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Theology and Religious Studies

Religion, Conflict and Globalization

Tales of forced conversion in Egypt and India: a comparative analysis of the female body as a symbolic battleground in interreligious relations

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1. *Abstract*

In Egypt and India there is a discourse which suggests that young women are being abducted and forcibly converted to Islam. This has led to moments of violent conflict in both countries, and a recent adaptation in legislation regarding interfaith unions in India. Whilst women are seemingly central to this narrative, female voices are rarely heard from on the matter. This raises the question of how women are viewed in the societies studied, specifically in relation to their significance as carriers of tradition and their choices surrounding marriage. Through an understanding of the historical background of interreligious strife in Egypt and India (supported by insights from Mahmood, Brownlee and Anand), together with traditional and contemporary views on female choice (drawing on the works of Armanios, Dube, Gupta, Yuval-Davis and Khatun), this thesis aims to shed light on the symbolic role of the female body within interreligious relations. Together with an analysis of primary sources from *The Guardian, DAWN, The New York Times, Aljazeera, The Hindu* and other news platforms, these sources show that the rumours surrounding forced conversion in Egypt and India stand to reinforce the prevailing assumption that, of their own volition, women would not have entered into relationships with those outside their religious community, or ever wish to convert. Indeed, in some cases, these rumours have been overemphasised, legitimising a system of Othering towards Muslim men, and undermining female choice.

Key words: Gender, Conversion, Abduction, Interreligious Conflict, Rumours, Agency

2. *Introduction*

In many cultural settings, symbols surrounding women and feminine ideals such as purity, fruitfulness and honour are central to national, communal or religious pride. It is often the case that whilst these feminine symbols are revered, individual women in such societies are treated as second-class citizens. This creates a disconnect between the symbolic view of women and their lived reality. Examples of this include America's Lady Liberty, a symbol of freedom built more than thirty years before female suffrage made such liberty legally applicable to women.[1] A second example is Marianne, a symbol of the French Republic. Depicted semi-nude, waving the nation's flag during battle in Eugène Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*, she is seen as protector and champion of the revolution's maxim: 'liberté, égalité, fraternité' over one hundred years before French women could vote.[2] A third example of a female symbol placed in the predominantly masculine sphere of war is Britannia, the national personification of Britain, dressed for battle years before British women would have formally served in the armed forces.[3] In these examples, the female body becomes a symbol of national, communal or religious pride. Yet in many contexts, as shall be explored, the agency of individual women is hindered, overlooked or even punished in these same national, communal and religious settings. This leads to an introduction of one of this thesis' case studies: India, and its national personification of Mother India. Depicted as a goddess dressed in a traditional sari, seated on a lion, she provides the perfect balance of strength and modesty.[4] When symbols like these become communal, a collective representation, there is arguably a greater urge to protect them from the Other.[5] It is this relationship between the male-centric public sphere and the Other, over the battleground of the female body, that will be explored within this thesis.

The geographical focus of this thesis is India and Egypt. Within both nations, interreligious strife over the last few decades has appeared to centre around women and

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[1] Joseph Berger, Antonio Masi and Joan Marans Dim, *Lady Liberty: An Illustrated History Of America's Most Storied Woman* New York: Fordham University Press, 2019, p. 12.
[2] Eugène Delacroix, *Liberty Leading The People*, Oil on Canvas Paris: The Louvre, 1830; Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, 1st ed. London: SAGE Publication Ltd., 1997, p. 79.
[3] Herbert Gribble, *Armada Memorial*, Granite and Bronze Devon: Plymouth Hoe, 1888.
[4] Nadira Khatun, "'Love-Jihad' And Bollywood: Constructing Muslims As 'Other'", *Journal Of Religion And Film* 22, no. 3 (2018), https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol22/iss3/8, p. 4.
[5] Nadira Khatun, "'Love-Jihad' And Bollywood: Constructing Muslims As 'Other'", p.10.

their importance to their respective societies.[6] Egypt is culturally and religiously divided, mainly between the Islamic community and that of the Orthodox Coptic Church. For generations, Copts have clung to their minority status, with Muslims outnumbering them almost 9 to 1.[7] Due to the precarious nature of the diminishing Coptic numbers, retaining existing numbers and continuing to raise children in the Coptic tradition is paramount.[8] Fertility and faithfulness are central to their survival. Women converting to Islam and potentially aiding already thriving numbers is therefore a contentious issue for modern Copts.[9] In India, there is a similar story of religious power imbalance. Whilst Indian Hindus hold a very strong majority and therefore arguably need not worry about their status, conflict and discrimination against the Muslim minority continues to feature in everyday life.[10] Fear of losing land and power is spurred on by the recent memory of Partition.[11] The accompanying concern of losing women and their fertility has roots in myth, literature and political rhetoric surrounding the sexually devious Muslim man and his many fruitful wives.[12] While the Indian Hindu community arguably have less grounds for fear than the Egyptian Copts, their conflict also boils down to concerns over population and power.

