howdy Modi” event in Houston, Texas that was attended by 50,000 individuals, making it the largest-ever gathering with a foreign political leader in the country.⁵⁸ In August 2022, national Hindu groups invited Sadhvi Nisha Rithambara .⁵⁹ A close ally of Modi and head of the women’s wing of the VHP, she was accused of inciting communal violence during the demolition of the Babri masjid in 1992. She spoke at an event in Georgia, which was condemned by civil society organisations.



Another event included the presence of a bulldozer during a parade marking Indian Independence Day in 2022 in Edison, New Jersey .⁶⁰ The event was hosted by the Indian Business Association and included a bulldozer with a picture of PM Modi and Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath. While the bulldozer may seem like an innocuous piece of machinery, in recent years it has become the symbol of muscular Hindu nationalism as it has been used by the Modi government to demolish Muslim homes and businesses.⁶¹ Following the incident in Edison, the mayor denounced the bulldozer as an unwelcome “symbol of division and discrimination,” and the Indian Businesses association later apologised for having it in the parade.⁶²



52. Jasa Macher, *Hindu Nationalist Influence in the United States, 2014-2021: The Infrastructure of Hindu Mobilizing*, (South Asia Citizen Web, May 2022), https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/22041101/20220523_hninfluenceusa.pdf.

53. Ibid.

54. “New Report Traces Activities of US-Based Hindutva Groups over Last 7 Years,” *The Wire*, 30 May 2022, <https://thewire.in/world/new-report-traces-activities-of-us-based-hindutva-groups-over-last-7-years>.

55. Jasa Macher, *Hindu Nationalist Influence in the United States, 2014-2021: The Infrastructure of Hindu Mobilizing*, (South Asia Citizen Web, May 2022), https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/22041101/20220523_hninfluenceusa.pdf.

56. “Factsheet: Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA),” *The Bridge Initiative*, 27 July 2023, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-vishwa-hindu-parishad-of-america-vhpa/>.

57. VICE, “A New Brand of Hindu Extremism Is Going Global | Decade of Hate,” YouTube Video, 24 June 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wmR2h8jAklg>.

58. Devesh Kapur, “The Indian Prime Minister and Trump Addressed a Houston Rally. Who Was Signaling What?,” *The Washington Post*, 29 September 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/09/29/prime-minister-modi-india-donald-trump-addressed-huge-houston-rally-who-was-signaling-what/>.

59. HSS, VHPA, TV Asia, Rashttra Darpan, Khabar, Atlanta Dunia, NRI Pulse, S&S Digital Media, USA. Satsang and Pravachan with Didi Maa Sadhvi Ritambharaji, August 2022, https://i0.wp.com/iamic.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/RITUMBRA_Visit.jpeg?w=1080&ssl=1.

60. Azad Essa, “New Jersey Prosecutors Conclude That Bulldozer at India Day Was a ‘Bias Incident,’” *Middle East Eye*, 30 January 2023, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/new-jersey-prosecutors-rule-india-day-bulldozer-act-bias>.

61. Astha Rajvansh, “How India’s Bulldozers Became a Vehicle of Injustice,” *TIME*, 11 August 2023, <https://time.com/6303571/how-bulldozers-became-a-symbol-of-anti-muslim-sentiment-in-india/>.

62. “Inclusion of Bulldozer in New Jersey I-Day Parade Criticised by Edison Mayor,” *Scroll.in*, 23 August 2022, <https://scroll.in/latest/1031121/use-of-bulldozer-at-new-jersey-i-day-parade-is-unwelcome-says-mayor>.

In 2023, the National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM) and the World Sikh Organization (WSO) released a report outlining the RSS network in Canada.⁶³ It divides up RSS's activities in the countries into four sections: 1) humanitarian relief, social services, and fundraising, 2) education, ideology, shakhas, 3) global politician influence, and 4) Islamophobic, anti-Sikh, and casteist rhetoric. A key segment of the *Sangh* is devoted to service and the report finds that this sector of the project "help[s] legitimise and perpetuate[s] the RSS's ideologies, while entrenching its wider presence under the guise of an ideologically neutral humanitarian network". An example of the global political influence of the Sangh includes a network of lobbying organisations called the Overseas Friends of the BJP (OFBJP), which has chapters in the US, UK, Australia, and Canada. The report includes a list of incidents outlining how anti-Muslim, anti-Sikh, and casteist rhetoric has been broadcasted in Canada by community leaders affiliated with mainstream organizations, and warns that hostility against Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, and Dalits has become more "socially legitimised, emboldened, and now threatens to destabilise India's large diaspora populations across the world, including in Canada".⁶⁴

Hindutva and Zionism

Another interesting aspect of Hindutva's transnational connections has been the Modi government's close relationship with Israel. Many proponents of Hindu nationalism seek to emulate Israel's exclusionary nation-state model. They have celebrated and championed the Zionist government of Israel's policies towards Palestinians and Arabs in both Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. On social media, there have routinely been great outpourings of support from Hindu nationalists to Israel, including in the forms of hashtags such as #IndiaWithIsrael, #ISupportIsrael, #IndiaStandsWithIsrael and #PalestineTerrorists.⁶⁵ Both Hindu nationalists and Zionists also dehumanise Muslims and hold Islamophobic views.⁶⁶

Under the Modi government, India has built a close relationship with Israel, as both have engaged in a strategic military (India is the largest buyer of Israeli weapons) and technology partnerships.⁶⁷ The growing relationship between Israel and India is visible in India's discriminatory policies toward its Muslim population. In 2019, Modi's government introduced the Citizenship Amendment Act, which amended the law to create fast-track citizenship for Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Christians from bordering countries.⁶⁸ The amendment noticeably excluded Muslims, and effectively made religion a basis for citizenship claims in the country, echoing Israel's "discriminatory Law of Return, which bestows the right of citizenship to Jews across the globe," and denies any rights to Palestinians who were forcibly removed from the land.⁶⁹

63. National Council of Canadian Muslims and World Sikh Organization of Canada, "Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) Network in Canada," *Nation Builder*, 1 March 2023, https://assets.nationbuilder.com/worldsikh/pages/3301/attachments/original/1677711141/RSS_Report_2023_FINAL-compressed.pdf?1677711141.

64. Ibid.

65. CJ Werleman, "Zionism and Hindu Nationalism Bring Israel and India Together," *Politics Today*, 7 June 2021, <https://politicstoday.org/zionism-and-hindu-nationalism-bring-israel-and-india-together/>.

66. Rana Ayyub (@RanaAyyub), "Checked most of the #IndiaStandWithIsrael tweet handles. A common thread that runs through is a visceral hatred for Muslims and a bloodlust to see Muslims massacred and shown their place. Most handles followed by one or more BJP minister or the PM himself," X, 16 May 2021, 6:53 AM, <https://twitter.com/RanaAyyub/status/1393806853432233984?s=20>.

67. Maya Mirchandani, "Much Rides on Bibi, Modi and the 'Bromance'," *NDTV*, 15 January 2018, <https://www.ndtv.com/opinion/much-rides-on-bibi-modi-and-the-bromance-1800394>.

68. Somdeep Sen, "India's Deepening Love Affair with Israel," *Al Jazeera*, 9 September 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/9/9/indias-deepening-love-affair-with-israel>.

69. Kavita Chowdhury, "India's Hindutva Proponents and Zionist Israel: Strange Bedfellows," *The Diplomat*, 2 December 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/12/indias-hindutva-proponents-and-zionist-israel-strange-bedfellows/>.

In 2019, Subramanian Swamy, a member of the Upper House of the Indian Parliament and staunch Hindu nationalist, called for the increasing partnership between Israel and India in the face of “Islamic extremists”.⁷⁰ In this piece, he alluded to the similarities between Hindutva India and Zionist Israel, arguing that “both states claim to be a continuing cultural state”.⁷¹ In an April 2020 *VICE* interview, Swamy defended the CAA, while expressing Islamophobic sentiments, claiming that “we know where the Muslim population is large, there is always trouble because the Islamic ideology says so”, going on to reference conspiracy theories of a ‘Muslim takeover,’ claiming that “if Muslims become more than 30 percent, that countries in danger”.⁷² When the *VICE* journalist commented “that sounds like hatred,” he laughed and stated: “Easy to say hatred, I’m being kind to them by not letting them come to India.”⁷³ Further on in the interview, he argued that Muslims were not protected by Article 14 of the Indian Constitution which guarantees freedom of religion, arguing that Muslims cannot be given equal rights because “they are not in an equal category”.

In August 2019, Modi’s government suspended the autonomous status of Jammu and Kashmir by revoking Article 370 and 35A of the Indian constitution, stripping the state of the special status it was granted after Partition. This opened the door for non-Kashmiris to buy land in the region for the first time in decades, and locals fear that this will be used to change the demographics of the region.⁷⁴ In his book, *Hostile Homelands: The New Alliance Between India and Israel*, journalist Azad Essa notes that “annexation of Kashmir increasingly resembles Israel’s settler-colonial project of the occupied West Bank”.⁷⁵ Essa examines the commonalities shared between Hindutva and Zionism, noting that the ideologies behind the governments of both states use religious identity for political ends by exclusively supporting one religio-cultural group above the others, in an effort to create a nation-state where all others are rendered second-class citizens (if citizens at all).⁷⁶

Essa also highlights how Hindu nationalist groups in the US have had decades of collaboration with Zionist organisations and have adopted the same techniques used by Zionists to shut down criticism. This includes “going after universities and academics, attempting to alter school curriculum to reflect a pro-Hindutva narrative, and utilising the accusation of “Hinduphobia” as a shield from any criticism of the Hindutva movement or Indian policies in much the same vein that “antisemitism” is utilised to silence criticism of Israeli policies towards the Palestinians”.⁷⁷

70. Subramanian Swamy, “Zionist Israel & Hindu India Must Come Together against Islamic Extremists,” *The Print*, 29 August 2019, <https://theprint.in/feature/subramanian-swamy-zionist-israel-hindu-india-must-come-together-against-islamic-extremists/283719/>.

71. Ibid.

72. VICE News, “India Burning (Clip) | VICE on SHOWTIME,” YouTube Video, 1 April 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MCyBL8dBOEo>.

73. Ibid.

74. Mobashra Tazamal, “Is a Genocide of Muslims Underway in India?” (*The Bridge Initiative*, October 2022), <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Is-a-genocide-of-Muslims-underway-in-India.pdf>.

75. Azad Essa, *Hostile Homelands: The New Alliance between India and Israel*, (London: Pluto Press, 2023).

76. Mohammad Abou-Ghazala, “Decoding the India-Israel Connection: Book Talk with Azad Essa,” *The Jerusalem Fund*, 24 April 2023, <https://thejerusalemfund.org/2023/04/april-24-hostile-homelands-the-new-india-israel-relationship-book-talk-with-azad-essa/>.

77. Ibid.

THE ISLAMOPHOBIA INDUSTRY AND ITS CONNECTION WITH HINDUTVA



The Islamophobia Industry and its connection with Hindutva

The Islamophobia Industry is a loose, unorganised network of individuals, donors, and organisations that manufacture disinformation and promote the hatred of Islam and Muslims.⁷⁸ It is a transnational multimillion (a 2022 study⁷⁹ by Professor Jasmin Zine argues that the industry has access to 1.2 billion) dollar network that has largely grown in the post-9/11 environment, feeding a diet of fear and bigotry to billions around the world, and playing a key role in creating public support for anti-Muslim policies in the years and decades following the September 11th attacks.

This post 9/11 time period also witnessed the creation of the 'War on Terror' discourse, a narrative that claims that the religion of Islam promotes violence and terrorism and that Muslims are uniquely predisposed to extremism. This set of talking points and arguments build on orientalist stereotypes, and lead to the dehumanisation of Muslims, viewing them as a monolithic entity upon which any act is justified in order to dispel the supposed threat. Such rhetoric was used to justify amongst many things, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the horrific torture and human rights violations of Muslims held in prisons and blacksites during the War on Terror, the illegal surveillance of Muslim communities in the west, and the ongoing policing of community activism. This framing has also been adopted by a number of governments outside of the west, including China and India, where the authorities have utilised Islamophobic talking points (i.e. "Muslims are prone to extremism," "Muslims are untrustworthy," "Muslims are plotting to takeover") to justify repressive actions.

In the UK, a number of individuals who have expressed anti-Muslim views have also aligned themselves with proponents of Hindutva, both sharing a common disdain and suspicion for Muslims. One clear example of this is Bob Blackman, who has been the Conservative Member of Parliament for Harrow East since 2010. Blackman has a consistent documented record of expressing anti-Muslim views.⁸⁰ In May 2018, the Muslim Council of Britain wrote a letter to the Conservative chair, Brandon Lewis, calling for an independent investigation into Islamophobia in the party.⁸¹ In the letter, the organisation cited the actions of Blackman as examples of Islamophobia, including his membership of Islamophobic Facebook groups,⁸² sharing of anti-Muslim comments on his social media platforms,⁸³ and retweeting⁸⁴ anti-Muslim voices, such as Tommy Robinson.⁸⁵

No action was taken against Blackman, and the call for an inquiry into the party was met with little enthusiasm. In 2019, ahead of the general election, then-Home Secretary Sajid Javid

78. Nathan Lean, *The Islamophobia Industry - Second Edition: How the Right Manufactures Hatred of Muslims*, Edited by Jack G. Shaheen, (London: Pluto Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1v2xvxq>.

79. Jasmin Zine, "The Canadian Islamophobia Industry: Islamophobia's Ecosystem in the Great White North," *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 7, no. 2 (2022): 233–49, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48696287>.

80. Peter Walker, "Muslim Leaders Urge Investigation into 'Tory Islamophobia' Claims," *The Guardian*, 31 May 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/may/31/muslim-leaders-urge-investigation-into-tory-islamophobia-claims>.

81. MCB (@MuslimCouncil), "We are calling for an independent inquiry into Islamophobia in the Conservative Party following more than weekly occurrences of Islamophobia in the party last month," X, 30 May 2018, 8:54 PM, <https://twitter.com/MuslimCouncil/status/1001914876992868352>.

82. "Tory MP Accused of Islamophobia after Posting Anti-Muslim Article on Facebook," *The Independent*, 27 March 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/tory-mp-bob-blackman-islamophobia-facebook-conservative-harrow-east-racism-muslims-a8276101.html>.

83. Ibid.

84. Miqdaad Versi (@miqdaad), "NEW: Tory MP Bob Blackman was exposed sharing a platform with Katie Hopkins & David Vance ICYMI he has a long history linked to Islamophobia inc RTing Tommy Robinson @Conservatives claim a "zero tolerance" policy: we know what that really means (thread)," X, 12 July 2020, 11:35 AM, <https://twitter.com/miqdaad/status/1282262329099538433>.

85. "Factsheet: Tommy Robinson," *The Bridge Initiative*, 7 May 2021, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-tommy-robinson/>.

brought up the matter of an investigation into Islamophobia in the party during a debate on *BBC*, to which his fellow four rivals nodded in agreement.⁸⁶ However, an investigation into Islamophobia within the party never took place and under the leadership of PM Boris Johnson, the party deflected and evaded any call to action into this matter. Almost two years later following several delays, the government finally released the findings of an investigation into racism within the party (note that there was never an investigation into Islamophobia specifically), and the Singh Report, as it came to be known, concluded that anti-Muslim sentiment is an issue but stopped short of declaring it an institutional problem.⁸⁷

Blackman's role in promoting Islamophobia in the UK is also supported by his interactions and relationships with Hindu nationalists. A 2022 piece in *Byline Times* noted that Blackman has received considerable funds from far-right Hindu nationalist organisations, including those with ties to the BJP and RSS.⁸⁸ In 2017, in his role as Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Hindus, Blackman hosted⁸⁹ an event organised by the National Council of Hindu Temples⁹⁰ in Parliament for Tapan Ghosh, a hardline Hindu nationalist who has a history of stoking religious tensions in India.⁹¹ Ghosh has publically praised the genocide of Rohingya Muslims, claimed that all Muslims are "jihadis," and advocated for forced birth control of Muslims.⁹² Despite the numerous incidents over the years of clear anti-Muslim bias and comments, the Conservative party has failed to take any action against the Harrow East MP, signaling to the wider public that such discriminatory and prejudicial behavior is tolerated within government.⁹³



Unsurprisingly, Blackman is also connected⁹⁴ with other prominent anti-Muslim voices in the country, namely the Henry Jackson Society.⁹⁵ HJS is a neo-conservative think-tank that has fostered close relationships with Conservative members of the government and provides analysis and policy recommendations to policymakers. The organisation has been found to have an "anti-Islam" agenda and has routinely used words such as "extremist" to smear Muslim organisations (especially those that are politically active).⁹⁶ Reports published by the group have often framed Muslims in Britain as predisposed to violence or extremism, and have given policy recommendations that support the securitisation and criminalisation of the minority community. HJS reports have been cited by members of the Conservative party in their calls to enforce harsher policies on Muslim communities, as the claims made

86. Kevin Rawlinson, "Sajid Javid Puts Rivals on the Spot over Tory Party 'Islamophobia,'" *The Guardian*, 18 June 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/jun/18/sajid-javid-puts-rivals-on-the-spot-over-tory-party-islamophobia>.

87. Rajeew Syal, "Tory Islamophobia Report a 'Whitewash', Say Muslims in Party," *The Guardian*, 25 May 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2021/may/25/tory-islamophobia-report-criticises-boris-johnson-over-burqa-remarks>.

88. *Ibid.*

89. Michael Safi and Jessica Elgot, "Tories Disown Firebrand Hindu Activist after Commons Visit," *The Guardian*, 26 October 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/oct/26/tories-disown-firebrand-hindu-activist-after-commons-visit>.

90. "Home | NCHTUK," National Council of Hindu Temples, <https://www.thenchtuk.org/>.

91. National Council of Hindu Temples, "Tolerating the Intolerant - Shri Tapan K Ghoshji Speaking in the UK Parliament," YouTube Video, 19 October 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0fBxj9TwSI0>.

92. Aisha Gani, "This Far-Right Anti-Muslim Extremist Was in Parliament at an Event Addressed by Amber Rudd," *BuzzFeed*, 25 October 2017, <https://www.buzzfeed.com/aishagani/amber-rudd-spoke-at-an-event-in-parliament-attended-by-an>.

93. "MCB Calls for Conservatives to Finally Take Decisive Action against Bob Blackman Mp Following the 6th Serious Incident Linking Him to Islamophobia," Muslim Council of Britain, 12 July 2020, <https://mcb.org.uk/mcb-calls-for-conservatives-to-finally-take-decisive-action-against-bob-blackman-mp-following-the-6th-serious-incident-linking-him-to-islamophobia/>.

94. "Iran's Russia Backed Regime at a Dead End: Introducing a Draft Constitution for Iran's Future," Henry Jackson Society, 19 May 2022, <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/event/irans-russia-backed-regime-in-dead-end-introducing-the-draft-constitution-for-future-iran/>.

