

1 Article

2 Who is the Muslim? Discursive Representations of 3 the Muslims and Islam in Indian Prime Time News 4 Onaiza Drabu

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8 **Abstract:** A cursory look at Indian prime time news tells us much about the tone and tenor of the
9 people associated with it. Exaggerations, hyperbole, and tempers run wild and news anchors flail
10 in theatrical rage. News channels and news editors display their ideological affiliations
11 subliminally. These affiliations — a factor of personal political stance, funding bodies, and
12 investors — lead to partisan bias in the framing of news and, in some cases, can easily translate into
13 racial prejudice. In this paper, I examine news coverage related to Muslims in India. I study the
14 coverage of two issues specifically— *love jihad* and *triple talaq* —in prime time English news of two
15 channels — Times Now and Republic TV. My analysis of the content, tone, and tenor of their
16 coverage shows that these channels propagate associations between Islam and backwardness,
17 ignorance and violence through consistent employment of the following tropes — ‘Muslim women
18 need to be saved from Muslim men’, ‘Hindu women need to be saved from Muslim men’, and
19 ‘Muslims are not fully Indian — they are anti-national’. I place this study of news media within the
20 current political climate in India and briefly touch on the conversations it guides and provokes.
21 This is also a call for further analysis on this subject to examine and evaluate how discourse
22 manipulates public conversations and policy decisions.

23 **Keywords:** politics of representation; media; Islam; media representation; Muslims; Islamophobia.;
24 racism; anti-Muslim racism; love jihad; triple talaq; Muslims in India

25 1. Introduction

26 When Edward Said says that he has “not been able to discover any period in European or American
27 history since the Middle Ages in which Islam was generally discussed or thought about outside a
28 framework created by passion, prejudice or political interests” (Said 1981), it rings true for India in the
29 late 2000s as well. Muslims in India have a complex history — one that has led them to be seen as
30 invaders (Desai 2016), traitors (Rana 2017), backward (Fatmi 2016) and oppressed (Kirmani 2016).
31 Mass media, both television news and, to some extent, the print media, finds it easy to play into these
32 tropes and package ‘the Muslim’ into these stereotypical images. In a recent book about Muslim kids
33 in Delhi schools, the author finds out how deeply entrenched the association of a Muslim with terror is
34 amongst school students (Erum 2018). The book sparked off a host of conversations around raising
35 children in urban India today. It alerted parents to these seemingly innocuous micro-aggressions that
36 children are either subject to or causing. In July 2018, Twitter India saw the hashtag #talktoamuslim go
37 viral as a reaction to the deeply entrenched other-ing that the minority has been facing in public
38 discourse.

39 Through this paper, I aim to examine how this racism has been exacerbated by mass media — in this
40 case, specifically by TV news. I shall use the term Islamophobia to indicate the broad range of
41 prejudices, dislike and hatred towards Muslims and Islam. Mass media has long been a tool of
42 propaganda with its ‘reliance on market forces, internalized assumptions, and self-censorship, [...] without significant overt coercion’ (Herman & Chomsky 1988). It is said to “manufacture consent”
43 through a process of repeated representations of certain issues in a particular way. In this specific case,
44 the media also proves to be a powerful source of ideas and imagery about race.
45

46 Representations and misrepresentations of Muslims and Islam are complex. Global politics have
 47 aggravated their negative stereotyping and the media is critical in this opinion-shaping. Individuals
 48 with access to world news are now conscious that these images and lexical expressions associating
 49 Muslims with terror carry the weight of Islamophobia. Local politics play into these global
 50 superstructures and create localized versions of these images to manipulate audiences in a place like
 51 India. Since the rise of Hindutva, a right-wing Hindu nationalist ideology propagated by the ruling
 52 party in India since 2014 — the BJP — hate crimes, mob violence and targeted attacks on Muslims have
 53 been on the rise. As a minority, Muslims are seen as misfits in the Hindutva definition of a Hindu
 54 India. Just as we see in Erum's (2018) book, these global and local representations affect the lives of
 55 ordinary Muslims — from toddlers to adults. Mass media along with 'fake news' perpetuates the
 56 mischaracterization of Muslims as violent terrorists, regressive patriarchs and most importantly, 'the
 57 other'.

58 I shall examine how two news channels in positions of power use agenda setting, priming and framing
 59 to represent Muslims and Islam, and how these representations may not always be unbiased and
 60 objective. Much of what I have found may not be openly racist arguments but rather, show usage of
 61 tropes that incite racist attitudes. They are "apparently naturalized representations of events and
 62 situations [...] which have racist premises and propositions inscribed in them as a set of unquestioned
 63 assumptions" (Hall 2003). The minds of viewers are thus, in Hall's words, "impregnated with
 64 unconscious racism" towards Muslims and Islam.

65 2. Methodology

66 To study the representation of Islam and Muslims, I identified the top four English news
 67 channels in India (by viewership averages¹ across a period of 1 year). I then picked the prime time
 68 evening shows for these four channels and examined their headlines to identify two key issues in the
 69 depiction of Indian Muslims on TV between 2014 to early 2018. The issues which stood out were: the
 70 *triple talaq* and *love jihad* debates.

71 *Triple talaq* is a form of divorce that has been interpreted by certain Islamic lawmakers and
 72 Muslims in India to allow Muslim men to legally divorce their wives by stating the word "*talaq*"
 73 (Arabic for "divorce") three times in oral, written, or electronic form. *Love jihad* is a term used to
 74 describe alleged campaigns carried out by Muslim men targeting Non-Muslim women for
 75 conversion to Islam by feigning love. There is no official evidence supporting claims of such a
 76 phenomenon (Khalid 2017).

77 Using semiotics, media theory and critical discourse analysis as methods, my research was led
 78 by two questions:

- 79 • RQ1: Are there differences between the presentation of issues related to Muslims, and
 80 those concerning other communities? Are 'Muslim issues' specifically framed in terms
 81 of the religion and its problems, as opposed to other issues?
- 82 • RQ2: Are there specific meanings intended to be created in the presentation of Muslims
 83 and Islam?

84 As initial research resulted in an affirmative answer to the first two questions, it led me to investigate
 85 further:

- 86 • RQ3: What are the tropes that emerge in these representations?
- 87 • RQ4: What stereotypes do these tropes play into?

88

1

Source:

<http://www.indiantelevision.com/television/tv-channels/viewership/republic-tv-leads-english-news-aaj-tak-tops-hindi-news-ranking-180201>

89 Breaking this down further, using Saussure's (1966, p.65) framework of the signifier and
 90 signified, I asked specific questions of the content to analyze what the representations imply:

- 91 • Who are the anchors and what do they say? What is the vocabulary, tone and tenor they
 92 use?
- 93 • What does the accompanying text tell us? What do the vocabulary, font size, highlights,
 94 and other visual cues tell us?
- 95 • Who are the guest speakers invited onto prime time news panels? Who is chosen to
 96 represent the stakeholders?
- 97 • What do the headlines say? Do they have an inherent bias?
- 98 • Is all news covered with equal ferocity? What do the inclusions and omissions tell us?

99 After spending hours watching episodes of the four shows — 'The Newshour' on Times Now,
 100 'The Debate' on Republic TV, 'The People's Court' on India Today and 'Left, Right and Center' on
 101 NDTV 24x7 — I noticed specific objectivity with latter two. All four shows involve an anchor and a
 102 panel of guests to discuss daily headlines. The shows on NDTV 24x7 and India Today reported in an
 103 unbiased manner and their anchors constantly disassociated personal opinion from the channel's
 104 opinion and made sure that the debate was held in peaceful, neutral ways. Their shows devoted
 105 fewer episodes to these two issues² (*triple talaq* and *love jihad*) and focused on other news-making
 106 headlines too. They raised questions from both sides of the debate. Their panels had diverse
 107 representation, showing that their panel selection was balanced and more importantly, not set up to
 108 perpetuate stereotypes. The episodes of Republic TV's 'The Debate' and Times Now's 'The
 109 Newshour' were markedly different in their treatment of the issues of *triple talaq* and *love jihad*.
 110 Therefore, through the process of research my focus shifted exclusively to evaluating objectivity and
 111 studying the representations and discourse generated by these two channels — Republic TV and
 112 Times Now.
 113

114 2.1 Objectivity and Representations

115 Media constructs a reality with language as a device. Objectivity for the media then is a
 116 responsibility they shoulder. Westerstahl (1983) notes that it is essential for news reporting to be
 117 factual and impartial in order to provide a foundation for independent and rational
 118 decision-making. Parameters for evaluating objectivity in journalism, he notes, include
 119 non-partisanship and neutral presentation. He also notes that in mass media, editors push certain
 120 opinions through their selection of sources, topics and perspectives to showcase a certain aspect of
 121 the news. Anchors and editors hold the power to influence public opinion and mold discourse.
 122 Whether they treat this power with responsible objectivity in the episodes analyzed is a question I
 123 raise.