This fear of losing female community members and their procreative power to the Other has become increasingly apparent over the last few decades in both India and Egypt, shown by the rise in allegations of forced female conversions. In the main, these allegations describe a Muslim man physically abducting or surreptitiously luring a Coptic or Hindu woman away from her husband or parents, often with the promise of marriage, and

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[6] Nadira Khatun, "'Love-Jihad' And Bollywood: Constructing Muslims As 'Other'", p. 8; Febe Armanios, "The 'Virtuous Woman': Images Of Gender In Modern Coptic Society", *Middle Eastern Studies* 38, no. 1 (2002): 110-130, doi:10.1080/714004436, p. 111.

[7] Saba Mahmood, "Sectarian Conflict And Family Law In Contemporary Egypt", *American Ethnologist*, no. 39 (2012): 54-62, doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2011.01347.x, p. 56.

[8] Febe Armanios and Andrew Amstutz, "Emerging Christian Media In Egypt: Clerical Authority And The Visualizations Of Women In Coptic Video Films", *International Journal Of Middle East Studies* 45, no. 3 (2013): 513-533, doi:10.1017/s0020743813000457, p. 515.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Leela Dube, *Women And Kinship* Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1997, p. 10.

[11] Laura Dudley Jenkins, "Persecution: The Love Jihad Rumor", in *Religious Freedom And Mass Conversion In India* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019, 180-215, p. 184; Sisadat Daily, "Born a Muslim in India: The present and the future", 2021, https://advance-lexis-com.proxy-ub.rug.nl/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:628M-TVY1-F12F-F3JB-00000-00&context=1516831.

[12] Jyoti Punwani, "Myths And Prejudices About 'Love Jihad'", *Economic And Political Weekly* 49, no. 42 (2014): 12-15, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24480870, p. 12.

converting her to Islam.[13] Whilst the Egyptian case seems to involve lone men, it is theorised that in India, what has been labelled 'love jihad' is part of a wider Muslim plot to tip their minority balance and take over India.[14] Rhetoric suggests that the woman might be given to an older man in the community, become pregnant and invariably end up miserable.[15]

I first became aware of the Egyptian phenomenon of alleged female abductions and conversions through the works of Saba Mahmood.[16] This prompted further reading around the topic and an understanding of key themes. Whilst reading an article about the BBC television show *A Suitable Boy*, I came across the narrative surrounding love jihad and began to see parallels between this and the Egyptian case.[17] In *A Suitable Boy*, there is a scene presenting the Hindu protagonist and her Muslim love interest kissing in front of a temple, which caused a considerable stir with Indian audiences.[18] From there, I searched the news for examples of love jihad, before moving on to scholarly articles and books, discovering similarities in the interreligious past of Egypt and India as well as connections in their societal views on women. Although there is extensive literature on the Egyptian case and Indian love jihad in academia and in the media, the two cases have not yet been analytically compared. This thesis seeks to bridge the research gap, with a specific focus on the place of women and their symbolic significance within their nations' interreligious conflict. Due to the nature of rumours and the bias of their presentation, I found it difficult at times to ascertain whether the articles and reports themselves were limited in their presentation of women or whether women were simply the symbolic face of such cases. This uncertainty sparked my interest in female voice and its lack of representation, making me question why such voices were suppressed in documentation. Scholars such as Gupta, Anand and

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[13] Charu Gupta, "Hindu Women, Muslim Men: Love Jihad And Conversions", *Economic And Political Weekly* 44, no. 51 (2009): 13-15, p. 13; Laura Dudley Jenkins, "Persecution: The Love Jihad Rumor", p. 180; Sahar Bhog, "Why 'Love Jihad' Is An Attack On Women's Rights", *Feminism In India*, 2019, https://feminisminindia.com/2019/03/18/love-jihad-attack-women-rights/.

[14] Saba Mahmood, "Sectarian Conflict And Family Law In Contemporary Egypt", p. 57.