95. "Factsheet: Henry Jackson Society," *The Bridge Initiative*, 30 April 2019, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-henry-jackson-society/>.

96. *Ibid.*

by the organisation often provide the rhetorical and analytical data needed to justify discriminatory policies. HJS has routinely pushed forth a narrative of viewing British Muslims through a security lens, which explains why the group has been a leading supporter of the government's PREVENT programme.⁹⁷ The "counter-extremism" program has been criticised by human rights experts and civil society organisations as singling out Muslims and based on faulty logic that results in doing greater harm than good.

In September 2022, Blackman wrote to the UK Home Secretary alleging that "Islamist extremists" were to blame for the recent violence between Muslims and Hindus in Leicester.⁹⁸ This one-sided allegation was in stark contrast to actual mainstream media reporting and interviews from individuals on the ground. As the following section will outline, the riots in Leicester escalated from internal conflicts amongst different groups to full blown violence between the city's Hindu and Muslim populations. Blackman's letter contradicted the reality and pushed an Islamophobic narrative that painted Muslims as the primary instigators and perpetrators of violence, despite numerous video evidence showing the presence of Hindutva ideology in Leicester. The situation in Leicester involved a number of incidents of provocation, harassment, and violence from Hindu groups, including a march of around 200 men in balaclavas and masks chanting "Jai Shri Ram".⁹⁹ Despite this public knowledge of the presence of Hindutva views in Leicester, Blackman and other anti-Muslim voices pushed a binary narrative of Hindu victimisation and "Islamist extremists."

In November 2022, HJS published a report written by Charlotte Littlewood¹⁰⁰ claiming that there was no evidence of "Hindutva extremist organisations operating in Leicester", rather that it was social media influencers (predominantly Muslim) who peddled fake narratives to instigate violence.¹⁰¹ A June 2023 documentary¹⁰² published by *VICE* examining the spread of far-right Hindu nationalism explicitly referenced the violence in Leicester as one example of how followers of Hindutva are inflaming tensions across the world.¹⁰³ Failing to take into account reporting from the ground and video footage that clearly showed Hindu nationalist slogans being chanted in Leicester, the HJS report presents a biased representation of the events. Littlewood has gone so far as to claim that the turmoil in Leicester was "predominantly Islamist attack on Hindus".¹⁰⁴ She doesn't just merely play down the presence and role of Hindu nationalism in Leicester, her report completely denies its existence and insteads promotes Islamophobic narratives.



97. "Factsheet: PREVENT," *The Bridge Initiative*, 27 April 2022, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/prevent/>.

98. Bob Blackman (@BobBlackman), "Yesterday I wrote to the Home Secretary, @SuellaBraverman and asked the Leader of the House, @PennyMordaunt, about the recent scenes witnessed in Leicester and Birmingham and the attacks on the #Hindu community and temples. 1/1," X, 23 September 2022, 9:53 AM, <https://twitter.com/BobBlackman/status/1573234180472950784>.

99. "Leicester: Call for calm after Hindu-Muslim unrest in UK city," *Al Jazeera*, 20 September 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/20/leicester-call-for-calm-after-hindu-muslim-unrest-in-uk-city>.

100. Charlotte Littlewood (@CharlotteFLit), X, <https://twitter.com/CharlotteFLit>.

101. Charlotte Littlewood, "Hindu-Muslim Civil Unrest in Leicester: 'Hindutva' and the Creation of a False Narrative," (Henry Jackson Society, 4 November 2022), <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/publications/hindu-muslim-civil-unrest-in-leicester-hindutva-and-the-creation-of-a-false-narrative/>.

102. *VICE*, "A New Brand of Hindu Extremism Is Going Global | Decade of Hate," YouTube Video, 24 June 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wmR2h8jAklg>.

103. *Ibid.*

104. Henry Jackson Society (@HJS_Org), 2023, "There are and should be concerns around potential cohesion issues, but conflating it with Leicester and what was predominantly an Islamist attack on Hindus in Leicester is unfair." - @CharlotteFLit," X, 26 June 2023, 1:33 PM, https://twitter.com/HJS_Org/status/1673308442272882690?s=20

According to her biography, Littlewood is a research fellow at HJS and is a PhD candidate in Arab and Islamic studies with the University of Exeter University.¹⁰⁵ She has a history of researching and writing reports on Islamism in the UK, analysis which often ends up painting British Muslim civil society as intolerant and a threat to the country. In a January 2022 report for European Eyes on Radicalisation (EER), she examined “Islamist organisations in the UK”, noting that the “primary issues with Islamism in the UK pertain to sowing division in society, fomenting intolerance, and rendering individuals more vulnerable to radicalisation”.¹⁰⁶ The report goes on to allege that the Muslim Council of Britain, the UK’s largest umbrella body for Muslim-led organisations, is a Muslim Brotherhood-related organisation, claims that have been increasingly made in Europe to delegitimise the participation of Muslims in civil society. It also describes Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND), a civil society organisation empowering British Muslims to tackle Islamophobia, as being rooted in “Islamism,” and argues that the “organisation’s key narrative is that the government does not support Muslims and that it is purposefully downplaying and ignoring Islamophobia”. There have been numerous reports and documented evidence showing the presence of Islamophobia in the United Kingdom and the government’s inability, some may argue unwillingness, to tackle the problem. MEND’s mission to call attention to this is no different than the work done by other non-Muslim-led organisations, such as Hope not Hate. However, it appears that Littlewood may have an agenda against mainstream British Muslim organisations as her research often targets and essentially seeks to delegitimise the work of politically-active and vocal Muslim-led groups.

Throughout her career at the HJS, Littlewood has spearheaded a number of reports that present a similar narrative of British Hindus as victims and British Muslims as the villains. For example, Littlewood published an April 2023 report for HJS on anti-Hindu hate in schools.¹⁰⁷ According to the report, 988 parents responded to its survey. However, the names of the Hindu organisations and institutions and a breakdown of survey responses by geography and other important demographics are withheld. The survey questions were simplistic, broad, and failed to define what constitutes anti-Hindu hate. Further, while 51% of parents of Hindu pupils surveyed reported that their child had experienced anti-Hindu hate in schools, 71.49% of schools that responded to the survey recorded zero incidents. While anti-Hindu prejudice and hate must and should be tackled, HJS and Littlewood’s voice on the matter stands in danger of creating a narrative that amplifies Islamophobia, framing British Muslim communities as the perpetrator and thus failing to approach the matter through an impartial lens.

105. “Hindu-Muslim Civil Unrest in Leicester: ‘Hindutva’ and the Creation of a False Narrative,” Henry Jackson Society, 5 June 2023, <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/event/hindu-muslim-civil-unrest-in-leicester-the-impact-of-a-micro-community-cohesion-breakdown-falsely-attributed-to-organised-hindutva-extremism/>.

106. Charlotte Littlewood, “Islamist organizations in the United Kingdom: From the Rushdie Affair to Present Day,” *European Eye on Radicalization* (January 2022), <https://web.archive.org/web/20220519031902/https://eeradicalization.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/History-Islamist-Organisations-UK-Charlotte-Littlewood.pdf>.

107. Charlotte Littlewood, “Key Findings ANTI-HINDU HATE in SCHOOLS Research Brief Centre on Social and Political Risk Foreword,” (Henry Jackson Society, April 2023), <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/HJS-Anti-Hindu-Hate-in-Schools-Briefing-final.pdf>.

Littlewood's affiliations call into question the motives behind her work. Not only does she work for HJS, an organisation that has a long history of producing research demonising British Muslims, she recently sat down¹⁰⁸ with Nigel Farage,¹⁰⁹ the former head of UKIP¹¹⁰ that is described by HOPE not hate as having used "racism, xenophobia, sexism and Islamophobia to stir up division"¹¹¹ and raised fears about the threat of blasphemy in the United Kingdom.¹¹² The conversation again framed British Muslims as intolerant for voicing their opinions and views. While discussions can and should be had on these matters in regards to social cohesion and support for multicultural society, framing anything related to British Muslims through a security lens ultimately ends up securitizing a community that has already been heavily surveilled, policed, and harassed by the establishment.

When it comes to Hindu nationalism in the UK, the above section has outlined how a number of voices in the Islamophobia industry have either aligned themselves with Hindu nationalists or downplayed the dangers of this movement, all the while amplifying anti-Muslim rhetoric and tropes.

108. Charlotte Littlewood (@CharlotteFLit), ""Khatme Nabuwaat", "Mumtaz Qadri", "Khadim Rizvi", "Thereek e Labbaik". Google. Write down. Run names and orgs with these. Connections = PROBLEM. Get language specialists and systematically do this for blasphemy incidents in UK. You're welcome @SuellaBraverman @CommissionCE," X, 22 June 2023, 11:14 AM, <https://twitter.com/CharlotteFLit/status/1671823973460373510>.

109. "Who Is Nigel Farage?," *HOPE not hate*, <https://hopenohate.org.uk/chapter/who-is-nigel-farage/>.

110. "Factsheet: UKIP," *The Bridge Initiative*, 30 April 2019, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-ukip/>.

111. "Who Is Nigel Farage?," *HOPE not hate*, <https://hopenohate.org.uk/chapter/who-is-nigel-farage/>.

112. Henry Jackson Society (@HJS_Org), "Next Wednesday we're launching @CharlotteFLit's latest report - 'Britain's New Blasphemy Police? Understanding Islamist Anti-Blasphemy Action in the UK'" X, 13 July 2023, 5:25 PM, https://twitter.com/HJS_Org/status/1679527357852311554?s=20.

HINDU NATIONALISM IN THE UK



Hindu nationalism in the UK

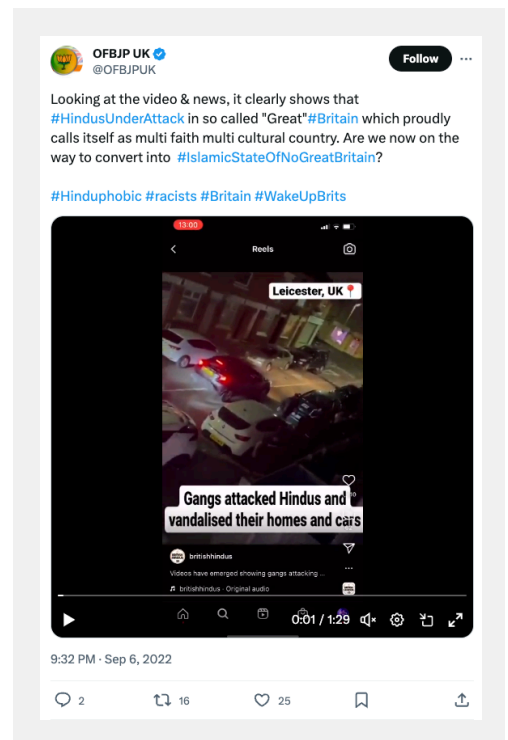
This section will profile several organisations that function within the UK and have expressed or supported Hindu nationalist sentiment. Such organisations have become increasingly active since the outbreak of tensions in 2022 between Leicester's Hindu and Muslim communities, which they used as an opportunity to propagate Islamophobic tropes and disinformation. It should be acknowledged that, given such organisations typically operate independently of one another, there does not appear to be a coordinated Hindu nationalist network in the UK. However, their involvement in our political, social, and public life serves as evidence against those who argue that Hindutva ideology is not present here.

Overseas Friends of BJP UK (OFBJP UK)

The Overseas Friends of the Bharatiya Janata Party (OFBJP) is an organisation supporting India's governing party led by PM Modi. It was initially established in the US and the UK, but now has chapters in over 40 countries, including Canada, Australia, Malaysia, Nigeria, Germany, and France.¹¹³

According to the OFBJP UK website, OFBJP UK was founded by Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Arun Jaitley.¹¹⁴ Vajpayee served as Indian Prime Minister (in 1996 and 1998-2004) and was one of the co-founders of the BJP. In his youth, he was an active member of the RSS and in 2012, wrote in an RSS publication: "I like its [RSS] ideology, and above all I like the RSS attitude towards people, towards one another which is found only in the RSS."¹¹⁵ Jaitley served in various ministerial roles under both Vajpayee and Modi, and while studying Law at the University of Delhi headed the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the student wing of the RSS.¹¹⁶

OFBJP UK promoted a distorted version of events in Leicester in 2022 that centred on anti-Hindu violence perpetrated by Muslims. In a tweet on 6 September 2022, the group shared a video supposedly depicting gangs attacking Hindu homes and cars, and claimed that "the video & news... clearly shows that #HindusUnderAttack", before asking: "Are we now on the way to convert into #IslamicStateOfNoGreatBritain?".¹¹⁷ Then, on 24 September 2022, OFBJP UK tweeted: "Time to Q From where does this fake #MuslimsUnderAttack came in picture? Is it a designated orchestration by #IslamicTerrorismInUK?".¹¹⁸



113. Mriganka Mukhopadhyay, "The Rise of BJP's 'Overseas Friends,'" *LSE South Asia Centre*, 3 July 2018, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2018/07/03/the-rise-of-bjps-overseas-friends/>.

114. "About Us," OFBJP UK, <https://ofbjpuk.com/about-us/>.

115. Smriti Kak Ramachandran, "Atal Bihari Vajpayee's Complex Relationship with Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh," *Hindustan Times*, 16 August 2018, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/atal-bihari-vajpayee-s-complex-relationship-with-rashtriya-swayamsevak-sangh/story-i4PWtQzyWnJpojnPQap7O.html>.

116. Douglas Busvine and Rajesh Kumar Singh, "India's New Finance Minister an Effective Foil for Modi," *Reuters*, 27 May 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-india-politics-jaitley-idUKKBN0E709N20140527>.

117. OFBJP UK (@OFBJPUK), "Looking at the video & news, it clearly shows that #HindusUnderAttack in so called 'Great' #Britain which proudly calls itself as multi faith multi cultural country. Are we now on the way to convert into #IslamicStateOfNoGreatBritain? #Hinduphobic #racists #Britain #WakeUpBrits," X, 6 September 2022, 9:32 PM, <https://twitter.com/OFBJPUK/status/1567249413088714752?s=20>.

118. OFBJP UK (@OFBJPUK), "If authorities carry a thorough analysis, few things will be clear. An India Pakistan match was a sport played between 2 nations & not 2 religions. Time to Q From where does this fake #MuslimsUnderAttack came in picture? Is it a designed orchestration by #IslamicTerrorismInUK?," X, 24 September 2022, 4:23 PM, <https://twitter.com/OFBJPUK/status/1573694522097278977?s=20>.

In May 2023, the *Daily Mail* published an article claiming that UK security sources found the Leicester unrest to have been “stoked by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Hindu nationalist party”.¹¹⁹ OFBJP UK denied on Twitter that Modi or the BJP played such a role in Leicester, claiming instead that “the key instigators were Islamic Extremist in Leicester.”¹²⁰ As such, OFBJP UK have repeatedly portrayed Muslims as “extremists” that targeted Hindus through acts of violence in Leicester, while disavowing any notion of Muslim victimhood. The role of Hindutva ideologies in the 2022 Leicester disturbances, as well as OFBJP UK’s attempts to influence the 2019 General Election, including in Leicester, are discussed later in this report.

Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK)

The VHP is the cultural wing of the RSS¹²¹ that operates in India and globally. According to its UK website, “in each country, the local organisation works independently in pursuit of the objectives of the VHP in harmony with the laws of that country”.¹²² Its stated objectives include promoting Hindu Dharma (religious duties) and culture, promoting interfaith relationships, and “working to create an effective voice for [the] Hindu community world-wide”. The VHP (UK) is headquartered in Leicester and has numerous branches nationwide.

The VHP in India is notorious for its Hindu nationalist and anti-Muslim agenda. The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) designated the VHP as a “militant religious organisation” for many years.¹²³ Its UK website lauds M.S. Golwalkar, one of the VHP’s founders: “the second Sarsanghchalak [leader] of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)... he inspired millions of youths to work selflessly, for the upliftment of the Hindu society.”¹²⁴ Golwalkar’s admiration of Nazi Germany and hatred of India’s religious minority communities, especially Christians and Muslims, has been discussed earlier in this report.

In India, the VHP played an integral role in the demolition of the Babri Masjid on 6 December 1992. Hindutva activists claimed that the mosque, located in Ayodhya in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, was built on the site of a temple marking the birthplace of the Lord Rama. Having laid the foundation stone for a new temple in November 1989, where the Babri Masjid stood, the VHP mobilised a rally at the mosque in December 1992. VHP and BJP leaders addressed a crowd of nearly 150,000 people, after which those present proceeded to storm and destroy the 464-year-old structure.¹²⁵ Hindutva mobs then ransacked the homes and shops of local Muslim residents, as well as other nearby mosques, murdering 18 Muslims in the process. This led to riots across India in which around 2,000 people were killed, predominantly Muslims. In a 1994 article for the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* entitled, “The Vishva Hindu Parishad and the Roots of Hindu Militancy”, James G. Lochtefeld, Professor of Religion at Carthage College, Wisconsin in the United States, wrote:

119. Abul Taher and Nicholas Pyke, “Violent Ethnic Clashes in Leicester Last Year Were Stoked by Modi’s Hindu Nationalist Party,” *Daily Mail*, 13 May 2023, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12081129/Violent-ethnic-clashes-Leicester-year-stoked-Modis-Hindu-nationalist-party.html?ito=native_share_article-top. (It is important to note that no other major media organisation in the UK reported this claim.)

120. OFBJP UK (@OFBJPUK), “Violent ethnic clashes in Leicester has no connection to Modi or BJP. The truth is blatant, the key instigators were Islamic Extremist in Leicester. Let us reiterate what @SuellaBraverman said regarding Islamic extremism & risk related the same in UK.” X, 14 May 2023, 5:06 PM, <https://twitter.com/ofbjpuk/status/1657779450765770752?s=46&t=9NgcD6mvDG8SDdG-Vnow4Q>.

121. “Factsheet: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS),” *The Bridge Initiative*, 18 May 2021, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-rashtriya-swayamsevak-sangh-rss/>.

122. “About VHP” VHP, <https://vhp.org.uk/about-vhp/>.

123. “Factsheet: Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA),” *The Bridge Initiative*, 25 May 2023, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-vishwa-hindu-parishad-of-america-vhpa/>.

124. “Founders of VHP” VHP, <https://vhp.org.uk/about-vhp/founders-vh/>.

125. “Babri Masjid: The Timeline of a Demolition,” *The Wire*, 6 December 2021, <https://thewire.in/communalism/babri-masjid-the-timeline-of-a-demolition>.

“The most prominent organization behind the demolition was the [VHP]... together with their allies in the [BJP]... both of these groups are unabashedly, even militantly Hindu, and claim to be standing up for the rights of Hindus against a series of governments whose “preferential treatment” of minorities - in particular, Muslims - had made Hindus second-class citizens in their “own” country.”¹²⁶

Another incident of the VHP's involvement in mass violence against Muslims was the Gujarat pogrom, which occurred in 2002 following a deadly train fire in Godhra that resulted in the deaths of 59 Hindu pilgrims.¹²⁷ An inquiry carried out by the Concerned Citizens Tribunal-Gujarat 2002 concluded¹²⁸ that the fire was an accident, however, the narrative promoted by Hindu nationalists at the time was that Muslims had targeted the Hindu pilgrims. This accusation resulted in large-scale riots targeting Muslims in the state, involving the destruction of homes, killing of individuals, and raping of women.