124 Representation is the production of meanings through language (Hall 1997) and objectivity can
 125 be evaluated by studying these representations. What constitutes an image is as important as
 126 studying how and why it circulates, since 'the question of the circulation of meaning almost
 127 immediately involves the question of power' (Hall 1997). Studying representations and the politics
 128 of imagery is thus useful in examining racism.

129 I use Van Dijk's approach to critical discourse analysis for studying representations. Van Dijk's
 130 approach in analyzing discourse is useful because it differentiates itself from formal linguistic
 131 analysis and places language in a context of active social structures and political problems. It
 132 examines equations of power in discursive representations and takes a stand by enforcing
 133 responsibility. The approach guides my study and position on the abuse of power these large media
 134 organizations exert by manipulating the attitudes (Van Dijk 2018) of viewers and reproducing
 135 racism. His proposed theoretical framework involves observing the following: opinion and

² Times Now devoted 8 episodes to *triple talaq* and 8 to *love jihad* since 2017 and Republic devoted 7 and 3, respectively. In comparison, NDTV discussed *triple talaq* in three episodes and *love jihad* once, whereas India Today covered *triple talaq* three times and *love jihad* five times.

136 emotion words, as well as volumes of intonation, global topics and semantic macrostructures,
 137 speech acts including the intention of the participants, metaphors — especially negative and
 138 manipulative — and ideological polarization of using in-group and out-group markers ('us versus
 139 them') by emphasizing good versus bad.

140 Van Dijk sees discourse analysis as a discipline of study rather than a methodology. Keeping in
 141 line with this, I will also combine his theoretical framework with that of media theorists' concepts of
 142 agenda setting, priming and framing to analyze the content. Agenda setting refers to the ability of
 143 the mass media to signal to the public what is important by virtue of choosing what to cover and
 144 how much to cover (McCombs and Shaw 1972). Priming, closely related to agenda setting, is the
 145 process of invoking certain images in the memory of a viewer through a semantic process — giving
 146 them an interpretive frame to recall specific associations with respect to certain issues in their
 147 thought process. Finally, framing is the process of communicating select aspects of an argument
 148 "to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or
 149 treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman 1993). Framing focuses more on content
 150 than priming and agenda setting. A frame can be a phrase, image, analogy, or metaphor that a
 151 journalist uses to communicate the essence of an issue or event. These tools of studying
 152 representation give me a theoretical framework, alongside semiotics, to critically analyze the
 153 discourse.

154 Iyengar and Kinder (1987) argue that the media "does not alter reality" but "changes and
 155 shapes perceptions by presenting an issue in a particular context (framing) and positioning it by the
 156 act of highlighting and association (priming) thereby influencing judgment." In this paper, I study
 157 how the stance the media takes may direct and affect the perception of the viewer.
 158

159 3. Headlines: What is the agenda set and how is the audience primed?

160 Van Dijk has emphasized on the textual and cognitive function of headlines. Their main
 161 function is that the information or, in this case, the opinion in the headline is used as a frame to
 162 process the information that comes after it (Van Dijk 1991a). In the digital age where all information
 163 goes up online minutes after being aired on TV, headlines play the dual role of framing opinion as
 164 well as serving as anchor text for search tools. The words used in headlines therefore, are key
 165 triggers for the thought process that follows in activating relevant dormant associations in peoples'
 166 memory.

167 In a list of over 2000 episodes of The Newshour on Times Now, content with the words
 168 "Hindu" or "Hinduism" appears 31 times in the headlines while the word "Islam" appears 14 times.
 169 The words appearing alongside "Hindu", "Hinduism" and "Islam" however, are telling of how the
 170 argument is framed:

171 The Newshour - Times Now

- 172 • Hindu – mentioned 31 times
- 173 • Hindu is accompanied by the following words: Congdivideshindu, jobless Hindus,
 174 Hindu haters, *asli* Hindu [real Hindu], being Hindu a disadvantage, don't Hindu girls
 175 have rights, Hindu's don't count, Hindu *Rashtra* [Hindu Nation], minority Hindus
 176 denied home, Hindu refugees, training to saving Hindus, Hindu *Swabhiman* [Hindu
 177 Pride]: Train kids to fight and shoot.
- 178 • Islam — mentioned 14 times
- 179 • In each of these cases "Islam" is accompanied with the following words: Islamist
 180 Hate, Islamophobia, stop giving 'Islamists' a free run, Islamist radicals, brutality,
 181 sickening depravity, Islamic Caliphate, Islamic rage, Terror in the name of Islam,
 182 Islamists threaten.

183 An analysis of these headlines from Times Now tells us that most of the headlines related to
 184 Muslims and Islam use words of antagonism, whereas for Hindus, associated words signify
 185 victimhood. If these headlines were to be believed, the Hindus are hated, jobless, at a disadvantage,
 186 denied rights and so on. Islam, on the other hand, has a free run, is replete with brutality, sickening

187 depravity, rage and terror. This can have serious repercussions on the view of Muslims in the mind
 188 of the audience. It primes one to unconsciously treat Muslims with suspicion and consequently,
 189 more likely to believe rumors about them.

190 Most headlines in Times Now and Republic TV prime the audience to think of Muslims as
 191 criminals, or hatching some conspiracies undercover. These headlines include words like, 'EXPOSE',
 192 'CAUGHT', 'BAN' — all in uppercase. These negative predicates, associated with the headlines,
 193 identify Muslims and Islam as agents of crime. Here, the moral agent is the vigilant media and the
 194 patient is the stealthy, criminal Muslim. Some examples as follows:

- 195 • Triple Talaq BANNED - Celebrations For Indian Women (Republic TV)
- 196 • Arnab Goswami EXPOSES Love Jihad (Republic TV)
- 197 • BAN "Nikah" Sex Racket in Hyderabad (Republic TV)
- 198 • CAUGHT: ISIS Converting Hindu Girls For 5 Lakh Rupees (Times Now)
- 199 • END Triple Talaq — Most Cruel And Demeaning Form Of Divorce (Times Now)
- 200 • Oppose Triple Talaq — 23-Year-Old Nasrin Was UNILATERALLY Divorced (Times
 201 Now)

202

203 Compared to these, NDTV 24x7 and India Today reported with neutral predicates:

- 204 • Triple Talaq ban: What's bad in theology is bad in law? (India Today)
- 205 • Banning Triple Talaq: Votebank Politics or Righting A Wrong? (NDTV 24x7)
- 206 • Triple Talaq Banned: One Step Closer to Uniform Civil Code? (NDTV 24x7)

207 The headline, "Why Indulge A *Love Jehadi*?" on Times Now is not only giving credence to the
 208 premise that *love jihad* exists, but it also lexically frames the headline such that it proclaims the man
 209 involved guilty, despite no official indictment. Another headline: "Arnab Goswami EXPOSES *Love*
 210 *Jihad*" (Republic TV), also operates on the same pretext, this time taking on the burden of trying to
 211 prove the phenomenon of *love jihad*.

212 In other headlines, the stance of the channels (Times Now and Republic TV) is clear and it is
 213 evident that there is no room for debate. The anchor has taken on the role of the moral actor and
 214 thereby, the savior in the following:

- 215 • #AbolishTripleTalaq: Closing in On The Quest For Equality? (Times Now)
- 216 • Women Allowed in Haji Ali — Big VICTORY, Next Triple Talaq Issue on their agenda
 217 (Times Now)
- 218 • Don't Hindu Girls Have Rights?

219 Objectivity is inherently assumed for the media and while it may not always be there, viewers
 220 tend to trust news and presume non-partisanship and objectivity. These headlines are not merely a
 221 reflection of the channel but also warning signals for the society overall as such framing reinforces
 222 stereotypes about Muslims.

223

224 4. Semiotics, Discourse and Semantics: How the Episodes are Framed

225 The second level of agenda setting involves content analysis of the debate. What does the
 226 anchor say, what is displayed on the screen in the ticker and who is invited for debates — a
 227 combination of these three factors frames how the audience views the story. For the episodes below,
 228 I study the anchors' speech, the text on the ticker, and overall semiotic inferences. Both these shows
 229 ('The Newshour' on Times Now and 'The Debate' on Republic TV) involve panel discussions. While
 230 the editors cannot be held responsible for the speech of the panelists, they do have editorial control
 231 over the selection of panelists. In both channels, there is an evident bias in selecting the voices
 232 presented. Hence, while I exclusively examine the speech of anchors because they guide the
 233 argument and conversation, I also make note of the representation (or non-representation) in the
 234 selection of the panelists.