[15] Aastha Tyagi and Atreyee Sen, "Love-Jihad (Muslim Sexual Seduction) And Ched-Chad (Sexual Harassment): Hindu Nationalist Discourses And The Ideal/Deviant Urban Citizen In India", *Gender, Place & Culture* 27, no. 1 (2019): 104-125, doi:10.1080/0966369x.2018.1557602, p. 114.

[16] Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference In A Secular Age: A Minority Report* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015.

[17] Hannah Ellis-Peterson, "BBC's A Suitable Boy Rankles 'Love Jihad' Conspiracy Theorists In India". *The Guardian*, 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/27/netflix-india-version-vikram-seth-novel-stirs-love-jihad-suspicions-rows.

[18] Hannah Ellis-Peterson, "BBC's A Suitable Boy Rankles 'Love Jihad' Conspiracy Theorists In India". *The Guardian*, 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/27/netflix-india-version-vikram-seth-novel-stirs-love-jihad-suspicions-rows.

Armanios provided extensive background on the traditional and contemporary presentation of women in India and Egypt which, along with an exploration of the male sphere of interreligious conflict, helped illuminate the nature of the rumours and their wider framework.

This thesis will begin with an overview of existing literature on the topics of alleged female abduction and forced conversion in India and Egypt, assessing the strengths and weaknesses of documentation, before moving on to a description of the methodology used throughout the research and writing process. Having established the relevant research methods used, the analytical comparison will commence with an examination of the nations' background of interreligious conflict and how this has paved the way for the thesis' central focus of forced conversions, abductions and women's place within this framework. This will lead to an in-depth analysis of the nature of the rumours involved, specifically the language used, and the differing focuses portrayed in media and reports. Finally, the thesis will explore and analyse the framework of female agency and objectification, questioning the fate of female citizens when feminine ideals are so entrenched in nationalism and religion.

3. *Literature Review*

3.1.   *Introduction*

This thesis will centre on the rumoured discourse surrounding alleged female abductions and conversions in Egypt and India and how it affects female agency and is affected by factors such as tradition, nationalism and Othering. Before introducing my own research, it is important to provide an overview of the current academic literature surrounding the topics of gender, agency, symbolism and communalism in Egypt and India. For clarity, this literature review will echo the structure of the thesis' analytical chapters. The chapter will begin with an overview of the works of Saba Mahmood and Jason Brownlee, who provide insight into the ongoing interreligious conflict between Egyptian Copts and Egyptian Muslims.[19] Then the chapter will refer to this topic from the Indian perspective, introducing the research of Dibyesh Anand, David James Strohl, Peter Berger and Sarbeswar Sahoo, who discuss the political and historical separation of Hindu and Muslim communities.[20] The second topic will see an overview of scholarly interpretations of the rumours surrounding alleged forced female conversion in Egypt and India, which, together with primary sources gathered, will be analysed in later chapters. For the Egyptian narrative, this section will focus on Mahmood, who introduces the stories of Camilia Shehata and Wafa Qustuntin.[21] For the Indian case, scholars such as Laura Dudley Jenkins, Krzysztof Iwanek and David James Strohl focus on different aspects of the rumours and their prevalence in Indian society today.[22] Finally, the literature review will focus on the role of women within

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[19] Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference In A Secular Age: A Minority Report* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015; Saba Mahmood, "Sectarian Conflict And Family Law In Contemporary Egypt", *American Ethnologist*, no. 39 (2012): 54-62, doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2011.01347.x; Saba Mahmood, "Sexuality And Secularism", in *Religion, The Secular, And The Politics Of Sexual Difference* New York: Columbia University Press, 2014; Jason Brownlee, *Violence Against Copts In Egypt* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013.

[20] Dibyesh Anand, *Hindu Nationalism In India And The Politics Of Fear* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016; David James Strohl, "Love Jihad In India's Moral Imaginaries: Religion, Kinship, And Citizenship In Late Liberalism", *Contemporary South Asia* 27, no. 1 (2018): 27-39, doi:10.1080/09584935.2018.1528209; Peter Berger and Sarbeswar Sahoo, *Godroads. Modalities of Conversion In India,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

[21] Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference In A Secular Age: A Minority Report* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015; Saba Mahmood, "Sectarian Conflict And Family Law In Contemporary Egypt", *American Ethnologist*, no. 39 (2012): 54-62, doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2011.01347.x.