The UK government conducted an inquiry into the 2002 Gujarat pogroms in which almost 1,000 died (primarily Muslims), as well as the destruction of around 20,000 Muslim homes and businesses, and 360 places of worship.¹²⁹ The inquiry¹³⁰ described¹³¹ the events as a “systematic campaign of violence” which had “all the hallmarks of ethnic cleansing.” It also found that the violence was “planned, possibly months in advance” by the VHP and that “the VHP and its allies acted with the support of the [BJP] state Government” led by then-Chief Minister of Gujarat and current Indian PM, Narendra Modi.¹³² The inquiry noted: “As an architect of the BJP's Hindu nationalist agenda which it has pursued since it came to power in 1995, [Modi] is a believer in the VHP's ideological motivation.”¹³³ A 2023 *BBC* documentary on the 2002 riots claimed¹³⁴ that Modi had “prevented the police from acting to stop violence targeted at Muslims and cited sources as saying Modi had specifically ordered authorities not to intervene.” In response to the *BBC* documentary, the Modi government branded it as propaganda and denied all allegations.

The VHP is directly involved in the current wave of communal violence in India. For instance, in August 2023, the VHP and its youth wing, the Bajrang Dal¹³⁵, organised a demonstration that reached Nuh, a district in the state of Haryana. Nuh is located under 100 km from India's capital city, New Delhi, and has a majority Muslim population of 77%. Protestors brandished weapons such as guns and chanted Islamophobic slogans, provoking Muslim counter-protestors to throw stones and burn vehicles. This triggered widespread anti-Muslim attacks,

126 James G. Lochtefeld, “The Vishva Hindu Parishad and the Roots of Hindu Militancy,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62, no. 2 (1994): 587–602, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1465279>.

127. Christophe Jaffrelot, “Communal Riots in Gujarat: The State at Risk?” *Heidelberg Papers in South Asian and Comparative Politics* no. 17 (July 2003), <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volltextserver/4127/1/hpsacp17.pdf>.

128. Anil Dharkar, “CRIME against HUMANITY: An Inquiry into the Carnage in Gujarat - Findings and Recommendations,” (Citizens for Justice and Peace, 2002), <https://www.sabrang.com/tribunal/tribunal2.pdf>.

129. “India Blocks BBC Documentary on Modi's Role in Gujarat Riots.” *Al Jazeera*, 21 January 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/1/21/india-asks-youtube-twitter-to-block-links-of-bbc-film-on-modi-gujarat-riots>.

130. Rana Ayyub (@RanaAyyub), “For me, the revelational and damaging part of the BBC documentary is former UK foreign secretary Jack Straw speaking on record for the first time about the finding of his own officials in Gujarat during the 2002 anti-muslim pogrom,” X, 19 January 2023, 7:41 AM, <https://twitter.com/RanaAyyub/status/1615977673855225858>.

131. “India Blocks BBC Documentary on Modi's Role in Gujarat Riots.” *Al Jazeera*, 21 January 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/1/21/india-asks-youtube-twitter-to-block-links-of-bbc-film-on-modi-gujarat-riots>.

132. Hartosh Singh Bal, “Full Text | UK Govt Inquiry Says VHP Planned to ‘Purge Muslims’ in 2002 Riots, Acted with Guj Govt's Support,” *The Wire*, 24 January 2023, <https://thewire.in/communalism/full-text-bbc-documentary-gujarat-riots-modi-uk-report>.

133. *Ibid.*

134. *Ibid.*

135. Nistula Hebbar, “Bajrang Dal | The aggressive arm of Hindutva,” *The Hindu*, 5 August 2023, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/bajrang-dal-the-aggressive-arm-of-hindutva/article67162932.ece>.

including near Nuh in the city of Gurugram, in which a Hindu mob set a mosque ablaze and murdered its 22-year-old Imam.¹³⁶ Following the deadly episode, the local BJP government in Haryana systematically bulldozed the homes and shops of hundreds of Muslims it claimed to be culpable in communal clashes, many of whom were also arrested.¹³⁷

In the wake of the disturbances in Leicester in September 2022, the VHP (UK) wrote a letter to the then-Prime Minister, Liz Truss, alleging that “a large number of Hindus of Leicester, their places of worship, their cultural and religious symbols have been wantonly targeted and damaged by Islamic extremists and hoodlums.”¹³⁸ In this regard, the VHP have propagated a false narrative that blames Muslims exclusively for the unrest, which neglects the role of Hindu nationalists in provoking the violence, as discussed extensively in this report. The letter also claimed that “the riots are merely the most recent manifestation of Islamic extremism which has hurt [the] UK (and other countries) over the last several decades.” Such vilifying rhetoric depicts Muslims as a grave threat to society given the apparent prevalence of “extremism” within Muslim communities. The VHP (UK)’s mischaracterisation of events in Leicester plays on harmful Islamophobic tropes and may thus only heighten communal divisions in the city.

Sewa UK

Sewa UK is a branch of the Sewa International, the global welfare wing of the RSS.¹³⁹ Sewa was established in India in 1989 and is currently active in over 25 countries.¹⁴⁰ Its self-proclaimed purpose is “to engage the Indian Diaspora (NRI) worldwide... [and to encourage] these people to remain connected with Indian roots through contribution to humanitarian causes locally and in India”, particularly natural disasters and crises such as COVID-19.¹⁴¹ While its purported humanitarian objectives appear noble, it has been accused of funding RSS projects across India¹⁴² and masterminding other illicit activities, namely the trafficking of children from north east India.¹⁴³

The organisation has a long history of bankrolling the Hindu nationalist movement in India. For example, Sewa International was exposed by a coalition of South Asian organisations in the UK for allegedly diverting relief funds raised for the 2001 Gujarat earthquake and channelling them to Hindutva organisations responsible for orchestrating the violence in Gujarat in 2002.¹⁴⁴ Following the revelations, Lord Adam Patel, a reputable businessman and Life Peer that was born and raised in Gujarat who passed away in 2019, resigned as a patron of Sewa International in August 2002.¹⁴⁵ He labelled Sewa International “a front

136. “Imam Killed after Hindu Mob Attacks Mosque in India’s Gurugram,” *Al Jazeera*, 1 August 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/1/imam-killed-after-hindu-mob-attacks-mosque-in-indias-gurugram>.

137. Alishan Jafri, “Muslim Homes, Shops Bulldozed; over 150 Arrested in Nuh in India’s Haryana,” *Al Jazeera*, 7 August 2023. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/7/vengeance-muslim-homes-shops-bulldozed-150-arrested-in-indias-haryana>.

138. Vishva Hindu Parishad - VHP (@VHPDigital), “We requested @10DowningStreet @trussliz to urgently take suitable action against the continued violence against Hindus in Leicester and Birmingham by Islamic extremists and hoodlums: @AlokKumarLIVE,” X, 21 September 2022, 11:29 AM, <https://twitter.com/VHPDigital/status/1572533538859405313>.

139. Neha Dixit (@nehadixit123), “Dear NRIs, Please don’t donate to Sewa International for Covid relief. They work as the welfare wing of RSS. Apart from supporting BJP gov’t massive crimes including abandoning Indian citizens in this pandemic, they also traffic children from tribal areas to indoctrinate them.” X, 4 May 2021, 2:51 AM, <https://twitter.com/nehadixit123/status/1389397155752808449?s=20>.

140. “Sewa UK - Home,” Sewa UK, <https://sewauk.org/>.

141. “Sewa International - Who We Are,” Sewa International, 2021, <https://www.sewainternational.org/Who-We-Are>.

142. Raqib Hameed Naik, “Hindu Right-Wing Groups in US Got \$833,000 of Federal COVID Fund,” *Al Jazeera*, 2 April 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/2/hindu-right-wing-groups-in-us-got-833000-of-federal-covid-fund>.

143. Neha Dixit (@nehadixit123), “Link to my investigation from 2016 which has evidence and government documents to prove Sewa Bharti trafficks children from the North East.” X, 6 May 2021, 12:52 PM, <https://twitter.com/nehadixit123/status/1390273334936367104?s=20>

144. Amrit Wilson, “From Nagpur to Nairobi to Neasden – tracing global Hindutva,” *The Long View* 2, no. 3 (June 2020), <https://www.ihrc.org.uk/from-nagpur-to-nairobi-to-neasden-tracing-global-hindutva/>.

145. “Tributes Paid to Labour’s Lord Adam Patel of Blackburn,” *BBC News*, 30 May 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lancashire-48460510>.

for controversial militant Hindu organisations” and expressed that “I very much regret ever having been part of this racist organisation”.¹⁴⁶ Likewise, Awaaz South Asia Watch, a British advocacy organisation focusing on human rights in South Asia, has affirmed that Sewa International’s “main purpose is to raise funds for and support a distinct family of organisations associated with the extremist RSS”.¹⁴⁷ In April 2016, Conservative MP, Bob Blackman, received a donation of £2,000 from Sewa International to travel to India and “meet with [their] trustees, volunteers and political figures”.¹⁴⁸ Blackman’s well-documented links to a network of Hindu nationalist organisations in the UK have been explored throughout this report.

Param Shakti Peeth of UK

Param Shakti Peeth (PSP) was established in 1992 and, according to its website, “has been working to mainstream the “marginalized” members of the society... and mitigate other socio-economic inequalities prevailing in India that are detrimental to inclusive development and also impede the growth of the nation as a whole.”¹⁴⁹ Among the charitable objectives of PSP’s UK branch are facilitating education opportunities, promoting knowledge and understanding of Hinduism among both Hindus and non-Hindus, and encouraging interfaith harmony.¹⁵⁰

One of PSP’s founders is Sadhvi Rithambara, who is also the founder-chairperson of the Durga Vahini organisation, the women’s wing of the VHP, and has a long and well-documented history of Islamophobia.¹⁵¹ Rithambara was present at the 1992 Babri Masjid demolition and was arrested for her role in inciting nationalist violence, including the subsequent riots in which nearly 2,000 Muslims were killed.¹⁵² The Liberhan Commission, which was authorised by the Indian Government to investigate the demolition and subsequent unrest, concluded in its inquiry in 2009 that Rithambara was one of those responsible for leading India “to the brink of communal discord”. Indeed, in the aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition, historian Tanika Sarkar wrote: “The audio-cassette speeches of Sadhvi Rithambara, a women ascetic of the VHP, were the single most powerful instrument for whipping up anti-Muslim violence.”¹⁵³ Moreover, Rithambara has been arrested on other occasions, including in 1995 for a speech in the city of Indore, in which she vilified Christians and called Mother Teresa a “magician”, leading to 169 Hindu nationalists being arrested for arson attacks targeting the Christian community. She was again arrested in 2008 for attempting to hold a public rally instigating communal tensions in Jammu, a city in the disputed region of Kashmir.¹⁵⁴

146. Pieter Friedrich, “Twitter Gives Millions to ‘Welfare Wing’ of India’s RSS Paramilitary,” *Baaz News*, 12 May 2021, <https://www.baaznews.org/p/twitter-donates-millions-sewa-international-rss>.

147. Ibid.

148. Nafeez Ahmed, “Conservative MP Blaming ‘Islamist Extremists’ for Leicester Violence Funded by Organisations Tied to Hindutva Militants,” *Byline Times*, 27 September 2022, <https://bylinetimes.com/2022/09/27/conservative-mp-blaming-islamist-extremists-for-leicester-violence-funded-by-organisations-tied-to-hindutva-militants/>.

149. “About Us | Non-Profit Organisation | Non-Government,” VatsalyaGram, 30 April 2021, <https://vatsalyagram.org/about-us/>.

150. “PARAM SHAKTI PEETH of UK - Charity 1178957,” GOV.UK, <https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/5112782/governing-document>.

151. “Our Founders | Fundraising for NGO | NGO Donation,” VatsalyaGram, 4 May 2021, <https://vatsalyagram.org/our-founders/>.

152. Areeb Ullah, “Calls to Ban ‘Divisive’ Hindu Activist Sadhvi Rithambara from UK Speaking Tour,” *Middle East Eye*, 16 September 2022, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/india-uk-modi-ally-sadhvi-rithambara-tour-ban-calls>.

153. Tanika Sarkar, “The Women of the Hindutva Brigade,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 25, no. 4 (December 1993): 16–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.1993.10416135>.

154. “Sadhvi Rithambara,” *Hindutva Profiles*, 12 September 2022, <https://hindutvaprofiles.com/member/sadhvi-rithambara/>.

PSP also organised Rithambara's planned September 2022 speaking tour of the UK.¹⁵⁵ She was due to appear at five events across the country, but the tour was cancelled after backlash from numerous advocacy organisations and MPs such as Sam Tarry and Yasmin Qureshi. Tarry wrote a letter to the then-Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, and the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, labelling Rithambara as "a hugely divisive figure, known for her xenophobic speeches and rhetoric, in particular against the Muslim community in India", adding: "I am deeply worried about the potential stoking of communal tensions, should her visit be allowed to progress."¹⁵⁶ This came just days after a church in the state of New Jersey in the United States cancelled a fundraising event at which Rithambara was due to feature, in the wake of outcry from civil society organisations such as the Indian American Muslim Council and Hindus for Human Rights.¹⁵⁷ In turn, PSP UK's ongoing association with a divisive figure such as Rithambara calls into question the organisation's affiliation with and support for Hindu nationalism.

INSIGHT UK

INSIGHT UK describes itself as "a social movement of the British Hindu and British Indian (BHI) communities... [working] on the issues affecting BHI communities through awareness, advocacy and campaign".¹⁵⁸ On its website, it purports to "have a strong [grassroots] presence in more than 100 towns and cities across the United Kingdom".¹⁵⁹ In recent years, there have been numerous examples of the organisation's use of inflammatory rhetoric on social media and propagation of Islamophobic narratives.

In January 2023, the *BBC* released a two-part documentary examining Narendra Modi's role in the 2002 Gujarat riots.¹⁶⁰ The documentary has been banned in India after the Modi-led BJP government exercised emergency powers to prevent clips of the documentary being shared on platforms such as Twitter and YouTube.¹⁶¹ Indian tax officials also raided the *BBC*'s offices in Delhi and Mumbai in February 2023 following the documentary's release.¹⁶² INSIGHT UK subsequently shared an anonymous petition¹⁶³ on their website calling for an independent investigation into the *BBC*, asserting that the documentary "has been strongly condemned for not meeting the highest standards of editorial impartiality... the contents and timing of the documentary presented, reflect a bias and malafide intentions".¹⁶⁴ However, the UK Government's inquiry holds Modi "directly responsible"¹⁶⁵ for the violence in Gujarat while he was the state's Chief Minister, indicating that INSIGHT UK's condemnation of the *BBC* is arguably unfounded.

155. Areeb Ullah, "Calls to Ban 'Divisive' Hindu Activist Sadhvi Rithambara from UK Speaking Tour," *Middle East Eye*, 16 September 2022, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/india-uk-modi-ally-sadhvi-rithambara-tour-ban-calls>.

156. Ibid.

157. Alisha Rahaman Sarkar, "New Jersey Church Cancels Event with 'Divisive' Hindu Supremacist after Backlash," *The Independent*, 12 September 2022, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/new-jersey-church-rithambara-babri-masjid-b2165102.html>.

158. "About Us," INSIGHT UK, <https://insightuk.org/about-us>.

159. Ibid.

160. Hannah Ellis-Petersen, "What Is the BBC Modi Documentary and Why Is It so Controversial?," *The Guardian*, 14 February 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/14/why-is-bbc-report-on-narendra-modis-handling-of-sectarian-riots-in-2002-so-controversial>.

161. "India Ban on BBC Modi Documentary 'Imperils Press Freedom,'" *Al Jazeera*, 25 January 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/1/25/india-banning-bbc-documentary-on-modi-attack-on-press-freedom>.

162. Hannah Ellis-Petersen and Jim Waterson, "BBC Offices in India Raided by Tax Officials amid Modi Documentary Fallout," *The Guardian*, 14 February 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/14/bbc-offices-india-raided-tax-officials-modi-documentary-fallout>.

163. "Call for an Independent Investigation into the BBC over Modi documentary," *change.org*, 22 January 2023, <https://www.change.org/p/call-for-an-independent-investigation-into-the-bbc-over-modi-documentary>.

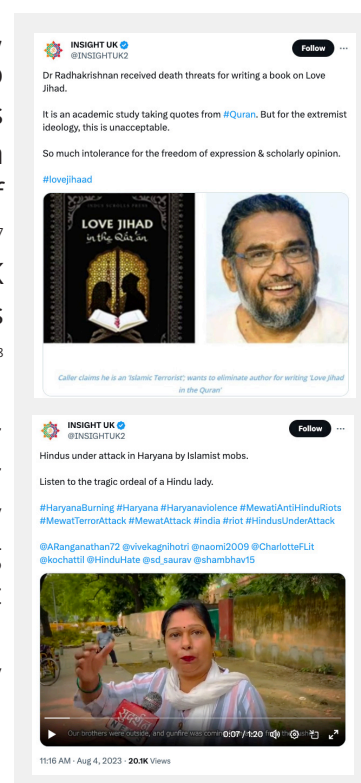
164. "BBC Documentary," INSIGHT UK, 5 February 2023, <https://insightuk.org/bbc-documentary>.

165. Hartosh Singh Bal, "Full Text | UK Govt Inquiry Says VHP Planned to 'Purge Muslims' in 2002 Riots, Acted with Guj Govt's Support," *The Wire*, 24 January 2023, <https://thewire.in/communalism/full-text-bbc-documentary-gujarat-riots-modi-uk-report>.

Furthermore, INSIGHT UK has repeatedly spread misinformation about the 2022 Leicester unrest. As but one example, the organisation issued a press release on 18 September 2022, saying: “The Hindu community has been a target of organised violence in Leicester over the past 20 days. It has suffered at the hands of extremist Muslims who have sought to cause deliberate harm, disruption and fear amongst Leicester’s thousands of citizens.”¹⁶⁶ As discussed in this report, Hindu nationalist elements played a significant role in the escalation of violence and civil disorder that was directed at the city’s Muslim communities.