235

236 4.1 Trope 1: The Victim Muslim Woman Who Needs to be Saved from the Muslim Man

237 In her famous work, ‘Do Muslim Women need saving?’ Lila Abu Lughod writes about
 238 being ‘surprised by how easily people presume that Muslim women do not have rights’ (Abu
 239 Lughod 2013). She acknowledges the violence and oppressive practices against women but is also
 240 quick to note that this violence must not necessarily be associated with one religion. For this analysis
 241 too, the acknowledgement of the oppression inflicted by certain practices on a section of the
 242 population is crucial. However, preventing the essentialization all Muslims and Islam as oppressive
 243 towards women due to certain practices followed by a minority is also important.

244
 245 Topics like the banning of the *niqab*, *hijab* and other rights have dominated public debate in the
 246 last few years. These discussions have propagated the image of Muslim women as lacking agency
 247 and being oppressed — specifically by Muslim men. In discussions around *triple talaq* — instant
 248 divorce that a man can give his wife — this lack of agency is most pandered to. I use Gayatri
 249 Chakravorty Spivak’s (1993) essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ where she deconstructs power and
 250 voice between the powerful, colonial elite and the colonized subaltern. She notes that ‘white men are
 251 saving brown women from brown men’ (Spivak 1993). I play on her claim to say that ‘Hindu men
 252 are saving Muslim women from Muslim men’. In this analysis, a gendered racism pandering to
 253 oriental tropes and a savior-victim dichotomy emerge.

254 Navvaro (2010) notes that for Western media, most news stories mentioning Muslim women
 255 and violence against them are shown repeatedly without much nuance. They do not “usually
 256 explain the political, economic and educational factors that fuel intolerable practices” and
 257 consequently build this perception of Muslim women as victims needing saving. The coverage of the
 258 *triple talaq* debate is framed along similar lines. Much of the issue is related specifically to women
 259 whose socio-economic status does not enable them to be independent. However, they are often
 260 essentialized as being Muslim women oppressed by Islam — a monolithic religion enforced by its
 261 men.

262
 263 **Episode 1. Should Triple Talaq Brigade Apologize? | The Debate on Republic TV (22 Aug 2017)**

264 The analysis of this episode begins by noting the representation on the panel. In a trend that
 265 recurs throughout all the episodes analyzed, the spokesperson for all Muslims is a stereotypical
 266 religious clergyman dressed in traditional clothes with a hat and a full beard. Visually, he clearly
 267 stands out among fellow panelists as the face of Islam and is addressed as *maulana*. The clergymen
 268 are trained in an orthodox, religious school of thought and are a very small minority amongst
 269 Muslims.

270 Discussing instant divorce and its support among a certain section of Muslim clergy for the law
 271 that allows it, the anchor makes his stand evident early on. The anchor’s speech is full of opinions
 272 and emotion words, including, but not limited to, the following:

- 273
- 274 • “Primitive. Fake. False unjust religious practices.”
 - 275 • “[This is the] biggest slap in the face on the likes of All-India Muslim Personal Law
 276 Board who have been expecting Indian Muslim women to tolerate triple talaq in 2017.
 277 In a secular country like India, horrible practices like this will be put to an end.”
 - 278 • “I’m not going to be politically correct or communally correct. You must accept defeat.
 279 Tomorrow this farcical religious argument you have built to squander the rights of
 women [...].”

280 All three sentences are laden with the lexical framing of Islam as a religion with “primitive”
 281 practices that are “unjust” to women. Adjectives like “horrible”, “unjust”, “primitive” and “archaic”
 282 perpetuate racist images of Islam. The metaphor of “slap in the face” is used to shame and indicate
 283 defeat of the “other” (religious Muslims) against a secular India. The belligerent tone employed by
 284 the anchor to address the Muslim panelists from the start of the show indicates an already existing
 285 conflict between his views and theirs.

286 The anchor addresses all accusations towards the Muslim *maulana* (clergyman) and creates a
 287 spectacle by demanding explanations for specific instances of misuse of the *triple talaq* law around
 288 the country. He forces those supporting the law to apologize to the Muslim women on TV. The

289 anchor incites and provokes the *maulana* by saying “Is [he] looking nervous and sheepish tonight?”
 290 This is an implication that the Muslim man stands to lose his power with a change in the law, i.e. the
 291 ban on *triple talaq*. The anchor presupposes a stronghold of power of the Muslim orthodoxy, which
 292 he aims to convey to the viewer and subsequently push the viewer to actively thwart it. The flashing
 293 ticker text reinforces the message:

- 294 • “Join the team that fought for Muslim women’s rights”
- 295 • “#REJECTTRIPLETALAQ”

296 The text urges viewers to join in as agents fighting for Muslim women’s rights, making them an
 297 active part of the savior campaign.

298

299 **Episode 2. Triple Talaq BANNED – Celebrations for Indian Women | The Debate on Republic TV (22 Aug**
 300 **2017)**

301 In this episode, the anchor’s speech was laced with lexical expressions such as “misogynistic”,
 302 “archaic”, “backward”, “biased”, “illegal” and “wrong” for Islam and Muslims—each heavy with
 303 the baggage of racism that has shadowed Muslims in India. Noting snippets from the anchor’s
 304 speech:

- 305 • “Why was being anti-women, pro Muslim?”
- 306 • “Is it a Muslim right to burn your wife alive?”
- 307 • “Muslims need to be protected from not having a Uniform Civil Code.”
- 308 • “1400-year-old regressive practice of *triple talaq* has been thrown away into the
 309 dustbin.”

310 The meaning produced here and the stress, intonation and word order of the questions presuppose
 311 an inherent misogyny in Islam. Further, the anchor creates his own meaning by misquoting the
 312 panelists who support *triple talaq* and express that they would resist this potential change in the law
 313 as follows:

- 314 • “All is not lost, these misogynists say, these sexists, chauvinists say, ‘There is still
 315 some hope we can still crush women. Only we’ll take 100 days to crush women.’”

316 The selection of panelists in this episode is biased as well. By regularly selecting orthodox
 317 Muslims who present themselves in a traditional way – men with beards and skullcaps and women
 318 with burqas and niqabs – they repeatedly portray a stereotypical image of a Muslim that is not
 319 representative of the diversity of voices that exist. In a country with 172 million Muslims, each with a
 320 different cultural and ethnic background and politics, this stereotyping is a gross
 321 mischaracterization.

322 Navarro (2010, p.100) says that,

323 Another strategy that accentuated the stereotype of Muslim women as passive
 324 and submissive women is that whenever the issue of “women in Islam” is
 325 discussed or reported, women are hardly ever given the chance to express their
 326 opinions; hence, they are deprived of preferential access to this discourse, a
 327 source of power comparable to social resources.

328

329 When Muslim women appear on these panels, they are either fully covered in niqab or completely
 330 Westernized, having shed their Islam. With this pattern, the anchor chooses to perpetuate a specific
 331 visual narrative – the oppressed Muslim woman, anonymized by religion, needs saving and this
 332 can only be achieved if she denounces Islam completely; the bearded Muslim man represents
 333 orthodox intolerance. In this episode too, this trend is evident. There were no Muslim women on the
 334 panel. Muslim men were made to represent women. During the episode, pointing to the clergymen
 335 the anchor says:

- 336 • “Are women human beings for you or are they a flock of cattle that you do as you
 337 please?”
- 338 • “A man can gather all the wives he possibly can and reduce them to domestic help but
 339 why can’t a Muslim woman do the same?”
- 340 • “Why don’t you give Muslim women the freedom of movement?”

341 The metaphor of cattle is used paint a picture of a submissive, passive woman who is objectified
 342 as property without much agency. The choice of words in the third question assumes that Muslim
 343 women need to be “given freedom” — with the presupposition that men restrict this freedom.

344 In another episode of The Debate on Republic TV (Dec 31, 2017), the anchor accuses one of the
 345 clergy members on the panel: “Why are you fighting against the basic rights of Muslim women?
 346 Why are you against Muslim women? Why are you against progress?” His intention to polarize the
 347 discussion with hostile speech and rhetorical questions is evident. He does not seek answers, rather
 348 he uses these leading questions to produce the effect of conflict by provoking both the panelists and
 349 the audience.