[22] Laura Dudley Jenkins, "Persecution: The Love Jihad Rumor", in *Religious Freedom And Mass Conversion In India* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019, 180-215; Krzysztof Iwanek, ""Love Jihad" And The Stereotypes Of Muslims In Hindu Nationalism", *Journal Of Alternative Perspectives In The Social Sciences* 7, no. 3 (2016): 355-399; David James Strohl, "Love Jihad In India's Moral Imaginaries: Religion, Kinship, And

Egyptian and Indian societies. Febe Armanios discusses the Church and culturally prescribed dictates given to Coptic women on behaviour, namely within the roles of wife and mother.[23] Through further research, she analyses this more specifically with Andrew Amstutz, focussing on how Coptic cinema encourages subservience in women of the faith.[24] This leads to an exploration of scholarly literature surrounding women in India. Leela Dube presents an overview of the familial structure in South Asia and the role women play in it, whilst Charu Gupta discusses the historical pattern of hysteria surrounding the Muslim male Other and how this impinges on female agency, specifically when choosing a partner.[25]

3.2.   *Literature surrounding interreligious conflict in Egypt*

In both Egypt and India, there is a framework of ongoing interreligious tension between the Copts and Muslims and Hindus and Muslims, respectively. This section of the chapter will outline the existing academic literature on this topic. In the Egyptian case, both Saba Mahmood and Jason Brownlee offer extensive background on the history of interreligious conflict. Drawing on 15 months of fieldwork among Copts and Bahai citizens in Egypt, Mahmood's primary focus is on the nature of minority status and how it is affected by Egyptian governance.[26] She establishes that 'despite the presence of a robust Coptic elite', representation of the Coptic community in the 'army, judiciary, and the government' is extremely low.[27] Indeed, Brownlee concurs that 'with a few exceptions', Copts are 'barred' from leadership positions.[28] They are in agreement that Copts are 'subject to discrimination that their Muslim counterparts are spared', and that 'aside from physical assaults, Copts face numerous forms of quotidian discrimination'.[29] Whilst Mahmood's focus is specifically

Citizenship In Late Liberalism", *Contemporary South Asia* 27, no. 1 (2018): 27-39, doi:10.1080/09584935.2018.1528209.

[23] Febe Armanios, "The 'Virtuous Woman': Images Of Gender In Modern Coptic Society", *Middle Eastern Studies* 38, no. 1 (2002): 110-130, doi:10.1080/714004436.

[24] Febe Armanios and Andrew Amstutz, "Emerging Christian Media In Egypt: Clerical Authority And The Visualizations Of Women In Coptic Video Films", *International Journal Of Middle East Studies* 45, no. 3 (2013): 513-533, doi:10.1017/s0020743813000457.

[25] Leela Dube, *Women And Kinship* Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1997; Charu Gupta, "Hindu Women, Muslim Men: Love Jihad And Conversions", *Economic And Political Weekly* 44, no. 51 (2009): 13-15.

[26] Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference In A Secular Age: A Minority Report* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015, p. ix.

[27] Saba Mahmood, "Sectarian Conflict And Family Law In Contemporary Egypt", p. 55.

[28] Jason Brownlee, *Violence Against Copts In Egypt*, p. 5.

[29] Saba Mahmood, "Sectarian Conflict And Family Law In Contemporary Egypt", p. 55.

centred on minority status in the country, Brownlee's research provides a linear examination of Coptic discrimination and historical flashpoints of Coptic-Muslim conflict, with a timeframe stretching from 1911 to 2013 when the text was published. Therefore, while he touches on the 'everyday forms of prejudice' Copts are subjected to, his greater focus is on moments of physical violence.[30] For example, he describes the detonation of a car bomb 'barely thirty minutes into 2011' outside a popular Coptic church celebrating midnight mass, which killed 23 parishioners.[31] This leads to a discussion of Coptic protection from the 'security state', which 'not only failed to intercept the bomber' but also 'stood by afterward as Christians and Muslims scuffled'.[32] Indeed, Brownlee shows that whilst Egypt officially became a republic in 1953, 'state officials never became truly accountable to the public they ostensibly served', with police involvement often equating to predation rather than protection.[33]