Similarly, INSIGHT UK’s Twitter account is rife with Islamophobic propaganda:

- INSIGHT UK has sought to legitimise the “Love Jihad” conspiracy, which purports that Muslim men lure Hindu women into marriage in order to forcefully convert them to Islam. This has increased the taboo around interfaith marriages in India and led to arrests, as well as violent reprisals and killings of Muslim men in romantic relationships with Hindu women.¹⁶⁷ Despite there being no evidence for “Love Jihad”, INSIGHT UK has justified the propagation of the conspiracy on the grounds of “the freedom of expression and scholarly opinion”.¹⁶⁸
- On 4 August 2023, INSIGHT UK tweeted: “Hindus under attack in Haryana by Islamist mobs.”¹⁶⁹ As discussed earlier in this chapter, the violence in Haryana was triggered by a Hindutva march, following which a series of devastating anti-Muslim attacks were perpetrated by Hindu nationalist mobs under the local government’s watch.¹⁷⁰ A hashtag used in the tweet, “#HindusUnderAttack”, was also commonly used during the Leicester unrest in order to detract from the role of Hindutva and place the blame solely on Muslims.
- In a tweet on 14 August 2023, coinciding with the partition of India in 1947, INSIGHT UK described Pakistan as “a country that has now become to be recognised as the global hub of Islamist terrorism and religious persecution”.¹⁷¹ This racist language is frequent among Hindutva voices as it serves as a means to smear Pakistan and by extension, Muslims.



166. “Civil Disorder in Leicester,” INSIGHT UK, 18 September 2022, <https://insightuk.org/civil-disorder-in-leicester>.

167. Hannah Ellis-Petersen and Ahmer Khan, “‘They Cut Him into Pieces’: India’s ‘Love Jihad’ Conspiracy Theory Turns Lethal,” *The Guardian*, 21 January 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/21/they-cut-him-into-pieces-indias-love-jihad-conspiracy-theory-turns-lethal>.

168. INSIGHT UK (@INSIGHTUK2), “Dr Radhakrishnan received death threats for writing a book on Love Jihad. It is an academic study taking quotes from #Quran. But for the extremist ideology, this is unacceptable. So much intolerance for the freedom of expression & scholarly opinion. #lovejihaad,” X, 17 July 2021, 2:02 PM, <https://twitter.com/INSIGHTUK2/status/1416382851021344768?s=20>.

169. INSIGHT UK (@INSIGHTUK2), “Hindus under attack in Haryana by Islamist mobs. Listen to the tragic ordeal of a Hindu lady. #HaryanaBurning #Haryana #Haryanaviolence #MewatiAntiHinduRiots #MewatTerrorAttack #MewatAttack #india #riot #HindusUnderAttack,” 4 August 2023, 11:16 AM, <https://twitter.com/INSIGHTUK2/status/1687407239731019776?s=20>.

170. “Nuh: Mosque Set on Fire, Cleric Killed in Religious Clashes in India’s Haryana,” *BBC News*, 1 August 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-66368899>.

171. INSIGHT UK (@INSIGHTUK2), “14th August 1947 | Partition horrors remembrance day One of the darkest days in India’s history. The day when Bhārat Mātā (India) was partitioned. Millions of lives were lost and tens of millions were displaced as the British hastily drew arbitrary borders between India creating East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and West Pakistan. A country that has now become to be recognised as the global hub of Islamist terrorism and religious persecution. #Pakistan #PakistanIndependenceDay #India #IndependenceDay #IndependenceDay2023 #PartitionHorrorsRemembranceDay #Partition #British #Empire #Britishempire #Terrorism,” X, 14 August 2023, 10:33 PM, <https://twitter.com/INSIGHTUK2/status/1691201444139917313>.

Centre for Democracy, Pluralism and Human Rights (CDPHR)

CDPHR is an “organisation broadly working in the area of human rights... [that is] committed to advocate values of democracy and pluralism for a conducive environment for equality, dignity and justice”.¹⁷² Although CDPHR’s registered address is in the Indian capital city, New Delhi, it published “Fact-finding Report on Leicester Violence 2022: The Rise of Territorial Majoritarianism and Hinduphobia” in March 2023.¹⁷³ The report’s launch event in Parliament was chaired by Bob Blackman.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, the report is authored by Rashmi Samant and Chris Blackburn, both of whose credibility as voices on Hindu-Muslim issues is potentially questionable.

Samant resigned as President-Elect of Oxford University’s Students Union in February 2021 after a collection of racist, antisemitic, and transphobic social media posts she had authored surfaced.¹⁷⁵ In a statement on Facebook, she apologised for the hurt she had caused to her fellow students.¹⁷⁶ However, she soon claimed that she was forced to step down from her position due to her Hindu faith: “My historic election victory rapidly transformed into a distressing nightmare of bullying, harassment, & threats. It was declared that “Oxford students are not ready for a Hindu President”, compelling me to step down from my rightfully elected position.”¹⁷⁷ She subsequently released a book entitled, “A Hindu in Oxford”, which documents her self-proclaimed struggle.

Oxford India Society, Oxford Hindu Society, and Oxford South Asian Society issued a joint statement following Samant’s resignation, saying:

“Although the student body voted for Ms Samant because of the pledges on her manifesto, ultimately, her insensitive remarks about other minority groups and refusal to accept responsibility for her actions are what prompted calls for her resignation. We reiterate that these calls did not have anything to do with the fact that she is Indian or a Hindu or a woman.”¹⁷⁸

Similarly, Samant’s purportedly racist and anti-Muslim sentiments are underscored by her social media activity. This ranges from alleging a siege of Hindus in Leicester by “Muslim community fanatics”,¹⁷⁹ to peddling dangerous and dehumanising tropes about Islam and Muslims,¹⁸⁰ to retweeting a post describing Nuh as “the most backward district in all of India” because it has a majority Muslim population.¹⁸¹

172. “Home,” Centre for Democracy, Pluralism and Human Rights, <https://www.cdphr.org/>.

173. Rashmi Samant and Chris Blackburn, “Fact Finding Report on Leicester Violence 2022: The Rise of Territorial Majoritarianism and Hinduphobia” (Centre for Democracy, Pluralism and Human Rights, 23 March 2023), <https://www.cdphr.org/Report-Final.pdf>.

174. CDPHR (@cdphr), “On March 23rd, 2023, we published a report on human rights concerning the 2022 Leicester violence. The report details the emergence of territorial majoritarianism and hinduphobia in the UK prior to, during, and after the violence.” X, 23 March 2023, 6:01 PM, <https://twitter.com/cdphr/status/1638964307542040581?s=20>.

175. “Rashmi Samant Resigns as Oxford Student Union President-Elect amidst Row over Her Past Remarks,” *The Indian Express*, 18 February 2021, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/rashmi-samant-resigns-as-oxford-student-union-president-elect-amidst-row-over-her-past-remarks-7194086/>.

176. “Rashmi Samant Claims She Resigned as Oxford Student Union Head due to Cyberbullying,” *The News Minute*, 27 February 2021, <https://www.thenewsminute.com/karnataka/rashmi-samant-claims-she-resigned-oxford-student-union-head-due-cyberbullying-144309>.

177. Rashmi Samant (@RashmiDVS), “What doesn’t kill you only makes you stronger! At 22 years of age, as the first Indian Female President of the Oxford University Students Union, my historic election victory rapidly transformed into a distressing nightmare of bullying, harassment, & threats,” X, 5 August 2023, 4:48 PM, <https://twitter.com/RashmiDVS/status/1687853092195479552?s=20>.

178. Oxford India Society (@oxfordInd), “Joint Statement by the Oxford India Society, Oxford Hindu Society & Oxford South Asian Society to Address the Recent Coverage of the Ex-SU President-Elect,” X, 21 March 2021, 6:31 PM, <https://twitter.com/oxfordind/status/1373703908900499460?s=46&t=9NgcD6mvDG8SDdG-Vnow4Q>.

179. Rashmi Samant (@RashmiDVS), “Hindu Mandir Vandalised in Leicester by Muslim community fanatics. They have burt the religious flags and have been trying to keep Hindus hostage inside including little children. Cars and other Hindu owned properties have been toppled and vandalised too,” X, 18 September 2022, 10:31 AM, <https://twitter.com/RashmiDVS/status/1571431715901681664?s=20>.

180. Rashmi Samant (@RashmiDVS), “Shias don’t accept Sunnis as Muslim, Sunnis don’t accept Shias as Muslim, Sunnis and Shias together don’t accept Ahmadiyas as Muslim. Shias, Sunnis and Ahmadiyas don’t accept muslim women inside mosques or without hijabs,” X, 27 June 2023, 6:47 AM, <https://twitter.com/RashmiDVS/status/1673568616514551809?s=20>.

181. Eminent Intellectual (@total_woke_), “Do you know Nuh is the most backward district in all of India? Less than 2% Muslim women in Nuh become graduates? Muslim women in Mewat have the highest baby making rate in all of India? Population grows 3%+ every year? In most parts Nuh is 100% Muslim?” X, 2 August 2023, 9:36 AM, https://twitter.com/total_woke_/status/1686657274625024000?s=20.

Most alarming, however, is an Instagram photo posted on Samant's account on 10 March 2022 in which she is posing beside Yogi Adityanath, the Chief Minister of the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh.¹⁸² Adityanath faces criminal charges of attempted murder, vandalising a place of worship, and rioting dating back to 1999, and was imprisoned for 11 days in 2007 for inciting communal violence in Uttar Pradesh.¹⁸³ A 2017 piece in the *Washington Post* described him as “a controversial and deeply divisive figure [known] for his militant, misogynistic and anti-Muslim rhetoric”.¹⁸⁴ In one speech, he vowed: “If one Hindu girl marries a Muslim man, then we will take 100 Muslim girls in return... If they [Muslims] kill one Hindu man, then we will kill 100 Muslim men.”¹⁸⁵ Among numerous other inflammatory remarks by Adityanath is that “Muslims did no favour to India by staying here” following the country's partition in 1947.¹⁸⁶ As such, given her public association with Adityanath, Samant's alleged Islamophobia should come as little surprise.



The reliability of Samant's co-author of the CF DPR report on Leicester, Chris Blackburn, is also a concern. Blackburn is a UK-based political analyst, with a particular focus on South Asia. Blackburn endorsed the Henry Jackson Society's report on the Leicester disturbances and in turn, its conclusion that the involvement of Hindutva constitutes a “false narrative”.¹⁸⁷ As another example, in an article published in March 2023, Blackburn writes:

*“Communalism has certainly morphed into a different beast after 9/11. The rise of Pakistan-based radical Islamism since the 1990s, often promoted by the Pakistani government itself to divide India, has been the main cause behind the tension between India's diverse religions. Terror attacks and individual cruelty from India's Muslim radical population have poisoned the well in India. Islamophobia is on the rise, but often due to bad behaviour from India's radicals. A fact that often gets omitted.”*¹⁸⁸

With this, Blackburn absolves the BJP Government of any role in heightened communal tensions and Islamophobic violence in India, and even goes so far as to blame Indian Muslims for their own victimisation. Later in the article, he asserts: “As India heads toward a general election in 2024, it is time that the Western press recognises modern India, and the achievements delivered by its Prime Minister Narendra Modi.” Yet, he dismisses “scathing and personal” coverage of Modi and, in the process, Modi's complicity in India's ongoing genocide of its Muslim population.¹⁸⁹ It should come as little surprise, then, that Blackburn was “given an honorary letter to acknowledge his work on security and international relations” by Modi in 2022.¹⁹⁰

182. Rashmi Samant (@rashmi_in_oxford), “📸”, Instagram photo, 10 March 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/Ca6W0ktvwTB/>.

183. Michael Safi, “Controversial Hindu Priest Chosen as Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister,” *The Guardian*, 19 March 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/19/uttar-pradesh-yogi-adityanath-hindu-priest-chief-minister>.

184. Nilanjana Bhowmick, “Meet the Militant Monk Spreading Islamophobia in India,” *The Washington Post*, 24 March 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2017/03/24/meet-the-militant-monk-spreading-islamophobia-in-india/>.

185. Michael Safi, “Controversial Hindu Priest Chosen as Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister,” *The Guardian*, 19 March 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/19/uttar-pradesh-yogi-adityanath-hindu-priest-chief-minister>.

186. “Yogi Adityanath: ‘Muslims Did No Favour to India by Staying Here’” *BBC News*, 5 February 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-51382414>.

187. Chris Blackburn (@CJBdingo25), “The @HJS_Org report is out into the unrest in #Leicester by @CharlotteFLit. It's excellent. The sophisticated RSS-Bus hoax that was debunked by @ainajkhan was compared with Muslim activists car pooling. No Hindutva or RSS involvement.” X, 4 November 2022, 8:01 AM, <https://twitter.com/cjbdingo25/status/1588441373937893376?s=20>.

188. Chris Blackburn, “Is the Western Press Hostile to India's Rise?,” *Global Order*, 14 March 2023, <https://www.globalorder.live/post/is-the-western-press-hostile-to-india-s-rise>.

189. Mobashra Tazamal, “Is a Genocide of Muslims Underway in India?,” (The Bridge Initiative, October 2022), <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Is-a-genocide-of-Muslims-underway-in-India.pdf>.

190. “Chris Blackburn,” LinkedIn Profile, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/chris-blackburn-924ab834/>.

Given this history of inflammatory and biased statements, it is arguable that neither Samant nor Blackburn can be expected to provide an objective analysis of events in Leicester. Indeed, the report itself is fraught with dubious conclusions and untruths, such as:

- *“Symptoms of territorial ethnic cleansing were found through the analysis of the different slogans and speeches made by the majority community of East Leicester and the temporary displacement of Hindu community as a result of the unrest.”* As discussed later in the report, Leicestershire Police found no such evidence of the displacement of Hindu families from Leicester, much less evidence of “territorial ethnic cleansing”.
- *“Institutional Hinduphobia and bias was deduced through the analysis of the reporting of the Leicester unrest by the media houses BBC and the Guardian when compared to the verified police reports, witness accounts and corroborating reports from think tanks.”* Such claims are unfounded. Rather, the British media’s reporting of both the unrest in Leicester in 2022 and of anti-Muslim violence in India is worryingly characterised by the “repeated omission of Muslims as targets... the use of factual but incomplete descriptions leaves open the question of who the perpetrators and victims are”.¹⁹¹
- *“... the Hindu community categorises as the most law-abiding and least rabble-rousing religious community in the UK factoring to 0% of the prison population... The Muslim community on the other hand constitutes 4% of the general population but 17% of the prison population. The Christian community leads the tally by constituting about 45% of the prison population and 61% of the general population.”* The selective use of such statistics appears to highlight the authors’ intent to demonise Muslims as the driving force behind the violence in Leicester, despite the role of Hindutva mobs having been well-documented. Taken in isolation, the statistics also criminalise other religious communities and imply an absence of criminality within Hindu communities in the UK, which is racist and highly misleading.

191. Faisal Hanif, “Leicester Riots: Are Muslims Ever Allowed to Be Victims in UK Media?” *Middle East Eye*, 13 September 2022, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/uk-leicester-riots-muslims-victims-media-allowed-are>.

Case study:

THE 2022 LEICESTER RIOTS



Case study: The 2022 Leicester riots

This section will explore, firstly, the ways in which underlying community tensions provided fertile ground for the unrest that ensued in Leicester in 2022, with a focus on the 2017-18 campaign to obstruct a Muslim community centre being established in the city's Belgrave area and the mobilisation of Hindu nationalist ideas in the period leading up to the 2019 UK General Election. These events demonstrate how the 2022 events did not exist in a vacuum; rather, there have been prior incidents that have caused strain amongst Leicester's Hindu and Muslim communities. The chapter will then examine how voices from both the UK and India used social media platforms to create narratives and make allegations as the events in Leicester unfolded. The analysis of the accounts will illustrate how outside influences within this digital ecosystem exacerbated tensions through the spread of disinformation. The chapter will end with an analysis of the Government's response to the Leicester unrest.

What happened during the unrest?

Excerpt from "Leicester Disturbances Between Hindus and Muslims: An Explainer", written by Dr Chris Allen for the Community Policy Forum (30 September 2022)¹⁹²

Since late-August 2022, violent confrontations between groups of Hindu and Muslim men have taken place in the city of Leicester. According to the mainstream media, the starting point for this was an international cricket match between India and Pakistan that took place on 28 August 2022.¹⁹³ Videos circulating on social media shortly after showed a large group of men – some carrying India flags – walking through parts of the city chanting "Death to Pakistan".¹⁹⁴ While doing so, a police officer and Sikh man were violently attacked, initial reports suggesting the latter being attacked for being mistakenly identified as Muslim.

A few nights later, more videos appeared on social media. One showed a group of men – one of whom was carrying a knife – running through a Hindu area of Leicester seemingly attacking people and property. Another showed a man pulling a religious flag from the front of a Hindu house. On the same night, a young Muslim man was confronted by a group of men who asked if he was Muslim before violently attacking him.

With tensions high, matters escalated on 17 September 2022 when a gathering of around 200 Hindu men subsequently marched through a Muslim-majority area in the east of the city.¹⁹⁵ Wearing masks, hoodies, and balaclavas, the men chanted "Jai Shri Ram" – translated as "Hail Lord Ram" – a phrase associated with Hindu nationalist (Hindutva) violence in India.

Following claims that some involved in the march had attacked Muslims, a large number of Muslim men began to gather in the area in response. Separated by police, a flag was forcibly removed from a Hindu mandir while bottles and other missiles were thrown between the two groups. The following evening saw further confrontation during which the outer wall of a mosque was graffitied and a Hindu flag burned.

192. Chris Allen, "Leicester Disturbances between Hindus and Muslims: An Explainer," *Community Policy Forum*, 30 September 2022, <https://communitypolicyforum.com/portfolio-item/leicester-disturbances-explainer/>.

193. Tom Mack, "Police Investigating Cricket Violence Want to Find These Men," *Leicester Mercury*, 8 September 2022, <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/police-issue-cctv-images-men-7562525>.

194. Hannah Dodd and Liam Buckler, "Huge Brawl Breaks out in UK Street as Mob Throw Punches after Cricket Match," *The Mirror*, 1 September 2022, <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/huge-brawl-breaks-out-uk-27886799>.

195. Aina J Khan and Mark Brown, "Police Call for Calm after 'Serious Disorder' Breaks out in Leicester," *The Guardian*, 18 September 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/sep/18/police-community-leaders-crowds-leicester>.

Aside from the mainstream media's emphasis on the August cricket match, a number of different sources in the city suggest relations between some of the city's Hindus and Muslims had been deteriorating for some time, exacerbated by a range of socio-political and socio-economic factors such as a decade of austerity measures and cuts to local services. The shift to violence seemed to occur in May 2022 when a young Muslim man was violently attacked by 30 Hindu men carrying bats and poles.¹⁹⁶ Subsequently hospitalised for a broken arm, the attack is said to have not only increased tensions but was also a precursor of what was to come.