350

351 **Episode 3.** *Triple Talaq Petitioner Ishrat Shamed by Pack Of Patriarchs | The Newshour Debate on Times*
 352 *Now (29 Aug 2016)*

353 The discussion in this episode was focused on a political rally where a group of Muslim
 354 clergymen insulted a petitioner fighting for the ban on *triple talaq*. Taking a cue from this, the anchor
 355 uses leading statements like the following to guide the viewers’ opinions:

356

357 • “See, this is what she [a Muslim woman] is having to face to stand up for dignity and
 358 equality. She was called every conceivable derogatory term that you can think of by these
 359 Muslim patriarchs.”

360

361 Bringing the lady who filed the petition in question on air, he addresses her in a patronizing tone
 362 and says,

363 • “*Bohot sahi keh rahin hain aap. Kijye kijye, aapko support karne wale bohot hai*” [You are saying
 364 the right thing. Do it, do it. There are many to support you].

365

366 In this instance, we see how an act of misogyny by a group of men who happen to be Muslim is
 367 generalized as one sanctioned by Islam. Metaphors like the following incite the viewer towards
 368 anger at such injustices:

369 • “Doesn't your blood boil? *Islam iski ijazat kaise deta hai?*” [How does Islam allow this?]

370

371 In her observations on Western media, Navarro (2010) mentions that the media gives access to
 372 specific types of “Muslim women [who] appear as active sources of information” and calls them
 373 “Westernized women”. They are the ones who do not wear veils, almost never belong to an Islamist
 374 movement, and provide a contrast to the helpless niqabi — the anonymous and passive veiled
 375 woman. This oppressed and passive traditional Muslim versus the modern, secular Muslim is often
 376 employed theatrically in Indian news. In the following episodes we have politician Shazia Ilmi—
 377 an example of a secular Muslim woman—unveiled and progressive, pitted against two traditional
 378 Muslim clergymen, both bearded and dressed in traditional attire.

379

380 **Episode 4:** *Khalid Speaks For ‘Traitor’, Shazia Can’t For “Triple Talaq”?: The Newshour Debate on Times*
 381 *Now (1 March 2017)*

382 **Episode 5:** *Government Officially Opposes Triple Talaq: The Newshour Debate on Times Now (7 Oct 2016)*

383 **Episode 6:** *Oppose Triple Talaq 23-Year-Old Nasrin was UNILATERALLY Divorced: The Newshour Debate*
 384 *on Times Now (2 Nov 2016)*

385 In these episodes, the anchor introduces the panel members with strong descriptions, passing
 386 judgements on their rationality. Panelists include progressive Muslim women alongside *maulan*as.
 387 The anchor’s speech act is clear in his intonation and mocking stance in episode 5 as he says,
 388 referring to the *maulana* figure,

389

390 • “They are for the regressive practice of *triple talaq*”
 391 • “Viewers, I have a very arrogant man here. Let’s start on a basic premise—men and
 women are equal.”

392 In Episode 4, where they pit a good Muslim against a bad Muslim, we see ideological
393 polarization through the use of opinion and emotion words. The anchor says,

394 • “Why do you [clergymen on the show] get very, very worried when there is a progressive
395 Muslim woman who comes ups and challenges views?”

396 The anchor mocks and screams at the Muslim representatives and doesn’t let them speak. His tone
397 of voice when speaking to the clergymen is markedly different from his demeanor with other
398 panelists—he snaps and screams. Latching on to an instance of a Muslim panel member insulting
399 Ilmi, he rushes to defend her right to speak.

400

401 • “You will not talk to them like that. You treat them like a joke. You will apologize to those
402 women. Take off the mike and leave the show. You either apologize or leave the show.
403 Don’t shamelessly sit. Don’t insult my panelists.”

404

405 His speech act here is patronizing and then reprimanding. In this process, he positions himself as the
406 savior of the ‘good Muslim’ woman, standing up for her rights. The anchor is combative, his body
407 language displays aggression as he hunches over the panelist in an attempt to intimidate him and
408 forces him to leave the studio. While chaos and argument dominate the scene, he immediately pulls
409 up the other Muslim men on the panel for not reprimanding the erring panelist—creating the
410 semantic spectacle that, evidently, Muslim men do not stand up for Muslim women.

411 In episode 6, the anchor puts up another performance of saving the “Westernized Muslim
412 woman” when one of the clergymen comments on her personal appearance. Reminding viewers of
413 the overall plight of the “oppressed” Muslim woman, he quotes the following statistic:

414

415 • “48.1 % of Muslim women cannot even read or write their names.”

416

417 Then he characterizes the clergymen as worried because of the rising influence of “progressive”
418 Muslim women:

419

420 • “*Aap log pareshan kyun hain? Kyunki aapko pata hai ki Shazia, Saba aur Zeenat Shaukat Ali jaisi*
421 *auratein samne ayengi*” [Why are you people worried? Is it because women like Shazia, Saba and
422 Zeenat Shaukat Ali will come forth?]

423

424 **Episode 7:** *Should Muslim Personal Law Be Scrapped?* | *One India, One Law: The Newshour Debate on*
425 *Times Now (5 Feb 2016)*

426 **Episode 8:** *Uniform Civil Code | Personal Law above Constitution of India: The Newshour Debate on Times*
427 *Now (6 Nov 2015)*

428 In a similar vein, these two episodes, through their choice of panelists and lexical framing of
429 arguments, frame a view of Islam as discriminatory towards Muslim women as follows:

430

431 • “The most archaic law. Most archaic Islamic law, politicians under the garb of secularism
432 have nothing to question it”

433

434 • “Islam is discriminating against Muslim women”

435

436 • “What Muslim women are enduring in the name of religion”

437

438 • “Regressive practices as a result of Muslim personal law. How can that be supported?”
439 Episode 7 ends with the anchor making a powerful hand gesture of trashing something and
438 dismissing with a hand flick. “Throw them out, these Muslim personal laws,” he says, as the ticker
439 bleeps with photos of the flags of Muslim countries and text reading: “They reformed *talaq* laws,
440 why can’t we?” The panel for episode 8 features two female news correspondents and six male
441 panelists. Here too, representation is skewed.

442 Juxtaposing this with how India Today reports this issue is interesting. The headline reads
 443 neutrally: “*Triple talaq* ban: What’s bad in theology is bad in law?”³ Amongst the panelists are two
 444 legal experts. Also on air is one of the first women who filed a petition against the practice of *triple*
 445 *talaq*—a Muslim woman without a hijab and Salman Khurshid, a prominent moderate Muslim voice.
 446 The anchor does not specifically target Islam through the conversation, hailing the *triple talaq* ban as
 447 a victory for gender justice and not one against Islam,

448 • “Massive victory for gender justice—supreme court strikes down *triple talaq* in
 449 landmark judgment”

450 Through the show, the anchor and panelists highlight, that *triple talaq* is against Quran and violates
 451 Islamic law. The debate isn’t seen as a fight between Muslim women and Islam, but rather as a
 452 conflict of “fundamental rights versus personal law.”

453 On NDTV 24x7, the headline for this issue also reads in a similar vein, “Muslim Body Dares
 454 Government: Personal Law vs Rights?”⁴ Calling out biased reporting and domination of the
 455 discourse by the clergy, the anchor questions the representation of the stakeholders,

456
 457 • “Who is the one who speaks for Muslim women in India? Is it the women’s groups
 458 backed by progressive men or is it these community leaders who see every suggestion
 459 for change as an attack on the Muslim community?”
 460

461 While Republic TV and Times Now ignore all other social factors besides a victim’s Muslim
 462 identity, NDTV 24x7 and India Today explore alternative views instead of employing the savior
 463 trope. In the episode, “Banning *Triple Talaq*: Votebank Politics Or Righting A Wrong?”⁵ the ticker
 464 reads:

465 • ‘It is about gender justice, equality’
 466 • ‘20 countries abolish *triple talaq*’
 467 • ‘*Triple talaq* unconstitutional’
 468 • ‘Using *triple talaq* as a poll plank BJP’
 469

470 There is a significant difference in their reporting style, which shows objectivity and nuance as
 471 well as a healthy skepticism and caution to not fall for racist stereotypes.
 472

473 4.2 Trope 2: *The Hindu Woman Needs to be Saved from the Muslim Man* 474

475 Explaining how Muslims are viewed by Hindus in India, psychologist Sudhir Kakar says that in
 476 the mind of Hindus, Muslims are “sexual predators” and the Muslim male is attributed a “physical
 477 ferocity and rampant sexuality” (Kakar 2007). From his interviews of men, it is clear that they
 478 thought that Muslim men were “obsessed with sex and [forced] themselves upon our women”.