Whilst Mahmood and Elizabeth Iskander describe an ongoing conflict in Egypt, Brownlee provides historical glimpses of peace, hinting at the possibility of conciliation. In January 2011, the 18-day protest which began with the 'Day of Wrath' and ended with the resignation of President Mubarak, signalled a period of hope and unity in Egypt.[34] The popular slogan: 'Muslim, Christian, we are all Egyptian' created an air of optimism and change.[35] During the protests, scenes of 'interconfessional unity' could be seen.[36] One of the most striking examples of this was when Christians and Muslims took turns forming protective barriers as the other group worshipped.[37] Viewing this event in a vacuum, onlookers would be right to be optimistic. However, looking at the wider scene of violence, it is easy to understand how such a hopeful sense of unity crumbled. The protest was bordered on either side by violence. Iskander, whose research focusses on politics, religion and conflict prevention in the Middle East, pragmatically shows us that two weeks before the Day of Wrath, a church in Alexandria was bombed; two months after, a church in Atfeeh

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[30] Jason Brownlee, *Violence Against Copts In Egypt*, p. 5.
[31] Jason Brownlee, *Violence Against Copts In Egypt*, p. 12.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Jason Brownlee, *Violence Against Copts In Egypt*, p. 3.
[34] Jason Brownlee, *Violence Against Copts In Egypt* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013, p. 13.
[35] Elizabeth Iskander, *Sectarian Conflict In Egypt: Coptic Media, Identity And Representation* London: Routledge, 2012, p. 1.
[36] Jason Brownlee, *Violence Against Copts In Egypt* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013, p. 13.
[37] Ibid.

was burned down.[38] This suggests that the moment of hope was anomalous; the conflict raged on. These texts paint a picture of Copts as 'second-class' citizens who are not only prevented from entering influential positions in society, but have been at the centre of violent attacks which the police and state do little to manage.[39]

3.3.   _Literature surrounding interreligious conflict in India_

Whilst literature on the interreligious tensions in Egypt focusses inwards on the Coptic community and the discrimination they face, the literature surrounding India appears to focus on Hindu nationalism and the way it radiates outward in its preoccupation with the Islamic Other. For example, Dibyesh Anand's 2011 book on Hindu nationalism and its politics of fear uses a critical ethnographic approach to focus on the right-wing Hindu representation of the Muslim community as threatening to India's future and as dichotomous to the cultural purity of Hindutva ('Hinduness').[40] He shows this by stating that it is not the task of Hindutva to create a 'unified Hindu _samaj_ [society]' through the removal of hierarchies or by 'redressing the historical and contemporary injustices suffered by many Hindus' but instead by 'shifting the blame of all ills onto the "foreign" Other'.[41] David James Strohl agrees with this sentiment in his description of Hindutva activists who 'demonize Muslims as a foreign, disloyal population, living on Indian soil, providing the justifications for attacks on their person and property'.[42]

Whilst Strohl and Anand describe interreligious tensions as a binary (just between Muslims and Hindus), Leela Dube and Sarbeswar Sahoo describe a more complex view of Indian hierarchical structures through an exploration of the caste system. The introduction of _Godroads: Modalities of Conversion In India_ gives insight into India's unique caste system 'organised according to the principle of purity and pollution', which has historically allowed for 'a large section of India's population' to be treated as 'slaves'.[43] This in turn led to a

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[38] Elizabeth Iskander, _Sectarian Conflict In Egypt: Coptic Media, Identity And Representation_ London: Routledge, 2012, p. 1.

[39] Saba Mahmood, "Sectarian Conflict And Family Law In Contemporary Egypt", p. 55.

[40] Dibyesh Anand, _Hindu Nationalism In India And The Politics Of Fear_ New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p. 1.

[41]Dibyesh Anand, _Hindu Nationalism In India And The Politics Of Fear_, p. 14.

[42] David James Strohl, "Love Jihad In India's Moral Imaginaries: Religion, Kinship, And Citizenship In Late Liberalism", _Contemporary South Asia_ 27, no. 1 (2018): 27-39, doi:10.1080/09584935.2018.1528209, p. 29.

[43] Peter Berger and Sarbeswar Sahoo, _Godroads. Modalities of Conversion In India,_ Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020, p. 5.

movement of 'conversion as protest' where members of lower caste communities would 'break with their past identities and experience of exploitation'.[44] This presents an image of Indian society as not only discriminating against the Muslim Other but also against types of Hindu, leaving a very specific elite who are seen as embodying Hindutva. In Leela Dube's 1997 *Women and Kinship*, she describes the level of separation between different castes as similar to the societal segregation of Hindus and Muslims.[45] She does this through an example of the unpermitted elopement of a Jatav and a Jat (two Hindu castes, the former lower than the latter) in 1991 which resulted in the murder of both lovers and an accomplice.[46] As will be demonstrated in the analytical section of this thesis, such violence has also been known to follow the marriage of Hindu daughters to Muslim men.