“We cannot have a mosque in a Hindu area”

The rejection of the application for Belper Education Centre in January 2018 was arguably the first overt manifestation of Hindu-Muslim community tensions in Leicester. The application entailed the conversion of a vacant warehouse on Belper Street, Belgrave into a nursery and prayer space.¹⁹⁷ In February 2018, Leicester City Council's planning committee rejected the application on the grounds of concerns around noise pollution, traffic congestion, and parking issues on a narrow residential street. In response to these concerns, there were efforts taken by the applicants such as shortening the centre's planned open hours, and including provisions to control parking and the flow of traffic. Despite these amendments, the proposals were still rejected.¹⁹⁸ The council stated regarding its decision:

“The concerns regarding community cohesion, potential tensions between the proposed users and the residents or potential riots, a Muslim centre in close proximity to a temple and church and other issues relating to religion are not material planning considerations.”¹⁹⁹

When the proposals were initially put forth, the council received approximately 1,500 letters of objection to the project, many of which included anti-Muslim views and raised concerns around the establishment of a Muslim institution in an area with a sizeable Hindu population.²⁰⁰ For instance:

“We cannot have a mosque in a Hindu area, because we all know that they teach terrorism, we all know that there are extremists. We all know that our girls will not be safe when you have Muslim men in these areas. And we do not need a mosque near a temple. They can go into their area and [we] will stay in our area.”²⁰¹

As Shockat Adam, a Muslim community activist from Leicester, explained in a 2022 interview²⁰² on the *Byline Times* Podcast, designating particular areas as “Hindu” or “Muslim” ghettoises communities, which is particularly troubling in a city renowned as the most

196. Peter Osborne and Imran Mulla, “Leicester Riots: When Hindu Nationalism Came to Britain,” *Middle East Eye*, 20 September 2022, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/uk-leicester-riots-civil-war-hindu-nationalism>.

197. Dan Martin, “Decision Made on Muslim Education Centre & Prayer Room Plan,” *Leicester Mercury*, 1 February 2018, <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/plan-muslim-education-centre-prayer-1148416>.

198. Dan Martin, “Muslim Education Centre and Prayer Room Plans to Be REJECTED,” *Leicester Mercury*, 29 January 2018, <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/plans-muslim-education-centre-prayer-1117025>.

199. Dan Martin, “Decision Made on Muslim Education Centre & Prayer Room Plan,” *Leicester Mercury*, 1 February 2018, <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/plan-muslim-education-centre-prayer-1148416>.

200. Dan Martin, “Muslim Education Centre and Prayer Room Plans to Be REJECTED,” *Leicester Mercury*, 29 January 2018, <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/plans-muslim-education-centre-prayer-1117025>.

201. Adrian Goldberg, “The First Time Politics in Our City Was Played on Religious Grounds,” *Byline Times*, 21 September 2022, <https://bylinetimes.com/2022/09/21/the-first-time-politics-in-our-city-was-played-on-religious-grounds/>.

202. Ibid.

diverse in the UK.²⁰³ Adam also said that an elected official, off-the-record, called Belgrave a “Hindu area”, demonstrating that such ideas had infiltrated local political discourse and may have contributed to the council’s decision to reject the project application. Moreover, many objections on Leicester City Council’s website, like the above, were centred on Islamophobic stereotypes associating Muslims with violence, ‘extremism’, and ‘grooming gangs’.

Such stereotypes are also integral to Hindutva ideology which demonises Islam and Muslims as being inherently threatening to non-Muslim groups, particularly Hindus. A 2018 online petition, ‘Petition against Islamophobia – Prevent damaging community cohesion’, was signed by over 4,500 people and cited such concerns as being indicative of anti-Muslim prejudice.²⁰⁴ In an email to the Leicester City Mayor’s office, a local Muslim resident wrote in response to the Council’s decision:

“This clearly suggests a bias on the part of the council, as no matter what request has been put in and for whichever numbers of hours, the council flatly refused and is not willing to consider the application at all... We strongly feel that this decision and position is political and discriminatory against us because of the fact that we are a Muslim Centre and the majority of the objectors do not want a Muslim centre there.”²⁰⁵

Indeed, the number of objections to the project and the specific concerns expressed by objectors highlight the prevalence of Islamophobic sentiment. Significantly, many of the objectors were not from Leicester and instead had London addresses, demonstrating the role of voices from outside Leicester. This suggests that there may have been a concerted attempt to obstruct the project and preserve the Hindu character of Belgrave by preventing the establishment of a Muslim institution.

Mobilisation of Hindutva in the 2019 General Election

The December 2019 General Election - specifically, the contest for the Leicester East seat - has been described as “the first time that politics in our city was being played on religious grounds”.²⁰⁶ The Conservative Party candidate, Bhupen Dave (a Hindu), won 38.6% of the vote, losing narrowly to his Labour Party rival, Claudia Webbe.²⁰⁷ A leaflet that appeared to be in support of Dave was circulated across Leicester under the banner: “Operation Dharmic Vote” (ODV).²⁰⁸ According to the leaflet, “ODV is leading this non-party political campaign in the interests of the Indian-origin voters and of the Dharmic community in particular. By Dharmic community, we mean those whose spiritual roots are in Sanatan Dharma (Hindus), Jains, Sikhs and Buddhists.” The sub-heading on the leaflet’s front page was: “Will the Dharmic Community end up with Amrut or poison?” “Amrut”, a Sanskrit word which translates to “nectar”, referred to Dave, while Webbe was described as “poison” for her affiliation with the then-Labour Party Leader, Jeremy Corbyn, and supposed anti-India and anti-Hindu stance.

203. Asha Patel, “Leicester to Be Celebrated at Festival as ‘Most Diverse City,’” *Leicester Mercury*, 10 June 2021, <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/uks-most-diverse-city-leicester-5506545>.

204. “Petition against Islamophobia - PREVENT damaging community cohesion,” change.org, 26 February 2018, <https://www.change.org/p/leicester-city-council-petition-against-islamophobia-prevent-damaging-community-cohesion>.

205. *The original email and response from the Mayor’s office was shared anonymously with Community Policy Forum.*

206. Adrian Goldberg, “‘The First Time Politics in Our City Was Played on Religious Grounds,’” *Byline Times*, 21 September 2022, <https://bylinetimes.com/2022/09/21/the-first-time-politics-in-our-city-was-played-on-religious-grounds/>.

207. “Election Result for Leicester East (Constituency) - 2019 General Election,” UK Parliament, <https://members.parliament.uk/constituency/3570/election/397>.

208. Sunny Hundal (@sunny_hundal), “NEW: I’ve received copies of a leaflet doing rounds in Leicester, seen by locals as exacerbating sectarian tensions. The leaflet implies the Tory candidate is “amrut” (nectar) and Labour’s Claudia Webbe is “poison” as she is not ‘Dharmic’ (Hindu). More below,” X, 7 December 2019, 12:48 PM, https://twitter.com/sunny_hundal/status/1203295310719733761?s=20.

The leaflet's final page contained a table comparing the Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democrat parties, the first category of which asked whether each party held "a positive attitude towards India".²⁰⁹ Labour and the Liberal Democrats were rated unfavourably, whereas the Conservatives were marked as being supportive of India, including on Kashmir. Although Dave lost, the share of Conservative votes in Leicester East increased by 14.4%, compared to the previous General Election in June 2017, while Labour's share declined by 16.6%.²¹⁰ While it cannot be concluded that the ODV campaign caused this change, it can be assumed that ODV resonated with many of Leicester East's residents and that Hindutva and Islamophobic sentiments are increasingly prevalent in the area.

While ODV wasn't officially part of Dave's campaign, his friend, Mukesh Naker, was at the helm of ODV at the time of the 2019 General Election. Having been registered with the Electoral Commission in late-November 2019, Naker was listed as the organisation's 'responsible person'.²¹¹ He has admitted to being a Conservative Party member and, in 2015, coordinated a similar campaign in the Harrow East constituency.²¹² On this occasion, a leaflet was produced by Dharma Sewa Purvapaksha, a self-styled Dharmic campaign group founded by Naker.²¹³ The leaflet urged Harrow East's Hindu community to vote for incumbent Conservative MP, Bob Blackman, and not for Labour candidate, Uma Kumaran. The leaflet specifically cited the Labour Party's pledge to amend the Equality Act 2010 to outlaw caste-based discrimination.²¹⁴ Kumaran, herself a Hindu, was accused in the leaflet of branding British Hindus as "casteists", to which she responded by calling the leaflet "deeply divisive" and saying she was "appalled that my faith is being used against me".²¹⁵ Blackman, who was quoted in the leaflet as having said he would "commit to working with the Dharmic Community to see the repeal of this divisive clause", ultimately retained his seat.²¹⁶

In another instance, Blackman sponsored an event in Parliament on 4 February 2015 that launched the Dharmic Ideas Policy Foundation (DIPH).²¹⁷ UK Government Ministers and Conservative MPs, as well as "Hindu and Sikh intellectuals and activists", were invited to the event, which opened with a speech by Naker, DIPH's Communications Officer.²¹⁸ Thus, Naker evidently has a close political relationship with Blackman, whose ties to Hindu nationalists have been articulated in an earlier section throughout this report. In this regard, ODV was part of a wider, long-standing campaign by Naker and his allies to stoke inter-ethnic tensions in seats with a significant Hindu population, which played a role in last year's disturbances in Leicester.

Indeed, the contest for the Leicester East seat in December 2019 was a microcosm of the infiltration of Hindutva into British electoral politics, as a whole. In the run-up to the election, WhatsApp messages were circulated that urged British Hindus not to vote Labour, branding

209. Sunny Hundal (@sunny_hundal), "And here's the last page I have from this leaflet. At the top of their concerns: whether a political party is sufficiently pro - India," X, 7 December 2019, 2:16 PM, https://x.com/sunny_hundal/status/1203317390982955008?s=20.

210. "Election Result for Leicester East (Constituency) - 2019 General Election," UK Parliament, <https://members.parliament.uk/constituency/3570/election/397>.

211. Sunny Hundal, "The Campaigns Trying to Turn British Indians against Each Other," *openDemocracy*, 10 December 2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/campaigns-trying-turn-british-indians-against-each-other/>.

212. Ibid.

213. Sunny Hundal (@sunny_hundal), "This is astonishing. Tory MP in London playing Hindu divide-and-rule caste politics with leaflets for Hindus. Nasty," X, 4 May 2015, 7:47 PM, https://twitter.com/sunny_hundal/status/595298726064869376?s=20.

214. Siraj Dato, "Hindu Group Tells Voters to Back Tories Because They Wouldn't Legislate against Caste Discrimination," *BuzzFeed*, 6 May 2015, <https://www.buzzfeed.com/sirajdatoo/hindu-group-tells-voters-to-back-tories-because-they-dont-wa>.

215. Ibid.

216. Ibid.

217. "Dharmic Ideas Policy Foundation (DIPF) Launch At the House of Commons (British Parliament)," Pattni Connection, <http://pattniconnection.com/Events/DharmicIdeasFoundation-Jan2015-Pattni.html>.

218. Ibid.

the party “anti-India, anti-Hindu, and anti-Modi”. One message labelled those that do, or that are party members, as “traitors to their ancestral land, to their family and friends in India and to their cultural heritage”.²¹⁹ Such messages were accompanied by racist and Islamophobic videos of far-right figures, including one of Katie Hopkins²²⁰ at a protest in London against India’s occupation of Kashmir, in which she condemns the “Pakistani men” taking part and complains that “Islam is taking over my country”.²²¹ Moreover, the Overseas Friends of BJP (OFBJP) actively coordinated a campaign targeting 48 marginal Labour-Conservative seats by urging Indian constituents to vote Conservative, which would arguably increase the likelihood of an overall Conservative victory in the election.²²² The Conservative Party, led by Boris Johnson, ultimately won the election with an 80-seat majority in the House of Commons.²²³

Tanmanjeet Singh Desi, the Labour MP for Slough and a Sikh of Punjabi descent that was targeted by the OFBJP, tweeted: “I urge my Hindu and Sikh British compatriots: don’t fall for the divisive tactics of religious hardliners, trying to wedge apart our cohesive community, circulating lies on WhatsApp.”²²⁴ Likewise, in an opinion piece for *The Guardian*, Baroness Shami Chakrabarti, a Labour Peer in the House of Lords and a Hindu with Indian roots, wrote: “How irresponsible for any group with self-proclaimed primary allegiance to politics elsewhere in the world to feed such smears and conspiracies by actively intervening in an election here in the UK.”²²⁵

This campaign was largely waged in response to the passing of an emergency motion on Kashmir at the annual Labour Party Conference in September 2019. The previous month, the Government of Indian PM Modi revoked Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, which granted the state of Jammu and Kashmir special autonomous status.²²⁶ The motion stated: “There is a major humanitarian crisis taking place in the Kashmir region... Kashmir is a disputed territory and the people of Kashmir should be given the right of self-determination in accordance with UN resolutions”, and called for international observers to be allowed into the region.²²⁷ Corbyn himself tweeted in response to revocation of Article 370: “The situation in Kashmir is deeply disturbing. Human rights abuses taking place are unacceptable. The rights of the Kashmiri people must be respected and UN resolutions implemented.”²²⁸ Such concerns were echoed by human rights groups such as Amnesty International, which said: “The Indian government’s decision to revoke the special status of Jammu and Kashmir is likely to inflame tensions in the area and increase the risk of further human rights violations.”²²⁹

219. Haroon Siddique, “Divisive Tactics: WhatsApp Messages Urge Hindus to Vote against Labour,” *The Guardian*, 8 November 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/nov/08/british-hindus-urged-whatsapp-messages-vote-against-labour>.

220. “Factsheet: Katie Hopkins,” *The Bridge Initiative*, 7 August 2018. <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-katie-hopkins/>.

221. 5Pillars, “Far-right activist Katie Hopkins attended a protest in London today raising awareness about India’s ongoing occupation of Kashmir,” Facebook Video, 27 October 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2466497700052983>.

222. Rowland Manthorpe and Alexander J Martin, “General Election: Indian Nationalist Party BJP Supporters to Campaign in UK against Labour,” *Sky News*, 5 November 2019, <https://news.sky.com/story/general-election-indian-nationalist-party-bjp-supporters-to-campaign-in-uk-against-labour-11854965>.

223. “Election Results 2019: Boris Johnson Hails ‘New Dawn’ after Historic Victory,” *BBC News*, 13 December 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-2019-50776671>.

224. Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi MP (@TanDhesi), “I urge my Hindu and Sikh British compatriots: don’t fall for the divisive tactics of religious hardliners, trying to wedge apart our cohesive community, circulating lies on WhatsApp. They won’t silence the likes of me, who will speak up for human rights.” X, 7 November 2019, 10:33 PM, <https://twitter.com/tandhesi/status/1192570901671432193?>

225. Shami Chakrabarti, “British Hindus Voting for Labour Are Not ‘Traitors’ to India,” *The Guardian*, 6 December 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/dec/06/british-hindus-labour-india-bjp>.

226. “Article 370: India Strips Disputed Kashmir of Special Status,” *BBC News*, 5 August 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-49231619>.

227. “CONFERENCE ARRANGEMENTS COMMITTEE: REPORT 5 to Conference 2019,” The Labour Party, 25 September 2019, <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/CAC-5-FINAL.pdf>.

228. Jeremy Corbyn (@jeremycorbyn), “The situation in Kashmir is deeply disturbing. Human rights abuses taking place are unacceptable. The rights of the Kashmiri people must be respected and UN resolutions implemented.” X, 11 August 2019, 10:17 AM, <https://twitter.com/jeremycorbyn/status/1160480451066306560?>

229. “India: Revoking special status of Jammu and Kashmir likely to inflame tensions,” *Amnesty International UK*, 5 August 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/india-revoking-special-status-jammu-and-kashmir-likely-inflame-tensions>.

Likewise, the deputy director of Human Rights Watch's Asia Division, Meenakshi Ganguly, urged the Indian government "to step back, and fast", "unless it wants to inflame tensions in Kashmir for another generation".²³⁰

Having said this, more than 100 Indian groups wrote to Jeremy Corbyn condemning the passing of the Kashmir motion at the Labour Party Conference.²³¹ Given that Pakistan has also laid claim to the region since the partition of India in 1947²³², WhatsApp messages alleged that "the Labour Party is now the mouth-piece of the Pakistani government".²³³ Corbyn's successor, Keir Starmer, has shifted Labour's policy on Kashmir, arguing that "Kashmir is a bilateral issue for India and Pakistan to resolve peacefully" and that the UK should not get involved.²³⁴ However, Hindutva voices had already exploited the Kashmir issue and the Labour Party's initial response to it, generating a pro-Muslim and anti-Hindu narrative that divided British Hindu communities in their attitudes towards the party.²³⁵

Controversies around the Modi government's revocation of Article 370 also manifested in Leicester. On the one hand, there were pro-Kashmir protests in the city²³⁶ and Claudia Webbe, a close ally of Corbyn, was vocal in her support of Kashmir's right to self-determination.²³⁷ This led to members of the OFBJP "canvassing on the streets of Leicester, recommending that all the [Hindus] should not vote for Labour because a vote for Labour would be a vote for Muslims".²³⁸ Furthermore, a group of six Hindu Labour councillors serving in Leicester East wrote a letter to Corbyn on the eve of the 2019 General Election, expressing their "deep and overwhelming anger about the direction the Labour Party is moving in in respect of the Hindu community" and that "we are currently considering whether we can any longer remain in the Labour Party that has become both anti-Hindu and anti-Indian".²³⁹ This demonstrates that the political and communal divide in Leicester permeated the city for a number of years prior to the events that occurred in 2022.

The role of social media disinformation

An extensive digital ecosystem encompassing social media influencers, organisations, and anonymous social media accounts, from both the UK and India, inflamed tensions in Leicester in 2022. During the height of the disturbances, there was a campaign of social media disinformation by Hindutva voices. For example, Nupur J Sharma, editor-in-chief of *OpIndia*,

230. Meenakshi Ganguly, "India Needs to Step Back in Kashmir," *Human Rights Watch*, 12 August 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/08/12/india-needs-step-back-kashmir>.

231. Patrick Wintour, "Kashmir: Labour Shifts Policy after Backlash by Indian-Heritage Voters," *The Guardian*, 12 November 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/nov/12/kashmir-labour-shifts-policy-after-backlash-by-indian-heritage-voters>.

232. "Article 370: What Happened with Kashmir and Why It Matters," *BBC News*, 5 August 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-49234708>.

233. Haroon Siddique, "Divisive Tactics: WhatsApp Messages Urge Hindus to Vote against Labour," *The Guardian*, 8 November 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/nov/08/british-hindus-urged-whatsapp-messages-vote-against-labour>.

234. "Keir Starmer Shifts Labour Party Policy on Kashmir in Bid to Woo Indian Voters," *Middle East Eye*, 30 April 2020, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/uk-labour-keir-starmer-changes-stance-kashmir-indian-voters>.

235. Sunny Hundal, "The Anti-Labour Plot to Polarise Hindus over Kashmir," *OpenDemocracy*, 13 November 2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/anti-labour-plot-polarise-hindus-over-kashmir/>.

236. Asha Patel, "How Leicester Is Responding to 'Humanitarian Crisis' in Kashmir," *Leicester Mercury*, 10 September 2019, <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/how-leicester-responding-humanitarian-crisis-3301428>.

237. Claudia Webbe MP (@ClaudiaWebbe), "Solidarity To all Kashmiris in Leicester East, Leicester, across the UK and throughout the world The right to basic freedoms, self-determination and self-governance is a human right I stand with you today and everyday in the pursuit of peace and justice #KashmirSolidarityDay," X, 5 February 2021, 10:58 AM, <https://twitter.com/ClaudiaWebbe/status/1357826001225580545>.