479 This trope outlined by Kakar is reinforced within the news shows analyzed here. Arguments for
 480 saving Hindu/non-Muslim women from Muslim men—portrayed as the rabid other—are made.
 481 Muslim men are accused of charming these women through the promises of love as well as through
 482 hypnosis. The rapid popularity of the conspiracy theory of *love jihad* can be attributed to the extent of
 483 such framing of its coverage in the mass media. Linking it to terrorism through the use of the word
 484 ‘*jihad*’, it perpetuates the global stereotype of the violent Muslim, thereby making it more believable.
 485

486 **Episode 9: Arnab Goswami EXPOSES Love Jihad | The Debate on Republic TV (16 Aug 2017)**

487 **Episode 10: CAUGHT: ISIS Converting Hindu Girls for 5 Lakh Rupees | The Newshour Debate on Times**
 488 **Now (23 Jun 2017)**

³ India Today – People’s Court, 22 Aug 2017

⁴ NDTV 24x7 – Left Right and Center, Oct 13, 2016

⁵ NDTV 24x7 – Left, Right and Center, Feb 6, 2017

489 These episodes are rife with drama. Both are framed as exposés, with the screen behind the
 490 anchor flashing and moving, creating an atmosphere of agitation. The background music adds to the
 491 environment of agitation. The panel invited to discuss the *love jihad* issue consists of men only, not a
 492 single woman—reinforcing Navarro’s (2010) claim that the passive Muslim woman stereotype stems
 493 from this access, or the lack of it, to representation in this discourse. Unsurprisingly, no reference to
 494 women’s freedom to choose was made in the debate, which makes the bias in the selection of
 495 panelists evident.

496 Episode 10 has a hunt-and-chase sequence much like the earlier one. The text on screen is bright
 497 red and a strike through the text, a slashing of bright red words creates an imagery of violence. The
 498 episode shows an aerial view of a neighborhood which is zoomed in and then a car rushing through
 499 the streets, leading the viewer to dingy locations with the ticker flashing with the lines “academy of
 500 terror tutorial” and in red, bold letters “young minds poisoned here” and “Radicalization Hub
 501 exposed”. While the actual footage and testimony did not prove any allegations of a forceful
 502 conversion racket to a careful viewer, the connotation is evident. The panelist accuses “the
 503 Caliphate” of being desperate for new conversions, with the connotation that this trend stems from a
 504 global Islam. She claims to produce evidence of a rate card for conversions of different non-Muslim
 505 women, alleging that the prices to convert different types of non-Muslim women were different.
 506 This was later proved to be a doctored image, now used as WhatsApp propaganda which can be
 507 appropriately termed ‘fake news’⁶. The channel ran this insidious story without fact-checking and
 508 loaded it with false allegations against Muslims.

509 Editorial control over the panelists’ speech cannot be exerted once live on air, but the anchor can
 510 question the veracity of the statements and claims made by the panelists. Twice in these episodes,
 511 the anchors ignored obvious farcical claims by panelists. In the first instance, the anchor eggs on a
 512 panelist to make the preposterous claim that Muslim men are allowed to have sex slaves who are
 513 non-Muslims. The anchor does not cross-question the panelist’s claim, but rather signals her
 514 approval with the exclamation, “That’s right!”. In episode 9, a guest made the following racist
 515 remark, but the anchor fully validated his line of thought:

516 • “When jihadis are going for these girls they do not go with their beards and skull caps
 517 and ‘*bade bhai ka kurta*’ and ‘*chote bhai ka pyjama*’ [elder brother’s shirt and younger
 518 brother’s pants], they go as perfect—as you and me.”

519 In this stark case of othering of Muslims, the anchor alludes to the common stereotype that Muslims
 520 reproduce with an agenda; they have many children to increase the population of their race. To
 521 further dramatize this, the anchor interjects, screaming—“Shame! Shame! Shame!” This is a
 522 powerful speech act that he uses to malign the Muslim clergy.

523 The first questions asked by the anchor at the opening of episode 9 are evident of his stance on
 524 *love jihad*. His lexical framing creates the impression that conversions are not consensual but forceful
 525 or deceitful:

526 • “Are Hindu women, or non-Muslim women being forcefully converted, radicalized
 527 and a fraction of them pushed towards terrorist groups?”

528 • “Forcefully converted. Lure them into marriage. Pack them off to the Middle East.”

529 The anchor repeats these sentences multiple times, and the text “lured, converted and packed
 530 off to Syria” flash on the ticker repeatedly, reinforcing the semantic framing of this conspiracy
 531 behind conversions. ‘Lured’ is a word that suggests evil design that can be stopped through
 532 conscientious intervention. The episode thus encourages viewers to be active participants, or active
 533 thinkers, against this ‘ploy’ of the Muslims. “Packing them off” is a metaphor which suggests the
 534 lack of agency and consent of the women involved. Further, the anchor says:

535 • “Those who survived speak up.”

536 • “*Love jihad* is for real and there is a pattern to lure Hindu women to marry Muslim
 537 men”

538 • “Forced, lured, enticed, at conversion centers.”

⁶ Source: <https://www.altnews.in/times-now-runs-prime-time-story-based-7-year-old-photoshopped-image/>

539 In all these there is the presupposition that *love jihad* is a real phenomenon and that, the women
 540 here are victims/survivors who were lacking agency and independent decision-making. During this
 541 conversation, global Islamophobic superstructures come into play. Mentions of the Middle East,
 542 Jihad, Yemen and Syria plays into the primed minds of the viewers, striking the fear of global
 543 terrorism. Saussure's (1966) theory suggests that these words are signs that point to signifiers of
 544 global terrorism emanating from the Middle East. The word "racket" is used to a similar effect. All
 545 these expressions dispatch a very specific, targeted meaning at viewers—one that links Islam to
 546 terrorism, as evident in the anchor's speech,

547 • "Lured, converted and packed off to Syria"
 548 • "How is this innocent conversion? This is illegal conversion with a jihadi agenda."
 549 This again is a call for action by 'othering'. By insinuating that these conversion centers 'brainwash'
 550 women and preach hatred of Hindus, the anchor's speech is creating fear in the minds of viewers,
 551 which may translate to suspicion in personal lives.

552
 553 • "Brainwashed! Preaching hate on Hindu gods and Hinduism."
 554 • "Something dangerous is going on and we need to investigate it."
 555

556 Elaborating on the story behind a woman's conversion, the anchor says,

557
 558 • "She accidentally said 'Inshallah' at the workplace and she was hounded, lured and
 559 consumed by these *love jihadis* to convert to Islam to be sent to Yemen. Is that
 560 consensual conversion or forced conversion?"
 561

562 The meaning signified in this sentence is that of wily Muslim men waiting to pounce on any sign of
 563 weakness or sympathy from Hindu women towards Islam in order to convert them. The lexical
 564 framing of the ticker text enhances this implication. Usage of the word 'innocent' for the women
 565 involved presumes their passivity and naivety:

566 • "Lured, thrown into illegal conversion centers"
 567 • "How innocent women were lured and converted"
 568 • "Exposed *love jihad*-terror link"
 569

570 There is little evidence of terror links but the connection is presupposed in the very use of the term
 571 *love jihad*. The use of the metaphor 'thrown' also suggests the women's reluctance and cautions
 572 vigilance.

573
 574 **Episode 11:** *Why Is India in Denial On "Love Jihad"?* | *The Debate with Arnab Goswami on Republic TV (31*
 575 *Oct 2017)*

576 **Episode 12:** *Love Jihad Case: 'Consent' Is Prime, But Is It 'Independent'?* | *The Newshour Debate on Times*
 577 *Now (27 Nov 2017)*

578 **Episode 13:** *Akhila to Hadiya Via 'Hypnosis'?* | *The Newshour Debate on Times Now (11 Mar 2018)*
 579

580 The case of Hadiya, a Hindu woman who converted to Islam to marry her Muslim lover,
 581 became national news for months. Hadiya's parents claimed she was abducted and indoctrinated,
 582 while Hadiya herself asserted her free consent as an adult. While there was no evidence of forced
 583 conversion, the media trials were regular on these channels. The channels' stance was evident in
 584 how the issue was reported. Lexical expressions like 'religious conversion racket' and words like
 585 'indoctrination' dominated the speech of the anchors, as demonstrated by the following example:

586
 587 • "Hadiya's father has been fighting a battle against psychological kidnapping."
 588 • "She confesses she was taught to cut head, ear, eye and nose."
 589

590 All this while the ticker flashes the text below:

- 591
592
593
594
595
596
597
- ‘Love or psychological kidnapping?’
 - ‘Was told real Islam is in Saudi and Yemen’
 - ‘Incited hate against Hindus’
 - ‘Taught the idea of jihad and darul Islam’
 - ‘Personal affair vs larger plot;

598 Alleging conspiracy, including the systematic conversion of women to Islam through hypnosis,
599 was a key feature of these three episodes. The anchor clearly states the inability of the lady in
600 question, Hadiya, to make autonomous decisions. Reinforcing this view with the vocabulary of
601 coercion, consent, indoctrination, brainwashing etc. and peppering it with allegations of Stockholm
602 Syndrome, make the case for this being a coercive marriage even stronger. Following are some
603 examples of anchors’ incendiary speech
604

- 605
606
607
608
609
610
- “Not everything that Hadiya says can be taken at face value”
 - “Where does coercion stop and consent begin”
 - “She was getting indoctrinated or brainwashed”
 - “Look at the story of Patty Hurst (...) see what the case of Stockholm syndrome can actually mean and see whether there are similarities or not.”