3.4. *Rumoured discourse surrounding alleged forced conversion in Egypt*

Starting with academic literature from the Egyptian case, I will now introduce literature surrounding the rumoured discourse of alleged forced conversion. Mahmood gives great insight on this topic through her description of the cases of Camilia Shehata and Wafa Qustuntin, wives of Coptic priests who disappeared in 2010 and 2004 respectively.[47] She shows that these cases can be seen as a continuation and a flashpoint of the culture of Egyptian interreligious tension with the statement: 'Some of the most common issues that ignite Muslim-Christian violence in Egypt today involve rumors about interfaith romance or marriage, abducted women, and religious conversion'.[48] Indeed, the cases of Shehata and Qustuntin were not dealt with through the families involved or even simply by the police, but became a communal concern. For example, in the case of Shehata's disappearance, Mahmood shows that 'Copts took to the street and demanded the government find Camilia and bring her back to the Coptic Orthodox Church'.[49] In the case of Qustuntin, 'riots broke out at the Patriarchate' when the SSI 'ignored the demonstrators' demands to "restore" Qustuntin to her family and the Church', leading to the Coptic Pope Shenouda III going into

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[44] Peter Berger and Sarbeswar Sahoo, *Godroads. Modalities of Conversion In India,* p. 7.
[45] Leela Dube, *Women And Kinship* Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1997, p. 55.
[46] Leela Dube, *Women And Kinship* Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1997, p. 55.
[47] Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference In A Secular Age: A Minority Report*, pp. 111-114; Saba Mahmood, "Sectarian Conflict And Family Law In Contemporary Egypt", p. 55.
[48] Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference In A Secular Age: A Minority Report*, p. 111.
[49] Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference In A Secular Age: A Minority Report*, pp. 111-2.

isolation 'to protest the government's inaction'.[50] Whilst Mahmood focusses on the Coptic outrage surrounding the allegedly abducted citizens, Brownlee offers alternative insight into the Muslim response to Shehata's disappearance and its accompanying allegations. He suggests that a protest in Imbaba over Shehata's disappearance was not one-sided but that '2,000 Copts and Muslims' engaged.[51] Indeed, during ensuing 'clashes', he states that 'at least four Copts and nine Muslims lost their lives', showing the intensity of this flashpoint for both religious groups.[52]

3.5. _Rumoured discourse surrounding alleged forced conversion in India_

Academic sources on rumoured discourse surrounding forced conversion in India differ in tone. Like Berger and Sahoo, Dudley Jenkins's text discusses conversion in India. Her particular focus is on conversions from majority to minority religions and cultural reactions to this religious shift. Her chapter 'The Love Jihad Rumor' looks more closely at Hindu-Muslim conversions and the judgement that often accompanies it. Similar to Brownlee and Mahmood's hint at police complacency in protecting Copts in Egypt, Dudley Jenkins provides details of an Indian court case which suggests the far-reaching nature of Islamophobia in Hindu society. The case, heard in Kerala's High Court, concerned the marriages of two Hindu students to Muslim husbands.[53] The judge 'denied bail to the accused' (the Muslim husbands) and 'referred to the notion of the broader "love jihad"' phenomenon, despite all parties testifying that 'they willingly eloped'.[54] Whilst the investigation was ultimately called off, Dudley Jenkins attributes the case to a continuation of cultural infatuation with the idea of love jihad which she describes as becoming a 'rallying cry and an internet meme, applied arbitrarily to marriages between Muslim men and female converts, especially those without parental permission'.[55] As happens with rumours, Dudley Jenkins shows that narratives surrounding love jihad were 'reiterated and embellished over time', with 'extreme versions' conjuring the 'specter of mass conversions induced by

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[50] Saba Mahmood, _Religious Difference In A Secular Age: A Minority Report_, p. 112.
[51] Jason Brownlee, _Violence Against Copts In Egypt_, p. 15.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Laura Dudley Jenkins, "Persecution: The Love Jihad Rumor", in _Religious Freedom And Mass Conversion In India_ Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019, 180-215, p. 180.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Laura Dudley Jenkins, "Persecution: The Love Jihad Rumor", in _Religious Freedom And Mass Conversion In India_, p. 180.

thousands of young men trained by Pakistan's Interservice Intelligence Agency' intent on producing Muslim offspring.[56]