238. Adrian Goldberg, "The First Time Politics in Our City Was Played on Religious Grounds," *Byline Times*, 21 September 2022, <https://bylinetimes.com/2022/09/21/the-first-time-politics-in-our-city-was-played-on-religious-grounds/>.

239. Dan Martin, "Labour Councillors Accuse Jeremy Corbyn of Being 'Anti-Indian,'" *Leicester Mercury*, 11 December 2019, <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/labour-leicester-east-councillors-accuse-3632626>.

a right-wing news website based in India, tweeted: "I've been told by Hindu orgs in Leicester that several families (some say 200) have been displaced from Leicester and are unwilling to go back because they are scared of the violence by Islamists."²⁴⁰ Leicestershire Police replied to Sharma's tweet, stating that it was unaware of the displacement of Hindu families, which suggests her claims were fabricated.²⁴¹ At the time of writing, Sharma's tweet has been liked and retweeted almost 12,000 times and 5,000 times, respectively, highlighting the spread of such disinformation.



Sharma herself is a far-right Hindu propagandist and Islamophobe notorious for spreading anti-Muslim conspiracy theories.²⁴² In June 2022, she produced an article for *OpIndia* entitled: "'Islamophobia' does not exist: It's time to push for this 'politically incorrect' reality".²⁴³ In that article, she writes: "Nobody in their right mind can say that all Muslims are the enemy, however, their fear that Islam threatens their existence is not misplaced, given the mountain of evidence and the trail of blood that stand as a witness." Her claims on Twitter, where she has over half a million followers, were intended to substantiate the narrative that Muslims were responsible for instigating violence in Leicester, but were devoid of proven evidence.

Following the turmoil in September 2022, Sharma continued to involve herself in the Leicester story as she went on to interview British anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant activist, Tommy Robinson²⁴⁴, whom she described as the "one of [the] UK's foremost activists...talking about radical Islam and Islamism".²⁴⁵ In his interview, Robinson reinforced the Hindutva narrative, saying: "Pakistani Muslims are the aggressors... They are into selling heroin, they control drugs, they control violence", whereas Hindus are a "peaceful, peace-loving migrant community" that are victims of "oppression". Sharma subsequently cited the same statistic - for which she credits INSIGHT UK²⁴⁶ - that "about 200 [Hindu] families have been possibly displaced" from Leicester as a result of the violence. Robinson responded, claiming: "I've been inundated by English men who don't want to allow what's happening... saying, 'When are we going to Leicester?'... I'd bring hundreds of men to Leicester tomorrow [if the Hindu community asked for it]."²⁴⁷

In line with Sharma's claims, Charlotte Littlewood of the Henry Jackson Society²⁴⁸ asserted in an interview with GB News: "I have knowledge of at least six, potentially nine, families having left the area because of fear of violence. Some of them have now returned, but hide their outwardly Hindu symbols." She also concluded that she was "finding it hard to get hard

240. Nupur J Sharma, (@UnSubtleDesi), "I've been told by Hindu orgs in Leicester that several families (some say 200) have been displaced from Leicester and are unwilling to go back because they are scared of the violence by Islamists. Even if its 1 family displaced, it is a scathing indictment of @leicspolice," X, 22 September 2022, 4:35 AM, <https://twitter.com/UnSubtleDesi/status/1572791744609275905>.

241. Leicestershire Police (@leicspolice), "We are not aware of this. The area has been calm since Monday 19 Sept and our proactive policing continues to keep people safe. We have plans in place for upcoming festivals such as Navratri & Diwali. We would appreciate this being passed on to your Leicester contacts.," 22 September 2022, 8:53 AM, <https://twitter.com/leicspolice/status/1572856715372294144?s=20>.

242. "Nupur J Sharma," Hindutva Profiles, 23 March 2023, <https://hindutvaprofiles.com/member/nupur-j-sharma/>.

243. Nupur J Sharma, "Islamophobia Doesn't Exist: Time to Push for This 'Politically Incorrect' Reality," *OpIndia*, 14 June 2022, <https://www.opindia.com/2022/06/islamophobia-does-not-exist-time-to-push-for-politically-incorrect-reality/>.

244. "Factsheet: Tommy Robinson," *The Bridge Initiative*, 7 May 2021, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-tommy-robinson/>.

245. OpIndia English, "Nupur J Sharma Talks to Tommy Robinson about Leicester Violence, Islamism in UK, Hindus and More," YouTube Video, 31 December 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fx_8swDJJaE.

246. *The work of INSIGHT UK is discussed in the previous chapter of this report.*

247. Amardeep Singh Dhillon, "White and Hindu Supremacists Are a Match Made in Heaven," *Novara Media*, 23 February 2023, <https://novaramedia.com/2023/02/23/white-and-hindu-supremacists-are-a-match-made-in-heaven/>.

248. "Factsheet: Henry Jackson Society," *The Bridge Initiative*, 13 June 2018, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-henry-jackson-society/>.

evidence that this is Hindu nationalism. It's looking more and more like a territorial dispute particular to Leicester".²⁴⁹ Sharma retweeted Littlewood's interview, citing it as a reliable source of information despite Leicestershire Police having already debunked her claims.²⁵⁰ An *OpIndia* article also cited Littlewood in relation to the apparent displacement of Hindu families from Leicester²⁵¹ and within days, the article had been retweeted from *OpIndia's* page nearly 2,500 times.²⁵²

Notwithstanding the inaccuracy of these reports, Littlewood's work on Hindu-Muslim relations has been widely discredited, as has HJS's research as a whole (which is detailed previously in this report).²⁵³ As *Logically*, a fact-checking organisation seeking to tackle misinformation online, have observed: "The rise in Hindu nationalist influence has been accompanied by increasing communal rhetoric, driven not just by politicians and religious leaders on the ground but also by many media houses as well as right-wing influencers on social media."²⁵⁴ In this regard, the interaction between right-wing voices in the UK and India on social media illustrates the increasingly damaging impact of disinformation in relation to the disturbances in Leicester in 2022.

Besides disinformation, social media also played a prominent role in mobilising Hindutva sentiments and thereby, in fuelling the violence in Leicester. Between 17 and 21 September 2022, at which tensions were at their zenith, approximately 60,000 tweets used hashtags such as "#ProtectLeicesterHindus", "#StopLeicesterIslamicTerrorism", "#HindusUnderAttackInLeicester", "#HindusUnderAttackUK", and "#HinduHateInUK".²⁵⁵ According to *Logically*, 20,000 of these tweets were geotagged and of that number, 18,000 (81%) were from Twitter accounts in India, while just 1,200 (6%) were from UK accounts.²⁵⁶ This was corroborated by an investigation by the *BBC*, which found that tweets relating to the disorder in Leicester spiked from 17 to 21 September 2022 and that on 19 September alone, there were a total of almost 150,000 such tweets, a large proportion of which were geotagged to India. Many accounts had no profile picture and were set up within the previous month, which indicates "inauthentic activity", meaning that anonymous individuals were using multiple accounts to spread disinformation and anti-Muslim sentiment.²⁵⁷ Furthermore, 11 of the top 30 URLs that used the aforementioned hashtags linked to articles written by *OpIndia*, which underscores the extraordinary international reach of Hindutva-driven digital campaigns.²⁵⁸

249. HenryJacksonSoc, "Charlotte Littlewood Details On-The-Ground Information Regarding the Leicester Disorder on GBNews," YouTube Video, 21 September 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMxk69PrTzg>.

250. Nupur J Sharma, (@UnSubtleDesi), "Hello. Thank you for the response, however, In this, a local journalist has also said that 9 families have been displaced due to fear of Islamist violence," 22 September 2022, 9:26 AM, <https://twitter.com/UnSubtleDesi/status/1572864969284390913?s=20>.

251. Abdirahim Saeed (@AbdirahimS), "11 of the 30 top links being shared in English about #Leicester were OpIndia's One article cited British researcher Charlotte Littlewood, from the Henry Jackson Society, who told GB News that several Hindu families had left Leicester due to threats of violence from Muslims," X, 25 September 2022, 1:27 PM, <https://twitter.com/AbdirahimS/status/1574012785666711553?s=20>.

252. Reha Kansara and Abdiraheem Saeed, "Did Misinformation Fan the Flames in Leicester?," *BBC News*, 24 September 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-trending-63009009>.

253. MEND Community (@mendcommunity), "A new "report" by right-wing Islamophobia-linked think tank, the Henry Jackson Society (HJS), attempts to bring together Hindutva talking points with a right-wing obsession with Islam and Muslims. Some comment below," X, 19 April 2023, 4:16 PM, <https://twitter.com/mendcommunity/status/1648707265094991874>.

254. Sam Doak, Francesca Scott, Vakasha Sachdev and Ernie Piper, "Double Check: What Do We Know about Events in Leicester?," *Logically.ai*, 23 September 2022, <https://www.logically.ai/articles/double-check-what-do-we-know-about-events-in-leicester-1>.

255. Ibid.

256. Ibid.

257. Reha Kansara and Abdiraheem Saeed, "Did Misinformation Fan the Flames in Leicester?," *BBC News*, 24 September 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-trending-63009009>.

258. Ibid.

Misinformation was also circulated on social media by Muslim individuals, which exacerbated the unrest in Leicester. For example, a Muslim man from Leicester alleged on Facebook that his 15-year-old daughter was the victim of a kidnapping attempt by three Hindu men on 12 September 2022.²⁵⁹ The following day, Majid Freeman, a local community activist, shared the post on his Twitter page. However, Leicestershire Police carried out an investigation and concluded on 14 September that no such incident occurred, adding: “We urge people to only share or post on social media what you know to be true. This helps protect people and ongoing investigations.”²⁶⁰ In response, Freeman deleted his original tweet and tweeted, regarding the alleged incident, that “such lies have consequences & cast doubts on genuine cases.”²⁶¹ Yet, the fact that the original tweet had garnered hundreds of likes and been shared dozens of times on WhatsApp and Instagram indicates the rapid and damaging impact of social media misinformation, even where the information is initially presumed to be accurate.

The disturbances in Leicester also afforded social media influencers from both sides the opportunity to further their own individual agendas and narratives. The role of Nupur J Sharma has been explored above. In another instance, Mohammed Hijab, a Muslim social media influencer, was videoed addressing a crowd in Leicester and saying: “With no due respect, if they (Hindus) believe in reincarnation, what a humiliation for them to be reincarnated into some pathetic, weak, cowardly people like that.”²⁶² Although his ire is seemingly directed at Hindutva mobs in Leicester, he



ridicules mainstream Hindu beliefs in a discriminatory and racist manner. He also shared an image on his Instagram page with the caption, “Muslim patrol in Leicester”, which has been liked almost 30,000 times.²⁶³ Rather than helping to defuse the volatile situation in Leicester by encouraging local Muslim residents to exercise restraint, Hijab instead inflamed tensions by urging Muslim youth to take to the streets in order to deter their Hindu rivals. In styling himself as the defender of Leicester’s Muslim community, he was condemned by right-wing media outlets in both the UK²⁶⁴ and India²⁶⁵ as the instigator of anti-Hindu violence. This in turn strengthened the narrative that Hindus were being targeted by “Islamist” mobs, thereby inciting retaliation by Hindu youth against Muslims.

Social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp, also exposed the most alarming manifestations of the unrest in Leicester. On 17 September 2022, Freeman shared a video of dozens of Hindu youth confronting Muslims in the street and throwing

259. Reha Kansara and Abdiraheem Saeed, “Did Misinformation Fan the Flames in Leicester?,” *BBC News*, 24 September 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-trending-63009009>.

260. Leicestershire Police (@leicspolice), “Latest update,” X, 14 September 2022, 3:05 PM, <https://twitter.com/leicspolice/status/157005100535723649>.

261. Majid Freeman (@Majstar7), “Just got back from the location where the alleged kidnapping occurred. We went to the houses on day 1 too but no one answered. Just went again now with @RiazKhanLC and the cameras confirm no incident took place. Such lies have serious consequences & casts doubts on genuine cases,” X, 14 September 2022, 7:53 PM, <https://twitter.com/Majstar7/status/1570123622399852551>.

262. Sunny Hundal (@sunny_hundal), “Here’s another ‘activist’ Mohammed Hijab, searching for clout, telling his audience of masked men: ‘If they (Hindus) believe in reincarnation, what a humiliation of them to be reincarnated into some pathetic, weak, cowardly people like that.’ This sort of language is racist too,” X, 19 September 2022, 7:57 PM, https://twitter.com/sunny_hundal/status/1571936594440986629?s=20.

263. Mohammed Hijab (@mohammedhijabofficial), “Muslim patrol in Leicester,” Instagram Photo, 18 September 2022, https://www.instagram.com/p/CiqHJuwI_-P/.

264. Patrick Sawyer and Catherine Lough, “Islamist Preacher Accused of ‘Stirring up Hatred’ in Leicester,” *The Telegraph*, 24 September 2022, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/09/24/islamist-preacher-accused-stirring-hatred-leicester/>.

265. “Leicester: How Mohammed Hijab Incited Muslims to Attack ‘Weak’ Hindus,” *OpIndia*, 22 September 2022, <https://www.opindia.com/2022/09/mohammed-hijab-incites-muslims-leicester-anti-hindu-violence/>.

glass bottles at them, with police attempting to intervene.²⁶⁶ In another widely-circulated video, a gang of roughly 200 armed Hindu men are seen marching through Leicester whilst chanting “Jai Shri Ram”.²⁶⁷ Likewise, a man was filmed climbing a Hindu temple and pulling down a religious flag²⁶⁸, while one set fire to another flag.²⁶⁹ Such targeted attacks against religious places of worship is likely to evoke an emotional response in people belonging to the community in question. This inflames tensions by generating a climate of anger and mistrust, in this instance among both the Hindu and Muslim communities, while fuelling both sides’ narratives of victimisation by the other.

Ultimately, social media disinformation and activity, as a whole, perpetuated tensions in Leicester by proliferating false or otherwise unhelpful narratives. It is little surprise that Leicester City’s Mayor, Sir Peter Soulsby, told *BBC Radio 4*: “I’ve seen quite a selection of social media stuff which is very, very, very distorting now and some of it just completely lying about what had been happening between different communities.”²⁷⁰ It is evident, however, that there was a concerted campaign of disinformation from Hindutva online accounts in relation to the Leicester disturbances, whereas Muslim activity on social media was individual-based and not nearly as coordinated or widespread.

Political response and fallout

The political response to the unrest in Leicester centres on an independent review, the circumstances of which have shifted significantly since it was first commissioned in October 2022. Sir Peter initially appointed Dr Chris Allen, an Associate Professor in Hate Crime Studies at the University of Leicester, to lead the inquiry into the causes, timing, and ongoing implications of the disturbances.²⁷¹ However, less than a week later on 1 November 2022, Dr Allen stepped back from his role as lead reviewer²⁷² following a boycott of the review by local Hindu organisations²⁷³ and a campaign of social media abuse against him.²⁷⁴ On 26 May 2023, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Michael Gove, appointed Lord Ian Austin, an Independent life peer in the House of Lords and a former Labour MP, to chair the review.²⁷⁵

According to the Government website, the review panel will:

266. Majid Freeman (@Majstar7), “Hindu mobs on Belgrave Road throwing glass bottles at the Muslims but narrowly missing police officers heads on numerous occasions. There is NOT a small minority of these Hindutva thugs. There’s hundreds of them. Will the Hindu community leaders continue defending them? #Leicester,” 17 September 2022, 8:44 PM, <https://twitter.com/Majstar7/status/1571223601495277569?s=20>.

267. Sunny Hundal (@sunny_hundal), “Here’s a video of Hindus chanting “Jai Shree Ram” (praise Lord Ram) and carrying weapons while on the streets of Leicester,” X, 19 September 2022, 7:44 PM, https://twitter.com/sunny_hundal/status/1571933255842021376?s=20.

268. INSIGHT UK - Leicester (@INSIGHTLeicester), “Thank you @BarryGardiner for raising concerns with Police. But will Police defend and protect Hindus and Hindu temples? Last Saturday, hindu flags from a temple in Leicester was desecrated in presence of police and burnt. #HindusUnderAttackInUK,” X, 24 September 2022, 5:39 PM, <https://twitter.com/INSIGHTLeicester/status/1573713645787353091?s=20>.

269. Minakshi Shriyan (@Mikakshishriyan), “In Leicester, Hindu temple Vandalised by Muslim community fanatics. They have burnt the Bhagwa flags and have been trying to keep Hindus hostage inside including little children. Hindu owned properties have been toppled and vandalised too. #HindusUnderAttack #HindusUnderAttackInUK,” <https://twitter.com/Minakshishriyan/status/1571557086634594304?s=20>.

270. Geneva Abdul, “Mayor Blames Leicester Unrest on Social Media Disinformation,” *The Guardian*, 19 September 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/sep/19/mayor-blames-leicester-hindu-muslim-unrest-on-social-media-disinformation>.

271. Asha Patel, “Inquiry into East Leicester Violence to Focus on Six Key Questions,” *Leicester Mercury*, 26 October 2022, <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/east-leicester-disorder-independent-inquiry-7748233>.

272. Will Jefford, “Leicester Disorder: Expert Dr Chris Allen Steps down from Review,” *BBC News*, 1 November 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-63477841>.

273. Greig Watson, “Leicester Disorder: Hindu Groups Set to Boycott Review,” *BBC News*, 29 October 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-63426507>.

274. Asha Patel, “Academic Dr Chris Allen Pulls out of East Leicester Inquiry,” *Leicester Mercury*, 1 November 2022, <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/chris-allen-out-inquiry-leicester-7768847>.

275. “Independent Review Launched into Civil Unrest in Leicester,” GOV.UK, 26 May 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/independent-review-launched-into-civil-unrest-in-leicester>.

- *establish the facts of what took place over the period of unrest, and a sequence of events;*
- *present an analysis of the causes of the unrest;*
- *make practical recommendations for how similar events that may arise in future could be prevented; and*
- *set out proposals and ideas for strengthening social cohesion locally.*²⁷⁶

Although the objectives of the review are laudable, Lord Austin's close relationship with the Henry Jackson Society (HJS) and his well-known history of Islamophobia means his appointment "ends any hope the review will be conducted in a fair and balanced manner".²⁷⁷ Coupled with controversy around the March 2023 publication of Government-commissioned review into PREVENT²⁷⁸, Lord Austin's appointment can rightfully be called into question.