611 All this while the ticker is flashing the following text, priming the audience to interpret the debate in
612 the way that leads them to believe that this was a forced conversion.
613

- 614
615
616
617
618
619
620
- ‘Confinement and coercion’
 - ‘NIA Exposes hypnotic conversion’
 - ‘Who runs conversion centers?’
 - ‘Hadiya paraded for photo op’
 - ‘Intensive hypnotic counseling’
 - ‘PFI uses hate to hypnotize’

621 Such reporting not only misleads but also creates panic. In contrast, NDTV 24x7, when
622 reporting on this issue, treats the term *love jihad* with a healthy skepticism and questions its origins.
623 In the episode titled, “Is ‘Love Jihad’ Just A Political Campaign?” the anchor says,
624

- 625
626
627
- “What is actually *love jihad*? I actually find love jihad most offensive. It’s crass, derogatory. “

628 Reporting on the specific case, the ticker shows the following text, proving that it is possible to report
629 without targeting Muslims and Islam:
630

- 631
632
633
634
- ‘Kerala Interfaith Marriage’
 - ‘SC: Girls consent is of prime importance’
 - ‘Love Jihad a political gimmick’

635 Not only does the channel report in a balanced manner, it also questions the potential origins of
636 the conspiracy theory of *love jihad*, rather than accepting it prima facie. How the media views and
637 frames the issue is essential to how things are interpreted by the public. In December 2017, right
638 around the time the issue of *love jihad* was widely debated in the media, a Hindu man in Rajasthan
639 hacked to death a Muslim laborer while filming a video which would go on to become viral. He used

⁷ NDTV 24x7 – Left, Right and Center, 30 October 2017

640 *love jihad* as a justification⁸ for killing the man (a claim that was later proven to be a lie), confident
641 that he would find public endorsement for his cause.

642

643 4.3 Trope 3: *Us vs Them – Muslims as not fully Indian*

644

645 Studies have discussed how in India, the category of “Muslim” has been reproduced as a
646 religious category, and has been rendered incompatible with ‘being Indian’ (Mehdi 2017). Mehdi
647 (2017) extends Said’s Orientalism thesis (1978) to ‘explain how in the secular nation state of India, the
648 phobia isn’t of Islam; rather, it is of religion. The religion is identified as Islam’. She discusses how
649 ‘national identity and religious identity are at loggerheads’, making it impossible for Muslims in
650 India to be Indian. Through the process that Van Dijk calls the creation of ‘the We-Groups and the
651 others’ (Van Dijk 1998), we examine how the media plays a role in positioning Muslims as the
652 dangerous ‘other’.

653

654 Evidence for this can be found in the episodes on *love jihad* discussed above (episodes 9-13).
655 Flashing ticker messages display the following text,

656

- 657 • ‘National Song, national anthem insulted’
- 658 • ‘Incited hate against Hindus’
- 659 • ‘Wanted me to leave the country’
- 660 • ‘Taught jihad’

661 The connotations here are not only of forced conversion into Islam, but also that Muslims are taught
662 to hate India. The ticker framing signifies that the girl in question intended to leave the country and
663 denounce her Indian identity and embrace a Muslim one.

663

664 **Episode 10: CAUGHT: ISIS Converting Hindu Girls for 5 Lakh Rupees | The Newshour Debate on Times**
665 *Now* (23 Jun 2017)

666 This episode has been discussed earlier. The anchor openly posits the Muslim as the other and
667 makes an ‘us-them’ distinction between Muslims and Hindus when she says,

668

- 669 • “Do you think our faith is for sale? Us Hindus?”
- 670 • “Are we really going to allow this in our country?”

671 Terming this phenomenon as ‘rabid Islamism’ and a part for ‘global jihad’, she also uses the term
672 ‘trafficking’ to describe the conversion. Meanwhile, the ticker flashes with the following text
673 indicating the Hindus as targets of this conversion campaign:

673

- 674 • “Caught: ISIS Converting Hindus”
- 675 • “Survivor Recalls Nightmare”
- 676 • “My daughter was told to learn to Quran”
- 677 • “My daughter was told to learn Syrian”

678 It is important to note that the channel showed ‘Syrian’ as a language on screen, without fact
679 checking. The links with ISIS too remain unsubstantiated but the ticker claims the following:

679

- 680 • ‘Radicalization hub exposed’
- 681 • ‘Inside ISIS conversion zone’
- 682 • ‘Young minds poisoned here’

682

683 In this episode, the anchor panders to global islamophobia by using feared buzzwords like
684 ‘caliphate’, ‘jihad’ and ‘sharia’ when talking of conversions. These place Indian Muslims within the
685 broader canvas of the global fear of Islam. Again, citing emotive terms and metaphors, she calls the
686 Muslim men who are involved with these women, ‘ISIS terror recruiters’:

687

- “ISIS terror recruiters befriend Hindu girls.”

⁸

Source:

[https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/shambhu-lal-regar-gave-afrajuls-murder-a-love-jihad-angle-to-hide-his-affair-s
ta/306866](https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/shambhu-lal-regar-gave-afrajuls-murder-a-love-jihad-angle-to-hide-his-affair-s
ta/306866)

688

689 **Episode 14: BAN "Nikah" Sex Racket In Hyderabad | The Debate With Arnab Goswami on Republic TV (20**
 690 **Sep 2017)**

691 The semiotics of this episode are tilted in the favor of the anchor's argument, against the
 692 Muslim men. I use this episode because it ties in with the Muslim personal law debate we have seen
 693 arise in *triple talaq* discussions. The male panelists, much like the other shows, appear with beards
 694 and caps. One panelist wears a keffiyeh - a garment alien to India and associated with Palestinian
 695 Arabs. This visual marker strongly suggests the correspondence of Muslims with Arabs in the global
 696 Islamophobia context, as described earlier. The anchor doesn't shy from such stereotypes and racist
 697 imagery.

698

699 Here too, while discussing a possible sex racket, the anchor frames the issue as if the Muslims
 700 sanction it through a specific loophole in the Muslim personal law. The persons actually responsible
 701 are not questioned. While seeking defense from the clergymen the anchor pauses to catch the
 702 clergyman's use of the word Islamic law and screams,

703 • "Don't you ever use the word Islamic Law in the context of India, stop dreaming
 704 about it."

705 • "This gentleman is unhappy in India, he wants the laws to be changed."

706 • "I don't care about your Muslim personal law. No Muslim personal law."

707 The presupposition here is that the clergyman wants Islamic law over Indian law. In the eyes of the
 708 anchor and now the viewer, the keepers of the Islamic religion, and consequently Islam itself are
 709 fundamentally opposed to India.

710

711 The episode then goes on, with the anchor spewing further racist epithets:

712 • "*Boodhe, gande, Arab sheikh - ameer, sexually frustrated, perverted, Arab sheikh*" [Old,
 713 dirty, Arab Sheikhs - rich, sexually frustrated, perverted, Arab Sheikhs].

714 He provokes the clergymen to defend this strawman in order to alienate the them from the Indian
 715 audience.

716 • "Is it bothering you if I say something about Arab Sheikhs. Are you an Arab sheikh?
 717 Why do you have a problem? Are you getting tickled if I say something about them?"

718 Through these insinuations, the anchor primes the audience to further racism and Islamophobia

719 • "*Boodhe, gande, Arab sheikh. They come from Islamic states. They take them [Indian
 720 women] to Saudi and Oman where Islamic law works.*"

721 • "To hell with people like you who say we want Islamic law in this country. Islamic
 722 personal law has allowed selling off of little children for short term sex-packages to
 723 Arab men."

