

## LOVE JIHAD: A COMPLETE FICTION

Dr. Amjad Ali

The term 'Love Jihad' refers to as 'Romeo Jihad' which came into light in 2007 in Kerala and Karnataka state, but became part of public discourse in 2009 when Catholic Church bodies in Kerala and Hindu groups in Karnataka claimed that thousands of women had been coerced or lured into converting to Islam. In response to the claim, Kerala High Court ordered the police to look into the matter in which a report was submitted which categorically rejected the claim mentioning that there was "no substance" to the claims that "Love Jihad" was taking place. However, in the same year a case of 18-year-old Silija Raj, who eloped with her Muslim boyfriend in Karnataka, was used as propaganda by far-right Hindu groups to peddle the "Love Jihad" myth.

According to Charu Gupta, a professor of history at the University of Delhi, "There is nothing which can prove that "Love Jihad" actually exists. It is only a way to control women and to build up the bogeyman of evil Muslims," which is evident when the term was widely used by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) during elections in Uttar Pradesh with the sole purpose to the polarization of the electorate along religious lines. Similar tactics were used by far-right groups when India was still under British rule.

It is significant to note that in certain ways "Love Jihad" along with various issues had an uncanny resemblance to the 'abduction' and conversion campaigns launched by the Arya Samaj and other Hindu revivalist bodies in the 1920s in Uttar Pradesh, at a time when there was a spate of Hindu-Muslim riots in the region. It is also true that in the "Love Jihad" myth lecherous behaviour, skill in luring Hindu women through false promises, a high sexual appetite, a life of luxury and religious fanaticism are all portrayed as dominant traits of the male Muslim character because it provides privileged status to moral panic and public morality over constitutional morality.



## **Inter Faith Love and not 'Jihad'**

On social media, images of girls entrapped by “scheming” Muslim men with captions such as “Love Jihad always ends with the death of Hindu girls” and #MuslimsAreJihadi are being peddled widely. Hatemongering websites are spotlighting how “conspiracies” are being hatched by fundamentalists who intend to disrupt Hindu society. However, in a recent judgment by the Gauhati High Court lifting a ban on Assamese television serial Begum Jaan after the city police banned it over allegations by Hindu groups that it encouraged “love jihad” clearly depicts that the fanatics have no legal support.

By fore-fronting these imaginary threats, not only is the naturalness of inter-community love being strangled, it is also being harnessed to perpetuate religious and political polarization amid the corona virus pandemic. But, looking back, folklores, mythologies, and anecdotes from ancient India, are rife with how love blossomed in multi-religious mosaics. The religious fluidity allowed for traditions to borrow from each other, and when they were reprimanded, they were seen as acts of heroic defiance. But now, the most punitive agencies are being deployed to redefine the very idea of love.

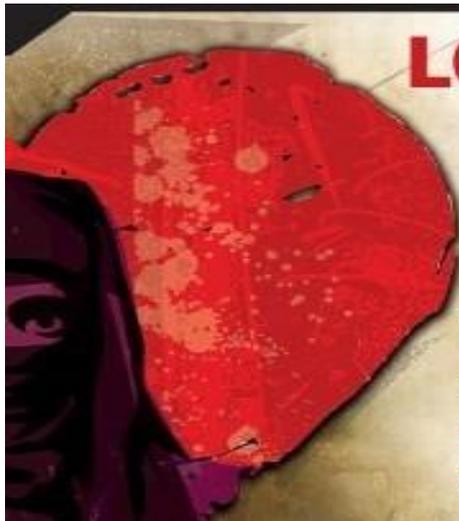
Amid many reprehensible attempts to determine how people must love, we must not let fade the value of love across the religious divide. It is a matter of fact that the inter-faith couples negotiate their religious differences and carry those skills into other aspects of their relationship. While the assumption is that differences are irreconcilable, couples who are in relationships often are strengthened, inspired and stirred by their differences.

When couples are in love, it is pretty much that they possibly have similar goals, worldviews, and spiritual leanings even if their individual religions may preach otherwise. Sometimes a secular person may even decide to pair with a religious partner which is a trend reported to be on the rise.

However, there are numerous questions doing the round such as how they will practice their faith (if they are both religious)? Will their differences weaken their individual beliefs? How they would relate to their disapproving friends and families? What kind of spiritual nourishment they plan to give their children, are projected as paramount. But, it is true to emphasize that two people need not share the same religion to be wedded to one other. No doubt there are various challenges, but those come with any relationship, even ones where the backgrounds are similar.

In interfaith pairings, values derive not necessarily from their religious affiliations. The two people may ascribe to certain beliefs based on the experiences they have had over the period of time, practices they have nurtured or moved away from or internal transformations that may have shaped their faith trajectories.

It's easy to embrace the idea of "sacred unions" only if they fit into predetermined moulds. But shouldn't we be celebrating those who denounce them to chart their own journey of faith? As the love jihad engine surges ahead and more litmus tests are proposed, we need to remind ourselves that love across the religious divide is powerful, unifying and now, courageous.



## LOVE IS NOT A JIHAD

*Right-wing outfits have started a campaign to warn Hindu girls of Muslim boys whose alleged design is to coax them into converting through affairs or marriage, dubbing it 'love jihad'. But is there such a thing? Consider these points:*

- 1** One cannot be told whom to fall in love with or marry.
- 2** The allegation questions all marriages where Hindu women have married Muslims and converted, willingly.
- 3** This can make the other community accuse Hindu men of trying to marry Muslim women to convert them.
- 4** A pattern cannot be made from a few isolated cases, creating an atmosphere of distrust and polarisation.

However, assuming for a moment that 'Love Jihad' was for real, can we hold the Muslims responsible for it or the fragile faith of our daughters because of our inapt upbringing behind their decision to convert. In my opinion in a diverse, multi-cultural society it should be an accepted norm, if two like-minded people can become life partners and are able to live happily ever after. I would say that it is perhaps a good way to unite and bring about harmony in our country.

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