The circumstances under which Dr Allen withdrew himself as lead reviewer of the Leicester disturbances demonstrates the ongoing influence of Hindutva on the review process. In the wake of his appointment, a coalition of Leicester-based Hindu organisations wrote a letter to Sir Peter, arguing that his stance on the unrest "cast strong doubts on his suitability to lead the review".²⁷⁹ In a 28 September 2022 article for *The Conversation*, Dr Allen responded to claims that the unrest was fuelled by "Islamist extremism"²⁸⁰, stating:

*"Despite their being no evidence to support such an assumption, research shows that a key trope of Islamophobia is the conflation of all things Islam with extremism", adding that "it is necessary... to also examine the extent to which Hindu nationalist ideologies or "Hindutva" is causing tensions outside of India's borders."*²⁸¹

Furthermore, the character assassination of Dr Allen on social media is all the more troubling. As but one example, the Stop Hindu Hate Advocacy Network vilified him on Twitter for his involvement in establishing the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims' working definition of Islamophobia, and for his wider work on Islamophobia at Government level.²⁸² Among other things, he has been labelled a "hate preacher"²⁸³ and, by *OpIndia*, a "known Islamist sympathiser" and "anti-Hindu scholar".²⁸⁴ In questioning the professionalism of Dr Allen, critics appear intent on undermining attempts to highlight Islamophobia and excusing Hindu nationalism. After stepping down as lead reviewer, Dr Allen said:

276. "Independent Review Launched into Civil Unrest in Leicester," GOV.UK, 26 May 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/independent-review-launched-into-civil-unrest-in-leicester>.

277. P P Jaseem, "MP Known for Islamophobic Remarks Appointed by UK Govt as Reviewer into Leicester Unrest." *Maktoob Media*, 27 May 2023, <https://maktoobmedia.com/world/mp-known-for-islamophobic-remarks-appointed-by-uk-govt-as-reviewer-into-leicester-unrest/>.

278. "Independent Review of Prevent," GOV.UK, 16 September 2019, <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/independent-review-of-prevent>.

279. Jessica Murray, "Leicester Unrest: Hindu Groups to Boycott Review over Fears of Bias," *The Guardian*, 31 October 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/oct/31/leicester-unrest-hindu-groups-to-boycott-review-over-fears-of-bias>.

280. Bob Blackman (@BobBlackman), "Yesterday I wrote to the Home Secretary, @SuellaBraverman and asked the Leader of the House, @PennyMordaunt, about the recent scenes witnessed in Leicester and Birmingham and the attacks on the #Hindu community and temples. 1/1," X, 23 September 2022, 9:53 AM, <https://twitter.com/BobBlackman/status/1573234180472950784>.

281. Chris Allen, "Leicester's Unrest Is a Problem for the Whole City, Not Just Hindu and Muslim Communities." *The Conversation*, 28 September 2022, <https://theconversation.com/leicesters-unrest-is-a-problem-for-the-whole-city-not-just-hindu-and-muslim-communities-191363>.

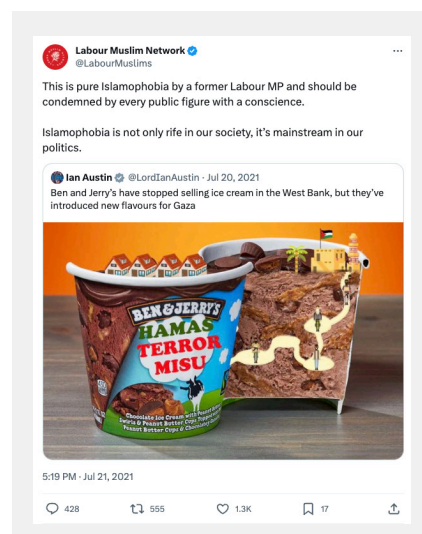
282. Stop Hindu Hate Advocacy Network (@SHHAN), "Dr. Chris Allen has been appointed lead for an 'independent review' into #Leicester violence. Who is Dr. Allen? Dr. Allen is a Professor who researches on Islamophobia. In an article for The Conversation UK, Dr. Allen already blames #Hindu nationalists for the violence.," X, 27 October 2022, 10:21 AM, <https://twitter.com/HinduHate/status/1585562312051564544?s=20>.

283. Bean (@srk090987), "Associate Professor in Hate Studies, Dr Chris Allen... sounds like hypocrisy. Chris Allen is a hate preacher. He attacked Hindu religion, which has no record of any hate crimes in UK. On the other hand, he was palling with Islamist radicals.," 2 November 2022, 11:46 AM, <https://twitter.com/srk090987/status/1587773260405493761?s=20>.

284. "Dr. Chris Allen, Islamist Sympathizer Who Had Tried to Blame Hindus for Leicester Violence Steps down from 'Independent Inquiry,'" *OpIndia*, 2 November 2022, <https://www.opindia.com/2022/11/anti-hindu-professor-chris-allen-appointed-to-review-leicester-violence-steps-down-after-hindu-organisations-protest/>.

*"It is important to stress that my decision was not made in response to the unprecedented levels of hate that has been directed towards me in recent weeks or the spurious allegations circulating on social media. While many are outright lies, some are rather more pernicious: distorting and misrepresenting the truth for their own individual and ideological gain."*²⁸⁵

Concerns about Lord Austin's suitability to lead the review largely relate to his past Islamophobic remarks and his association with HJS. In 2012, Friends of al-Aqsa, a civil society organisation advocating for Palestinian rights, brought a lawsuit against Lord Austin after he accused the organisation of denying that the Holocaust had taken place, for which he was forced to apologise.²⁸⁶ In 2021, Lord Austin posted a photo on Twitter of an ice cream tub labelled "Hamas Terror Misu", accompanied by the caption: "Ben and Jerry's have stopped selling ice cream in the West Bank, but they've introduced new flavours for Gaza".²⁸⁷ The tweet was roundly condemned, including by the Labour Muslim Network.²⁸⁸



Furthermore, Lord Austin has strong ties to HJS, the anti-Muslim stance of which has been explored earlier in this report. Lord Austin has spoken at various HJS events in Parliament²⁸⁹ and has endorsed a number of the organisation's reports²⁹⁰ having praised its "important and valuable work".²⁹¹ HJS has actively spread disinformation about events in Leicester in 2022 and disregarded the influence of Hindutva in the unrest. It is reasonable to expect that Lord Austin will advance a similar narrative and derive similar conclusions, further undermining the impartiality of the review.

As such, Gove's decision to appoint Lord Austin to chair the review has not been received favourably by Muslim organisations, civil society activists, and local councillors in Leicester. In a statement, the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) contends that instead of inspiring confidence and unity, his appointment has "created deep apprehension among Muslims and other communities in Leicester", adding that "any such review by Lord Austin will face questions about its credibility and legitimacy".²⁹² Likewise, the Leicester-based Federation of Muslim Organisations, which has over 150 affiliates, expressed "grave concerns" about Lord Austin's appointment in an open letter to Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak.²⁹³ It urged Sunak to

285. Asha Patel, "Academic Dr Chris Allen Pulls out of East Leicester Inquiry," *Leicester Mercury*, 1 November 2022, <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/chris-allen-out-inquiry-leicester-7768847>.

286. "Dudley North MP Ian Austin Sorry for Holocaust Claim," *BBC News*, 1 June 2012, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-18304089>.

287. Ian Austin (@LordIanAustin), "Ben and Jerry's have stopped selling ice cream in the West Bank, but they've introduced new flavours for Gaza," X, 20 July 2021, 9:27 PM, <https://twitter.com/LordIanAustin/status/1417581840832024586>.

288. Labour Muslim Network (@LabourMuslims), "This is pure Islamophobia by a former Labour MP and should be condemned by every public figure with a conscience. Islamophobia is not only rife in our society, it's mainstream in our politics," X, 21 July 2021, 5:19 PM, <https://twitter.com/LabourMuslims/status/1417881980193157122>.

289. Meghan McCain (@meghanmccain), "A true honor to speak this morning at the House of Commons for the Henry Jackson Society with Ian Austin, Bill Browder & Vladimir Kara-Murza on the Magnitsky Act, Sergi Magnitsky and my father's legacy. We must continue the fight against Putin's tyrannous regime and keeping the Magnitsky sanctions upheld.," Instagram photo, 15 November 2018, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BqNLBBU14H3/>.

290. "Audit of Geopolitical Capability," Henry Jackson Society, 5 September 2022, <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/audit/>.

291. Areeb Ullah, "Concerns over Leicester Unrest Reviewer's Henry Jackson Society Links," *Middle East Eye*, 31 May 2017, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/leicester-unrest-reviewer-ian-austin-henry-jackson-society-links>.

292. Callum Parke, "Muslim Council of Britain Concerned over Chair of Review into Leicester Unrest," *The Independent*, 1 June 2023, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/ian-austin-muslim-council-of-britain-leicester-lord-prime-minister-b2349778.html>.

293. "FMO Open Letter to the PM," Google Docs, https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf28ai3RXc4KOTk1Uub7amW_PSDtbaipj2xGSnGPRJdeTomxw/viewform.

appoint a reviewer with a “balanced view on the issues affecting all our diverse communities”. Several Leicester City councillors have also boycotted the review on the grounds that having Lord Austin at its helm would “severely hamper the integrity of the review, and in turn, its recommendations will have no value”.²⁹⁴

Recent reviews commissioned by the Conservative Government are anything but impartial. Adeeb Ayton, a Senior Policy Analyst at Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND), argues: “Lord Austin’s appointment appears to be part of a broader pattern whereby the Government establishes supposedly ‘independent’ enquiries, only to be led by individuals who seem to share its positions on the given social issue being dealt with.”²⁹⁵ The latest and arguably, most striking example is the Independent Review of PREVENT, which was led by William Shawcross.²⁹⁶ Shawcross is a former director of HJS and former senior fellow at Policy Exchange, a think-tank whose “anti-Muslim agenda is clear and visible”.²⁹⁷ Whilst HJS director, Shawcross stated: “Europe and Islam is one of the greatest, most terrifying problems of our future. I think all European countries have vastly, very quickly growing Islamic populations.”²⁹⁸

Consequently, the Shawcross Review was boycotted by 17 prominent civil society organisations, including Amnesty International, Liberty, and the Runnymede Trust. In a joint letter, they said Shawcross’ appointment demonstrated that “the UK government has no interest in conducting an objective and impartial review of the strategy, nor in engaging meaningfully with communities affected by it”.²⁹⁹ Therefore, Lord Austin is merely the latest Government-appointed reviewer into issues pertaining to ethnic minority communities who has a track record of racism, which casts doubt over the credibility of such reviews.

There is no denying that the review into the 2022 Leicester unrest requires impartiality, fairness, and the trust of the city’s Hindu and Muslim communities. Yet, the appointment of Lord Austin has greatly undermined the review’s credibility and leaves one wondering as to why the Government would appoint someone with a history of Islamophobic views in charge of what is potentially one of the most crucial reviews of our time. This is particularly perplexing given that Dr Allen’s resignation was triggered by allegations of his supposed bias towards Hindu communities that hampered his ability to conduct an objective review. While such claims are ill-founded, it appears that Lord Austin is predisposed towards a distorted narrative, promoted by the likes of HJS, that minimises the role of Hindutva ideologies in what transpired in Leicester in 2022. Widespread opposition to his appointment by Muslim organisations and local councillors illustrates that the review lacks legitimacy from the outset.

294. Asha Patel, “Councillors Will Not Engage in Leicester Unrest Review due to Leader,” *Leicester Mercury*, 2 June 2023, <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/councillors-refuse-participate-government-review-8484347>.

295. Adeeb Ayton, “The ‘Independent’ Reviews on Race and Ethnic Minorities That Simply Mirror the Conservatives’ Divisive Party Line,” *Byline Times*, 13 July 2023, <https://bylinetimes.com/2023/07/13/the-independent-reviews-on-race-and-ethnic-minorities-that-simply-mirror-the-conservatives-divisive-party-line/>.

296. William Shawcross, “Independent Review of PREVENT,” GOV.UK, February 2023, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1134986/Independent_Review_of_Prevent.pdf.

297. Mobashra Tazamal, “The Criminalization of Muslim Civil Society,” *The Bridge Initiative*, 28 April 2022, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/the-criminalization-of-muslim-civil-society/>.

298. Randeep Ramesh, “Quarter of Charity Commission Inquiries Target Muslim Groups,” *The Guardian*, 16 November 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/nov/16/charity-commission-inquiries-muslim-groups>.

299. “UK: NGOs Condemn Appointment of William Shawcross and Announce Civil Society-Led Review of Prevent,” *Amnesty International*, 16 February 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/02/uk-ngos-condemn-appointment-of-william-shawcross-and-announce-civil-society-led-review-of-prevent/>.

CONCLUSION



CONCLUSION

The events that occurred in Leicester in September 2022 deeply rattled the residents of the city. Considered one of the most multicultural cities in the United Kingdom, the tensions that arose between the Hindu and Muslim communities last year demonstrated the need to address any underlying communal tensions in order to foster communal harmony. It also brought to light how political parties and certain voices within the public are engaging in divisive politics, namely by supporting Hindu nationalist sentiments and amplifying Islamophobia. It's unclear what everyone's goal is in sowing disharmony, but some voices are using inflammatory and divisive rhetoric to make gains at the ballot box.

What stood out in our review of the events that unfolded in September 2022 in Leicester that differentiates it from other instances of communal disturbance was the presence of Hindutva, a socio-political ideology that has gained great popularity in India under the rule of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India is experiencing a dangerous shift regarding its national identity as Hindu nationalist voices (who currently govern the country) seek to remake the country as a Hindu-only nation, in stark contrast to its secular constitution. To carry out this endeavour, Hindu nationalists have targeted the country's Muslims, who currently make up India's largest minority community at about 14 percent, claiming they are not real Indians. Throughout the last decade under the leadership of PM Modi, Hindu nationalist voices across the country have been emboldened to carry out their mission, which has entailed dangerous levels of hate speech and violence targeting Indian Muslims. This has involved mob violence often in sight of or with the direct involvement of law enforcement, public lynchings, daily harassment, economic boycotts, targeting of interfaith couples, Islamophobic propaganda on mainstream media channels, discriminatory legislation aimed at disenfranchising Muslims, and a growing stream of disinformation on social media. With growing instances of hate speech and violence, all of which are rarely condemned by the government, rights experts have warned that a possible genocide is underway in India.

Hindu nationalism has not remained exclusive to India. The ideology has proponents in countries outside of the subcontinent, including in the UK, and alongside the advent of social media, it has been able to spread and take root. What has gone hand in hand with the spread of Hindu nationalism has been Islamophobia as Muslims are framed as a threat (i.e. foreign invaders) to the Hindu majority in India. In the UK, this Islamophobic viewpoint has attracted anti-Muslim voices, such as the Henry Jackson Society, who have minimised or completely dismissed alarming incidences of Hindu nationalism and instead framed them as examples of Islamic militancy. Given the prevalence and normalisation of anti-Muslim attitudes in the UK, it is not surprising that this false narrative is again being used to minimise rising threats from the far-right, including Hindu nationalists.

Rather than approach the matter by addressing the reality on the ground in Leicester, a number of voices within the British public chose to push forth a narrative that further divides communities and plays on harmful stereotypes. From right-wing think tanks such as the Henry Jackson Society to politicians who have a history of engaging in Islamophobia like MP Bob Blackman, these voices have espoused anti-Muslim rhetoric when discussing and analysing the events in Leicester, claiming that the clashes were perpetrated primarily by "Islamists". Not only do such accounts distort the reality of the events by minimising the

presence of Hindu nationalist sentiment, but they also increase the potential harm on the Muslim community in Leicester. The voices that framed the events in Leicester through this biased lens did so in a climate where anti-Muslim hate crimes have skyrocketed and Muslim communities remain the most targeted religious group in the UK.³⁰⁰

The events that unfolded in Leicester are connected to what is occurring in India as footage on the ground provided evidence for the presence of Hindu nationalist ideology: the very obvious one being the chanting of “Jai Shri Ram” (victory to Lord Ram), a religious phrase that has been used as a rallying cry by Hindu nationalists in recent years. Leicester also brought about a much-needed conversation about the role of social media in spreading disinformation and its real-world impact. This report finds that further examination must be done and tangible efforts need to be made by policymakers in tackling the spread of false and inflammatory claims online. In Leicester, social media disinformation inflamed tensions between the Hindu and Muslim communities, and current reporting finds that outside voices (not only the broader UK but also international) interfered with local issues.

Leicester is one of the UK’s most diverse cities and its history is a testament to the strength and positive impact of multiculturalism in the country. In recent years, however, it has appeared that political parties have sought to create divisions within South Asian communities in an effort to make electoral gains. Given the Conservative party’s documented history of Islamophobia, it is no surprise that it has engaged in stoking anti-Muslim racism within the Hindu community in Leicester.³⁰¹ Rather than take part in actions that promote social cohesion, it has utilised Indian politics as a political opportunity and positioned itself as pro-Hindu. This tactic has proved fruitful. Leicester is historically a Labour-voting city but in recent years, a number of local Labour seats have been lost to Conservatives, who have arguably made some of these gains by galvanising Hindu voters. It is unclear whether members of the party truly subscribe to Hindu nationalist views, but it is clear that in recent years the party has been engaging in divisive politics and doing little to ease tensions between communities.

British South Asian communities are an important part of the success and growth of the country. The communities are diverse, representing different ethnicities and religions, and have historically lived harmoniously amongst one another as they have contributed heavily to British society. However, the events in Leicester demonstrate how tensions have been inflamed and how outside voices can play a role in increasing divisions, leading to potentially dangerous levels of violence and instability. The response to the events has also been telling as certain voices within the British public have engaged in further divisive rhetoric by engaging in Islamophobia and minimising the harms of Hindu nationalism. In an effort to maintain social cohesion, it is imperative that we properly address any intercommunity issues through unbiased means and without amplifying harmful tropes that will only result in greater harm.

300. “Hate Crime, England and Wales, 2022 to 2023,” GOV.UK, 5 October 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2022-to-2023/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2022-to-2023>.

301. Greg Heffer, “Tory Islamophobia Inquiry: Anti-Muslim Sentiment ‘Remains a Problem’ within Conservative Party, Report Finds,” *Sky News*, 25 May 2021, <https://news.sky.com/story/tory-islamophobia-anti-muslim-sentiment-remains-a-problem-within-conservative-party-report-finds-12316516>.

APPENDIX:

Historical overview of British South Asian communities



Appendix: Historical overview of British South Asian communities

With each passing census, the UK South Asian population has seen a steady increase. The 2001 Census revealed that 3.9% of the population identified as South Asian, which included first, second and third generation settlers.³⁰² By the 2011 Census, South Asians constituted 7.5% of the population. As of the 2021 Census, the South Asian population currently stands at 9.3%.³⁰³ As Britain moved towards modernity, it made attempts to identify all those within its borders. However, key data that was missing was religious records of those that settled prior to the 1940s. After the 1940s, it became possible to talk about Indians on the assumption that they may be Hindus and Pakistani and Bangladeshi as Muslims. However, in modern times we find that such categorisation may no longer be appropriate as India is home to Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. For example, India currently stands as the country with the third highest Muslim population in the world.³⁰⁴ Likewise, India is also home to the highest population of Sikhs in the world.³⁰⁵

EARLY SOUTH ASIAN SETTLERS IN BRITAIN

The presence of South Asian communities in Britain can be traced back to as early as the 17th century.³⁰⁶ The establishment of the East India Company allowed for greater movement of people in both directions with many coming to Britain as “Indian domestics, servants and ayahs (nannies) in the service of East India Company agents and British families returning from India”.³⁰⁷ There were also many who came as Indian sailors, recruited to fill the lack of manpower that emerged following the death and desertion of white sailors in India.³⁰⁸ Consequently, sailors and servants constituted the earliest Indian working-class settlers in Britain.³⁰⁹ Predominantly made up of those from the Indian subcontinent, the bustling South Asian population in Britain has seen numerous changes in character as well as the significant increase in size mentioned previously.