724 This allegation not only others the Muslims in India from secular Indians but also paints a picture of
 725 the barbaric Arab with whom the Indian Muslim is linked.

726 • "This is a secular country. Say you want sharia, then you go to one of those Arabic
 727 countries where you get a legal sanction to flog women in public. You go join the ISIS
 728 where sex slavery is legal. Go to Syria."

729 The anchor brings back the argument to a topic of current relevance where he now associates Islamic
 730 personal law - a topic under contention by Indian judiciary to this,

731 • "I have a huge problem with Islamic personal law and I have a problem with those
 732 that don't have a problem with Islamic personal law because it is this Islamic personal
 733 law that has sanctioned the selling off of little girls to old and perverted Arab men."

734 Here he reinforces the picture of Muslim men who are sex-obsessed and prey on younger women. In
 735 this complex process of representation through association, the anchors and editors try to build
 736 social consensus for an issue - abolishing Muslim personal law in India - through the construction of
 737 dominant images of sexual predation and barbarism, which are racist.

738 This toxic racism and portrayal of Muslims as predatory others is one of the reasons of mob
 739 violence against Muslims. There is deep suspicion amongst Hindus against Muslims and their

740 intentions. Linking Arabs with Indian Muslims and toxic racism against Arabs makes this even more
 741 dangerous. In a case of mob lynching in July 2018, the murderers justified their actions by saying,
 742 “Did you see the Qatari’s face? His big beard?”⁹ The fact that the man looked visibly Muslim and
 743 Arab caused his death at the hand of a suspicious mob.

744 **5. Hashtags: What is guiding the conversation flow?**

745 Hashtags are a way to sort and classify individual tweets on Twitter by topic. It uses the ‘#’
 746 symbol in front of a string of text that acts as an index. All conversations around a certain hashtag
 747 are thus searchable and accessible. Hashtags are often used to mobilize conversation around a
 748 particular topic and generate the impression of a popular opinion. Shows from both channels which
 749 were analyzed—Republic TV and Times Now—use hashtags during their show to engage live
 750 viewers and what we see is a call for action and a priming of digital public opinion.

751 Each of these hashtags mentioned below has several hundred to a few thousand associated
 752 tweets. This means that thousands of viewers were watching and engaging with the content in real
 753 time. The channels encourage this practice of live-tweeting and participating in the larger public
 754 discourse. Each time someone tweets, they must type out the text in the hashtag for their voice to be
 755 heard. In this the channels control and incite public discourse by setting the agenda and guiding the
 756 conversation by the adjectives and predicates of the hashtag.

757 The hashtags associated with *love jihad* are replete with hostile verbs—ban, nailed, fight, and
 758 they also cite global islamophobia speech registers such as the ‘caliphate’ to invoke a sense of
 759 urgency and wrongdoing towards the Hindu.

760 *Love Jihad* Hashtags:

- 761 • Lovejihadtapes
- 762 • bannikahsex
- 763 • lovejihadfight
- 764 • CaliphateConvertsHindu
- 765 • Lovejihadnailed
- 766 • Lovejehadnexustapes
- 767 • Hadiyaconversiontwist
- 768 • Hadiyapfitrophy

769 Hashtags for *triple talaq* are similarly wedded to verbs like ‘reject’, ‘over’, ‘oppose’ and so on. The
 770 emphasis is on exhorting Indians to be united as one country under one law, as the Muslims and
 771 their laws are positioned as evident threats to it. Even the hashtag #MullahsShameIshrat is framed in
 772 such a way that gives the impression that all mullahs oppose her.

773 *Triple Talaq* Hashtags:

- 774 • Rejecttriplelataq
- 775 • Triplelataqover
- 776 • Triplelataqbillpassed
- 777 • TripleTalaqSabotage
- 778 • mullahsShameIshrat
- 779 • iOpposetriplelataq
- 780 • indiawithaneesa
- 781 • onecountryonecode
- 782 • oneindiaonelaw

⁹ Source:<https://www.indiatimes.com/news/india/did-you-see-his-long-beard-he-looks-like-a-terrorist-says-one-of-the-villagers-in-bidar-lynching-case-350303.html>

783 The physical act of tweeting out one's opinion involves typing out the hashtag. That act in itself
784 may reinforce this media-fed thought process as one's own. It is also likely that only those who
785 condone the channel's opinion will tweet to be heard, polarizing all conversation with a specific
786 opinion.

787 6. Discussions and Conclusion

788 Media trials and most importantly, biased media debates create widespread, one-sided notions
789 about current affairs. I began the paper with common notions of what a Muslim has looked like over
790 the years – the media trials have reinforced that belief. Through these hours of prime time news, the
791 Muslim has been the barbaric, misogynistic, regressive, anti-national, not-Indian, Arab, a terrorist
792 and the other. While it must be acknowledged that for the issues discussed here, the perpetrators are
793 Muslim and claim to derive sanction from Islam, it must also be notes that instead of holding the
794 individual perpetrators accountable, the media starts a trial against all Muslims and Islam. They use
795 global superstructures to play into these tropes and through repetition, reinforce the stereotypes.
796 That Muslim men oppress Muslim women or that Hindu women need to be cautious of a Muslim
797 man's intentions to lure and convert her, or that Muslims aren't Indian, they are the 'other' to an
798 ideal Hindu Indian—all create buckets for Indian Muslims to fill. The hostile anchors, the selection
799 of clergymen for misrepresented panels, visual and aural cues while on-air, all fuel resentment.
800 When the adjectives used to describe Muslims include 'jihadi', 'ISIS recruiters', 'patriarchs', this is
801 the view that is reinforced in minds of an audience. Not only does such careless journalism miss the
802 diversity within Islam, but it also leaves ordinary Muslims open to racist discrimination—with very
803 material consequences. The rampant use of WhatsApp to spread fake news is one example of this.
804 The reason why lynch mobs find it so easy to believe and kill at the behest of an unverified
805 WhatsApp forward is a systemic racism against Muslims that is slowly being normalized by the
806 mass media.

807
808 In both these cases, of *triple talaq* and *love jihad*, we see provocative racist imagery that stays with
809 the audience much after the news cycle dies. Origins of the term *love jihad* are unknown but its rise to
810 common parlance is solely a factor of its use in the media¹⁰, especially TV news. Similarly,
811 anti-Muslim fake news circulating on WhatsApp and other mediums and creating mass panic finds
812 more credence because similar conspiracy theories have been reported and highlighted by the news
813 media. A case in point is the rate card for conversion of non-Muslim women which was discussed in
814 an episode—an image later proved to be doctored and fake.

815
816 Much speculation suggests that such irresponsible journalism finds sanction through political
817 motivations—with the rise of a right-wing Hindu nationalist government that seeks to divide voters
818 on communal lines. NDTV 24x7 and India Today have highlighted this as well. The recent
819 Cobrapost sting operation confirms what many have suspected all along—media houses in India
820 manipulate news and how it is investigated and presented as a direct result of funding. In
821 Cobrapost's secretly recorded conversations, executives have been caught on tape saying that
822 journalists "will refrain from going deep negative, but they can't ignore a news"¹¹ in exchange of an
823 exorbitant sum of money from a group with obvious political affiliations.
824

¹⁰ Source:

<https://www.news18.com/news/politics/parties-wash-their-hands-off-love-jihad-controversy-say-its-not-a-political-issue-but-a-media-creation-710740.html>

¹¹ The Cobrapost sting files can be found here: <https://www.cobrapost.com/blog/Operation-136:-Part-1/1009> and the full story on the operation can be read here on The Wire:

<https://thewire.in/media/cobrapost-sting-big-media-houses-say-yes-to-hindutva-black-money-paid-news>

825 Understanding this in context of sponsors, Said says, “(imagery in mass media) is presided over
 826 by the great power establishments—the oil companies, the mammoth corporations and
 827 multinationals, the defense and intelligence communities, the executive branch of the government”
 828 (Said 1981). Studying ownership patterns of these channels is telling. Republic TV is owned by
 829 Goswami, along with Rajeev Chandrasekhar, a member of the ruling party (BJP), while Times Now
 830 is part of the Times group owned by Bennet & Coleman. While the former has affiliations with the
 831 BJP stated clearly, the other is a conservative right-wing channel with undisclosed affiliations as
 832 well. NDTV and India Today are both owned by journalists and individuals. Taking a stance and
 833 covering certain issues responsibly as a journalist is an objective duty. While displaying affiliations
 834 is not desirable, what is most reprehensible is this toxic racism.
 835