Furthermore, Strohl discusses a 'moral panic' surrounding the rumours of love jihad, giving the example of the marriage between Hindu Bollywood actress Kareena Kapoor and the Muslim actor Saif Ali Khan.[57] He describes the role of a right-wing Hindu magazine *Himalaya Dhwani* in accusing the couple of engaging in love jihad, despite Kapoor's insistence that they 'married because they loved one another and that neither had converted'.[58] Nadira Khatun discusses the same case in her text focussed on the use of cinema in postcolonial India, saying that Khan received death threats before his wedding and was 'accused of promoting '*love-jihad*''.[59] Krzysztof Iwanek furthers this presentation of love jihad as rife within Hindu society through his research on the *Anti Love Jihaad Helpline* and the *Anti Love Jihaad Front*.[60] Both of these platforms advertise as protecting the Hindu community from the dangers of Muslim men, providing information on how to stay vigilant in communal separation from Muslim citizens. For example, he discusses an image shared through the *Anti Love Jihaad Front* Facebook page, showing a Muslim tailor taking a Hindu girl's measurements, with a 'hand close to her breast'.[61] Iwanek describes the accompanying caption as calling 'for Hindu "brothers" to stop Hindu "sisters" from frequenting Muslim tailors and jewellers'.[62] Strohl discusses a similar system of Hindu communities encouraging one another to protect women from Muslim men, referring to them as 'Internet Hindus'.[63] These examples and statements show the far-reaching promotion of discrimination, advertised as protection, within love jihad discourse.

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[56] Laura Dudley Jenkins, "Persecution: The Love Jihad Rumor", in *Religious Freedom And Mass Conversion In India*, p. 180.

[57] David James Strohl, "Love Jihad In India's Moral Imaginaries: Religion, Kinship, And Citizenship In Late Liberalism", *Contemporary South Asia* 27, no. 1 (2018): 27-39, doi:10.1080/09584935.2018.1528209, p. 28.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Nadira Khatun, "'Love-Jihad' And Bollywood: Constructing Muslims As 'Other'", *Journal Of Religion And Film* 22, no. 3 (2018), https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol22/iss3/8, p. 17.

[60] Krzysztof Iwanek, ""Love Jihad" And The Stereotypes Of Muslims In Hindu Nationalism", *Journal Of Alternative Perspectives In The Social Sciences* 7, no. 3 (2016): 355-399.

[61] Krzysztof Iwanek, ""Love Jihad" And The Stereotypes Of Muslims In Hindu Nationalism", p. 363.

[62] Ibid.

[63] 63 David James Strohl, "Love Jihad In India's Moral Imaginaries: Religion, Kinship, And Citizenship In Late Liberalism", p. 29.

3.6. _Female agency and the societal position of women in Egypt_

Finally, the topic of female agency and societal dictates on the roles of women will be introduced. In relation to the rumours discussed above, Mahmood hints at the issue of agency surrounding Shehata and Qustuntin. For example, when Shehata was 'sequestered' by the Church following her return, 'a number of human-rights and feminist organizations' showed concern for her wellbeing.[64] Indeed, they 'demanded that Camilia be allowed to make a public appearance and clarify her position', fearing she was held against her will.[65] More generally, Mahmood shows that 'these abduction stories are symptomatic of the pernicious symbiosis created between religion and sexuality under modern secularism', going on to explain that the 'simultaneous relegation of religion, sexuality, and the family to the private sphere has tied up their regulative fates in such a way that struggles over religion often unfold over the terrain of gender and sexuality'.[66] Scholarly debates surrounding secularism go beyond the scope of this thesis, but the analytical section will touch on the traditional distribution of societal roles between men and women. While not focussing on one particular country in her analysis, Nira Yuval-Davis' _Gender & Nation_ gives insight into the 'binary' domains within society, with the 'naturalized locations of men in the public sphere and women in the private sphere' being widely accepted historically.[67] These scholarly statements provide both a specifically Egyptian and a nationally generic view on the separation of men and women in society.