Indian servants, considered to represent ‘oriental luxury’, were of value as an ‘index of rank’ and symbolised the ‘exalted’ statuses of the India-returned noblemen.³¹⁰

Crucially, many were hired for the duration of the passage from India to Britain and were considered indispensable.³¹¹ However, upon arriving in Britain, their engagements were over and many were left to fend for themselves.³¹² As such, records reveal that many either sought positions of work with families going to India or offered to work

302. “South Asians Making Britain,” *Moving People Changing Places*, <https://www.movingpeoplechangingplaces.org/migration-histories/south-asians-making-britain.html>.

303. “Ethnic Group, England and Wales,” Office for National Statistics, 29 November 2022, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/bulletins/ethnicgroupenglandandwales/census2021>.

304. “Countries with the Largest Muslim Population 2022,” Statista, 13 October 2023, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/374661/countries-with-the-largest-muslim-population/>.

305. “Countries with the Largest Sikh Population 2020,” Statista, 17 October 2023, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1356282/world-religions-sikh-population-worldwide/>.

306. Nishah Malik, “Going for an Indian’: Food, Immigration and Multiculturalism in Britain,” *British Online Archives*, 7 April 2022, <https://microform.digital/boa/posts/category/articles/470/going-for-an-indian-food-immigration-and-multiculturalism-in-britain>.

307. “Sources for the Study of South Asian People in Britain, 1600-1947,” *The British Library*, <https://www.bl.uk/britishlibrary/~media/subjects%20images/black%20britain%20and%20asian%20britain/sources-for-the-study-of-south-asian-people-in-britain-1600-1947.pdf>.

308. Ibid.

309. Ibid.

310. Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt18dztyb>.

311. Ibid.

312. Ibid.

a passage home.³¹³ Those servants and ayahs who were unsuccessful in finding a way back home were left destitute after they proved to be no longer useful.³¹⁴ The extent to which many became destitute is revealed in the tragic incident of the 40 'Sons of India' who were found perished in London due to the cold and hunger in 1850.³¹⁵ This and many other instances prompted missionary Joseph Salter to open the 'Stranger's Home for Asiatics, Africans and South Sea Islanders' in Limehouse, London in 1857.³¹⁶

From the Mid-19th century, other groups of migrants that arrived from the subcontinent included well-off students, exiled Indian nobility, travellers and professionals in medicine, education, law, business, politics, and the women's movement.³¹⁷ This cohort of South Asians made a diverse group with some coming from working class backgrounds barely surviving whilst others successfully blended with the English upper class.³¹⁸

POST-1947 MIGRATION

Post-1947 migration to Britain from the Indian subcontinent saw individuals coming from the region for different reasons.³¹⁹ One such reason was the post-war labour shortages facing Britain at the time which resulted in the need for thousands of jobs to be filled, including the need for manual labour in order to build companies and houses.³²⁰ As a result, Britain offered those from the Commonwealth free migration opportunities, leading to the recruitment of Pakistani and Indian workers from the Punjab to work in manual labour on railways, at Heathrow Airport, in the Midlands iron foundries, in Sheffield and Scunthorpe steelworks, in rubber factories in Southall (London), and in textiles factories in Lancashire and Yorkshire.³²¹ For the newly opened National Health Service (NHS), Britain also recruited South Asian doctors who were mainly from rural areas and had lost their homes and jobs during the partition.³²²

Britain's numerous immigration acts also greatly influenced the patterns of migration from the subcontinent post-1947.³²³ The British Nationality Act (1948) welcomed all those with a Commonwealth passport to live and work in Britain with the same legal rights as those with British passports.³²⁴ However, with the passage of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1962), the rights those with a Commonwealth passport previously enjoyed were no longer available to them automatically.³²⁵ Instead, work permits were granted on an individual basis and usually given to white citizens coming from dominion states.³²⁶ This Act prompted many South Asian workers to settle in Britain and bring their families over as well.³²⁷

313. Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt18dztvb>.

314. Ibid.

315. "Pre 1947 Direct Migration to the UK from South Asia," *Striking Women*, <https://www.striking-women.org/module/map-major-south-asian-migration-flows/pre-1947-direct-migration-uk-south-asia>.

316. Ibid.

317. Ibid.

318. Ibid.

319. "Post 1947 Migration to the UK - from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka," *Striking Women*, <https://www.striking-women.org/module/map-major-south-asian-migration-flows/post-1947-migration-uk-india-bangladesh-pakistan-and>.

320. Ibid.

321. "South Asians," *Minority Rights Group*, 28 September 2022, <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/south-asians/>.

322. "Post 1947 Migration to the UK - from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka," *Striking Women*, <https://www.striking-women.org/module/map-major-south-asian-migration-flows/post-1947-migration-uk-india-bangladesh-pakistan-and>.

323. Ibid.

324. Ibid.

325. Ibid.

326. Ibid.

327. Ibid.

The Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1968) placed a further stipulation on those wishing to migrate from the Commonwealth.³²⁸ Only those with a parent or a grandparent who was born in Britain were allowed to migrate. Ultimately, “the 1968 Act explicitly created a two tier system of citizenship rights based on parentage.”³²⁹ Furthermore, migration to Britain after the passing of the Immigration Act (1971), which replaced both the 1962 and 1968 act, became temporary as employment vouchers, valid only for a certain period, replaced work permits.³³⁰ A 2018 piece by The Runnymede, the UK’s leading race equality think tank, found that the differentiations in each of the subsequent acts “operated primarily, but not exclusively, along race-based lines,” and thus not only carved “hierarchies of access to Britain” but also “carved hierarchies of citizenship.”³³¹ These four immigration acts created a situation of fluctuating migration to Britain which culminated in the arrival of 27,000 refugees following Idi Amin’s expulsion of Ugandan Asians from Uganda in 1971. Arriving in Britain, these refugees were faced with hostility particularly from Britain’s far-right with the National Front organising anti-immigration protests.³³²

THREE LARGEST NATIONAL ETHNIC GROUPS

Of the South Asian population in Britain today, the largest three national ethnic groups are Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis.³³³ These groups are not monolithic and as such have varied socio-economics status, housing and geographical distributions.

Migration of Indian communities in Britain largely began with the establishment of the East India Company, as already explored. This was followed by a wave of migration following the Second World War which along with “the British Nationality Act of 1948 enabling migration from the Commonwealth, more employment opportunities, better lifestyles and the start of the NHS made life in the UK an attractive proposition.”³³⁴ Furthermore, the 1960s and 1970s saw migration of Indian communities from countries like Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya who were either expelled or encouraged to leave.³³⁵ Many of these migrants were successful in business and finance having come from backgrounds in administration, the police and army.³³⁶ However, those Indians that left from East Africa under difficult political situations were forced to leave behind assets and wealth, and thus struggled to adjust and many ended up encountering great financial difficulty in their lives in Britain.³³⁷

Of the early Pakistani communities, from the 1950s and onwards, 70 percent of migrants originated from Mirpur in Kashmir³³⁸ and found employment in the ‘textile industries of Lancashire, Yorkshire, Manchester and Bradford, cars and engineering factories in the West Midlands, and Birmingham, and growing light industrial estates in places like Luton and Slough.’³³⁹ As many were not able to speak very good English, they struggled to progress in employment as well as interact with the wider community.³⁴⁰

328. Colin Yeo, “The Interregnum: 11 Years without Free Movement from 1962 to 1973,” *LSE BREXIT*, 25 May 2017, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2017/05/25/the-interregnum-11-years-without-free-movement-from-1962-to-1973/>.

329. Ibid.

330. “The Cabinet Papers | Commonwealth Immigration Control and Legislation,” The National Archives, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/>.

331. Sundeep Lidher, “British Citizenship and the Windrush Generation.” *The Runnymede Trust*, 24 April 2018, <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/blog/british-citizenship-and-the-windrush-generation>.

332. Ibid.

333. “Post 1947 Migration to the UK - from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka,” *Striking Women*, <https://www.striking-women.org/module/map-major-south-asian-migration-flows/post-1947-migration-uk-india-bangladesh-pakistan-and>.

334. “BAME We’re Not the Same: Indian,” *BBC Creative Diversity*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/creativity/nuance-in-bame/indian/>.

335. Ibid.

336. Ibid.

337. Ibid.

338. “BAME We’re Not the Same: Pakistani,” *BBC Creative Diversity*, <https://www.bbc.com/creativity/nuance-in-bame/pakistani>.

339. “Post 1947 Migration to the UK - from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka,” *Striking Women*, 2023, <https://www.striking-women.org/module/map-major-south-asian-migration-flows/post-1947-migration-uk-india-bangladesh-pakistan-and>.

340. “BAME We’re Not the Same: Pakistani,” *BBC Creative Diversity*, <https://www.bbc.com/creativity/nuance-in-bame/pakistani>.

Migration patterns of early Bangladeshi communities reveal that although Bangladeshi migrants were present in the UK as early as the 19th century from the region of Sylhet, the largest migration of Bangladeshis to the UK happened after the 1970s.³⁴¹ Civil unrest, the desire for a better life without poverty, natural disasters and Britain's immigration laws all played a role in the migration pattern.³⁴²

In the present day, Indians have the highest proportion of professional men compared with Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, who were more adept as labourers. For example, in 2022 "39.8% of workers from the Indian ethnic group were in 'professional' jobs - the highest percentage out of all ethnic groups in this type of occupation".³⁴³ Moreover, a population survey found that 35% of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis were economically inactive compared to only 19% of Indians.³⁴⁴

Regarding home ownership, the Indian population has a higher degree of home ownership than the Pakistani and Bangladeshi population.³⁴⁵ Data shows that 74% of Indians owned their own homes, followed by 58% of Pakistanis and 46% of Bangladeshis.³⁴⁶ Data also reveals that 34% of Bangladeshis live in social housing, which is seven times higher than the number of British Indians in social housing "which had the lowest number of people in social housing, with 5% saying they did so on census day".³⁴⁷ Additionally, 13% of British Pakistanis live in social housing.³⁴⁸ Alongside social housing, the data also showed variation amongst the three ethnic groups on overcrowding.³⁴⁹ Bangladeshi communities in England and Wales were the largest ethnic group amongst the three most likely to live in overcrowded housing as 39% reported living in this situation on census day.³⁵⁰

Indian communities tend to live more in outer city suburbs with largest concentrations in cities like Leicester (6.6%), Birmingham (4.6%) and Harrow (4.5%). 8.3% of Indian people lived in the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods, the lowest percentage out of all ethnic groups.³⁵¹ Pakistani communities are more likely to be concentrated in the "West Midlands (20.2%), Yorkshire and Humber (20.1%), London (19.9%) and the North West (16.8%)".³⁵² Bangladeshi communities are highly concentrated in Tower Hamlets with one in six Bangladeshis living there.³⁵³ Outside of London the largest Bangladeshi communities reside in "Birmingham, where there were an estimated 32,000 Bangladeshis in 2011, Oldham with 16,300, and Luton, Bedfordshire with a population of 13,600."³⁵⁴

341. "BAME We're Not the Same: Bangladeshi," *BBC Creative Diversity*, <https://www.bbc.com/creativitydiversity/nuance-in-bame/bangladeshi/>.

342. Ibid.

343. "Employment by Occupation," GOV.UK, 27 July 2022, <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/work-pay-and-benefits/employment/employment-by-occupation/latest>.

344. "Economic Inactivity," GOV.UK, 3 November 2022, <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/work-pay-and-benefits/unemployment-and-economic-inactivity/economic-inactivity/latest>.

345. "Home Ownership," GOV.UK, 4 February 2020, <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/housing/owning-and-renting/home-ownership/latest>.

346. Ibid.

347. Aamna Mohdin and Carmen Aguilar García, "Black People in England and Wales Three Times as Likely to Live in Social Housing," *The Guardian*, 15 March 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/mar/15/census-black-britons-social-housing-ons>.

348. Ibid.

349. Ibid.

350. Ibid.

351. "Indian Ethnic Group: Facts and Figures," GOV.UK, 28 October 2019, <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/summaries/indian-ethnic-group>.

352. "BAME We're Not the Same: Pakistani," *BBC Creative Diversity*, <https://www.bbc.com/creativitydiversity/nuance-in-bame/pakistani>.

353. Polly Nash, "Bangladeshi Migration to East London," *Whitechapel LDN*, 24 March 2023, <https://whitechapelldn.co.uk/bangladeshi-independence-migration-east-london/>.

354. "BAME We're Not the Same: Bangladeshi," *BBC Creative Diversity*, <https://www.bbc.com/creativitydiversity/nuance-in-bame/bangladeshi/>.

PUTTING DOWN ROOTS – FLOURISHING HINDU AND MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

South Asian communities who once came as migrants either in service of East India Company agents or as those in search of better lives or those wishing to escape civil unrest and war flourished as communities and began putting down roots through the establishment of places like mosques and temples, faith schools and halal butchers.

The growth of Hindu places of worship mirrors the migration patterns of Hindu migrants from India.³⁵⁵ As there were no official Hindu temples in London in the 1950s, the first wave of post-war Hindu migrants would have struggled to find places to worship.³⁵⁶ However, the 1960s saw a “popular fascination with a romanticised notion of “the East” which ‘led in part to the rise of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness’”.³⁵⁷ They managed to successfully open their “Radha Krishna Temple, the lease of which was co-signed by George Harrison, in the 1960s near busy Oxford Street’”.³⁵⁸ Communities utilised existing buildings to convert them into temples. For example, the Shree Ghanapathy in Wimbledon, which became Europe’s first fully consecrated Hindu temple when it opened in 1981, was initially a Presbyterian church.³⁵⁹

As the second wave of migrants from East Africa arrived and to cater for the growing number of South Asians in London, Willesden’s Shree Swaminarayan was renovated into a purpose-designed complex in the 1980s.³⁶⁰ By the end of the 20th century, a third wave of migrants arrived in Britain. Consisting of professionals, this influx of wealthier residents led to the opening of purpose built traditional style temples. Built in 1995, the BAPS Sri Swaminarayan Temple in Neasden, is considered to be the first purpose-built Hindu temple in Britain.³⁶¹

In 1889, Abdullah Quilliam established the first mosque in Liverpool at number 8 Brougham Terrace.³⁶² By the turn of the 20th century, the mosque had flourished to become “a boarding school for boys, a day school for girls, a library, a reading room, a museum, and a scientific laboratory. Classes were held in the evenings in a variety of subjects and these were available to all whether Muslim or not.”³⁶³ 1889 also witnessed the establishment of the Shah Jahan Mosque in Woking, which became Britain’s first purpose-built mosque.³⁶⁴ Much like early Hindu migrants, Muslims too would have struggled to find places for worship, especially places to conduct congregational prayers as is recommended in Islam. Khwaja Kamuluddin, who established the Woking Muslim Mission in 1912, took charge of the mosque and under his management the mosque flourished to become a hub for Muslims living in and visiting England.³⁶⁵ The Shah Jahan mosque had an eclectic congregation made up of diverse groups of Muslim men and women and *The Muslim Review*, which the mosque published, revealed a mosque built on the understandings of inclusivity, non-sectarianism and tolerance whilst seeking to accommodate itself “to its British context and represent Islam to the British public as compatible with and relevant to their lives.”³⁶⁶

355. Erica X Eisen, “London Temples Reveal the History of U.K. Hindus,” *Bloomberg*, 23 July 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-07-23/london-temples-reveal-the-history-of-u-k-hindus>.

356. Ibid.

357. Ibid.

358. Ibid.

359. Ibid.

360. Ibid.

361. Ibid.

362. “Abdullah Quilliam and Britain’s First Mosque,” *Discover Liverpool*, <https://www.discover-liverpool.com/local-history-stories-to-read/abdullah-quilliam-and-britain-s-first-mosque/>.

363. Ibid.

364. “The Shah Jahan Mosque, Woking,” The Open University, <https://www5.open.ac.uk/research-projects/making-britain/content/shah-jahan-mosque-woking>.

365. Ibid.

366. Ibid.

ORGANISATIONAL HISTORY OF SOUTH ASIANS IN BRITAIN

It is difficult to escape the impact of global incidences like 9/11 and the Salman Rushdie affair on the evolution of Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi communities in Britain. The post-9/11 climate led to greater securitisation of Muslim communities, as well as those perceived to be Muslim, and led to the emergence of narratives of angry Muslim men and the promotion of dangerous and orientalist stereotypes. Furthermore, the organisational history of South Asian communities in Britain has been obscured by blinding culturalism attuned only to the exotic.³⁶⁷ This has led to South Asians being viewed as those with a curious culture made up of spicy foods, Bollywood and bhangra, or a culture of fanaticism and religious extremism.³⁶⁸

This reductionist outlook is best evidenced in the media portrayal of Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi communities which are heavily laden with stereotypes, inaccurate representation of cultures, and a conflation of identities on the assumption that all those communities under the banner of 'South Asian' are homogenous. Looking specifically at the portrayal of Pakistani and Bangladeshi characters, "the stereotypes most associated with th[ese] group[s] are the 'Terrorist' and 'The Oppressed Woman'".³⁶⁹ Likewise, the portrayal of Indian characters centres around 'tired stereotypes' such as shopkeeper, terrorist and 'PHD doctors called Raj'.³⁷⁰ Furthermore, South Asian culture and practices, such as overbearing parents or 'exoticness', are often included in comedy shows and can be overlooked by viewers who may consider them to be 'soft stereotypes', in comparison to the more dangerous and violent stereotypes that are associated with South Asians, such as tyrants, bloodthirsty, or religious zealots.³⁷¹ With that being said, there are positive changes in media portrayal with more diverse roles and greater representation in film and TV, as well as the more vibrant presence of young South Asians on social media platforms such as TikTok.³⁷²

367. John Hutnyk, "The Dialectic of 'Here and There,'" in *A Postcolonial People: South Asians in Britain*, ed. Nasreen Ali, Virinder S. Kalra, and Salman Sayyid (London: Hurst and Company, 2006).

368. Ibid.

369. "BAME We're Not the Same: Pakistani," *BBC Creative Diversity*, <https://www.bbc.com/creativitydiversity/nuance-in-bame/pakistani>.

370. "BAME We're Not the Same: Indian," *BBC Creative Diversity*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/creativitydiversity/nuance-in-bame/indian/>.

371. Ibid.

372. Ibid.

HINDUTVA IN BRITAIN