836 While my analysis is limited to these select topics and media, this is also a first step to initiate a
 837 wider study, one that goes past the limitations of manually watching and transcribing hundreds of
 838 hours of TV footage. Artificial intelligence and voice-activated natural language understanding tools
 839 could be useful in analyzing the same content on a large-scale. Moreover, I have only studied two
 840 channels within the English language media landscape. The discourse in Hindi and other regional
 841 languages would be useful subject of study, as these channels have much higher viewership.
 842 Further, it would also be useful to analyze the impact of the conversations sparked by such coverage.
 843 Drawing out cause-and-effect relationships between the racist broadcasts to mob violence is possible
 844 when the data spans across a longer duration of time and is not anecdotal, as presented here.
 845 Artificial intelligence tools could help track public sentiment and the impact of these conversations
 846 on social media with a certain degree of accuracy.
 847

848 Together these channels record 2 million impressions a week. Many of these impressions
 849 insinuating racism indirectly cause violence and killings. In a recent case of lynching a man was
 850 killed because he looked like a terrorist owing to his long beard.¹² Another was lynched as revenge
 851 for *love jihad*.¹³ While the impact of TV news on the minds of the murderers is not proven, the fact
 852 that stereotypes and imagery stays for recall is frightening. The first step, thus, is to ‘expose and
 853 deconstruct the work of representation which the stereotypes are doing’ (Hall 1997) in order to be
 854 able to address it further.

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857 **Appendix: List of Headlines**

858 NDTV Left, Right & Centre

- 859 1. From Attacks On Muslims To Christmas: No Country For Minorities?
- 860 2. Tough Talaq Law: Will It Empower Women?
- 861 3. Top Court Sends Hadiya To College
- 862 4. Triple Talaq Banned: One Step Closer To Uniform Civil Code?
- 863 5. India's Obsession With Cow: Are We Losing Sight Of Real Issues?
- 864 6. Banning Triple Talaq: Votebank Politics Or Righting A Wrong?
- 865 7. Muslim Body Dares Government: Personal Law vs Rights?
- 866 8. From Haji Ali To Shani Temple: Shouldn't Women Have Equal Rights?

¹² Source:<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-killings/he-looked-like-a-terrorist-how-a-drive-in-rural-india-ended-in-a-mob-attack-and-a-lynching-idUSKBN1KJ09R>

¹³Source:<https://www.firstpost.com/india/a-year-after-lynching-of-man-in-bulandshahr-over-love-jihad-issue-victims-family-members-live-like-refugees-4501227.html>

- 867 9. Does India Need a Uniform Civil Code?
868
- 869 India Today The People's Court
- 870 1. Kasganj violence: No punishment for communal Katiyar?
871 2. What really happened in Kasganj? BJP hints conspiracy
872 3. Congress questions BJP's hypocrisy on beef: Janeyu in Gujarat, beef in Karnataka?
873 4. First talaq then mehram: Fight for rights or demonising Muslims?
874 5. Why are patriarchs blocking Triple Talaq Bill?
875 6. Love or Love Jihad in Hadiya case: Can consent have exceptions?
876 7. Operation Conversion Factory: Islamic State a reality in Kerala?
877 8. Zainaba exclusive: Love jihad an RSS-BJP bogey to polarise votes?
878 9. Kerala love jihad 'victim' Hadiya first time on camera: Forced conversion or choice?
879 10. Hadiya love jihad case: Politics, or sinister plot?
880 11. Triple talaq ban: What's bad in theology is bad in law?
881
- 882 Republic TV
- 883 1. #TripleTalaqOrdinance - PM Modi's Masterstroke Against Opposition | The Debate With
884 Arnab Goswami
- 885 2. Biggest Conspiracy To Break India EXPOSED | The Debate With Arnab Goswami
- 886 3. Hindus Divided For Votes? | The Debate With Arnab Goswami
- 887 4. Rahul Gandhi Attempts To Break The Hindu Vote? | The Debate With Arnab Goswami
- 888 5. Why Congress Against Triple Talaq Bill? | The Debate With Arnab Goswami
- 889 6. Is Congress Leading The Anti Triple Talaq Bill Lobby? | The Debate With Arnab Goswami
- 890 7. Why Did Congress, Owaisi Try Blocking The Triple Talaq Bill? | The Debate With Arnab
891 Goswami
- 892 8. Why Is India In Denial On "Love Jihad"? | The Debate With Arnab Goswami
- 893 9. Why Silent On "Bakr Id & Azaan" - Hindus Targeted? | The Debate With Arnab Goswami
- 894 10. BAN "Nikah" Sex Racket In Hyderabad | The Debate With Arnab Goswami
- 895 11. Triple Talaq BANNED - Celebrations For Indian Women | The Debate With Arnab Goswami
- 896 12. Arnab Goswami EXPOSES Love Jihad | The Debate
- 897 13. Should Triple Talaq Brigade Apologize? | The Debate With Arnab Goswami
- 898 Times Now
- 899 1. After Triple Talaq, Nikah Halala Under Supreme Court Lens? | The Newshour Debate(27th
900 March)
- 901 2. Akhila To Hadiya Via 'Hypnosis'? | The Newshour Debate(11th March)
- 902 3. Triple Talaq Bill Blocked | The Newshour Debate (4th January)
- 903 4. Big Face-Off Over Triple Talaq Bill | The Newshour Debate (3rd January)
- 904 5. Quran Above Constitution? | The Newshour Debate (28th December)
- 905 6. Love Jihad Case: Why The Call To Kill For Hadiya? | The Newshour Debate (28th Nov)
- 906 7. Love Jihad Case: 'Consent' Is Prime, But Is It 'Independent'? | The Newshour Debate (27th
907 November)

- 908 8. 'Secularists' Want Muslim Quota, But Block Hindu Equality Push?
- 909 9. Muslim Quota Threat to Unity? | The Newshour Debate(22nd November)
- 910 10. Triple Talaq: Why Oppose Law To Empower Women? | The Newshour Debate (21st
911 November)
- 912 11. Is Being Hindu A Disadvantage? | The Newshour Debate (1st November)
- 913 12. Love Jihad' Case: Why Oppose NIA Probe? | The Newshour Debate (8th October)
- 914 13. Why Indulge A Love Jehadi? Kerala's Shafin Jahan - The Newshour Debate (15th September)
- 915 14. Refugees Or Islamist 'Radicals'? | The Newshour Debate (5th September 2017)
- 916 15. Bakra Eid: 'Belief' Or 'Barbarism'? | The Newshour Debate (1st September)
- 917 16. Triple Talaq Petitioner Ishrat Shamed By Pack Of Patriarchs | The Newshour Debate (29th
918 August)
- 919 17. Who Will Stand Up For Aneesa? | The Newshour Debate (23rd August)
- 920 18. Don't Hindu Girls Have Rights? | The Newshour Debate (16th August)
- 921 19. CAUGHT: ISIS Converting Hindu Girls For 5 Lakh Rupees | The Newshour Debate (23rd June)
- 922 20. #IslamicCaliphateTape: Cowards Target Bharat | The Newshour Debate (13th May)
- 923 21. #IslamicRageAppeased- Why Give Islamic Rage A Free Reign? | The Newshour Debate (12th
924 May)
- 925 22. #AbolishTripleTalaq: Closing In On The Quest For Equality? | The Morning Newshour (11th
926 May)
- 927 23. Khalid Speaks For 'Traitor',Shazia Can't For "Triple Talaq?": The Newshour Debate (1st March
928 2017)
- 929 24. END Triple Talaq - Most Cruel And Demeaning Form Of Divorce: The Newshour Debate (8th
930 Dec)
- 931 25. From Triple Talaq To Polygamy - Why Gender Discrimination?: The Newshour Debate (10th
932 Nov)
- 933 26. Oppose Triple Talaq - 23 Year Old Nasrin Was UNILATERALLY Divorced: The Newshour
934 Debate (2nd Nov)
- 935 27. Women Allowed In Haji Ali - Big VICTORY, Next Triple Talaq Issue?: The Newshour Debate
936 (24th Oct)
- 937 28. Government Officially Opposes Triple Talaq: The Newshour Debate (7th Oct)
- 938 29. Triple Talaq Via Speed Post Legal In Islam?: The Newshour Debate (24th May 2016)
- 939 30. Muslim Personal Law Above The Constitution? : The Newshour Debate (25th March 2016)
- 940 31. Should Muslim Personal Law Be Scrap? | One India One Law : The Newshour Debate (5th Feb
941 2016)

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