Other academics who write on the societal position and agency of women in Egypt follow a different path. Febe Armanios was raised in a Coptic community and draws on first-hand knowledge to provide specific examples of cultural dictates on female presentation. She does this through an analysis of the words of the late Coptic Pope, Shenouda III.[68] In a 1998 article, the Pope summarised 'how a modern Coptic woman (in fact _wife_) can achieve' the quality of 'virtue'.[69] Such advice centres on a wife's interactions with her husband and the care she must take not to 'nag' him, but to constantly 'win him over'.[70] She connects

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[64] Saba Mahmood, _Religious Difference In A Secular Age: A Minority Report_, p. 112.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Saba Mahmood, _Religious Difference In A Secular Age: A Minority Report_, p. 112.
[67] Nira Yuval-Davis, _Gender & Nation_, 1st ed. London: SAGE Publication Ltd., 1997, p. 5.
[68] Febe Armanios, "The 'Virtuous Woman': Images Of Gender In Modern Coptic Society", p. 114.
[69] Febe Armanios, "The 'Virtuous Woman': Images Of Gender In Modern Coptic Society", p. 110.
[70] Febe Armanios, "The 'Virtuous Woman': Images Of Gender In Modern Coptic Society", p. 110.

these teachings back to the interreligious strife and anxiety underlying the Coptic community, specifically characterised by the 'threat of eradication' leading to 'significant emphasis' being placed on the 'reproductive responsibilities of all Copts (mainly directed at women), but also on the literal breeding of a specific type of woman'.[71] This topic was looked into further by Armanios in collaboration with Andrew Amstutz in 2013, with a specific focus on how Coptic cinema (Holy-wood) guides women towards the binary states of wife/mother or virgin/saint.[72] They quote Kelsy Burke and Amy McDowell (who have written on American evangelical entertainment media) saying that these films 'present traditional gender roles in new packaging' and although they 'provide discursive space to discuss gender in nontraditional ways, [they] ultimately reinforce gender hierarchies within Christian relationships'.[73]

3.7.   _Female agency and the societal position of women in India_

While scholarly discussions on womanhood in Egypt are deeply intwined with the role of the wife and mother, in India, the focus on the family unit as a whole appears more prevalent. Leela Dube wrote _Women and Kinship_ through collaborative work with the United Nations University Project and focusses on the intersection of kinship and gender in patrilineal, matrilineal and bilateral settings through ethnographic research.[74] She presents the Hindu ideal of the patrilineal household holding three or four generations, giving insight into the importance of continued Hindu lineage and the absolute interwovenness of family lives.[75] Within this context, the idea of an outsider (a woman of a lower caste or religion) entering the family is a dangerous one.[76] Dube goes on to explain that in Hindu society, 'a woman's purity is fragile: the pollution she incurs through sexual intercourse is internal' and therefore, just as the Hindu man must choose his bride carefully, so must the Hindu woman choose the right husband.[77] This connects to the cultural 'principle of protection', the need

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[71] Febe Armanios, "The 'Virtuous Woman': Images Of Gender In Modern Coptic Society", p. 114.
[72] Febe Armanios and Andrew Amstutz, "Emerging Christian Media In Egypt: Clerical Authority And The Visualizations Of Women In Coptic Video Films", pp. 521-2.
[73] Febe Armanios and Andrew Amstutz, "Emerging Christian Media In Egypt: Clerical Authority And The Visualizations Of Women In Coptic Video Films", p. 513.
[74] Leela Dube, _Women And Kinship_ Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1997.
[75] Leela Dube, _Women And Kinship_ Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1997, p. 12.
[76] Leela Dube, _Women And Kinship_ Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1997, p. 18.
[77] Leela Dube, _Women And Kinship_ Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1997, p. 50.

to safeguard unmarried women, which lies with her 'natal or patrilineal male kin'.[78] This tradition explains the role of Strohl's 'Internet Hindus' in their mission to spread news of love jihad to their Hindu brothers in order to protect their Hindu sisters.[79]

Charu Gupta shows that the view of protecting Hindu women specifically from Muslim men is no new phenomenon, but has roots in history and myth.[80] She compares the relatively new topic of love jihad with a similar occurrence in the 1920s where 'many Hindus came to perceive abductions and conversions of Hindu women as a characteristic Muslim activity'.[81] Indeed, she shows these constructs to have 'deeper historical roots', for example within the work of 19th century Hindu writers, who 'often portrayed medieval Muslim rule as a chronicle of rape and abduction of Hindu women'.[82] Through this narrative, Gupta shows that 'the abducted and converted Hindu woman was metamorphosed into a symbol of both sacredness and humiliation, and hence of the victimisation of the whole Hindu community'.[83] Although with altering focus, these academics present an image of Hindu societal views on women within the private sphere of family life, and of the need of the public sphere (that historically of men) to protect them.

3.8.   _Conclusion_

This chapter has presented a range of academic responses to the topics of interreligious strife, the rumoured discourse surrounding alleged forced conversions and societal roles of women in Egypt and India. Their research methods range from ethnographic study to the textual analysis of Papal articles, and together provide an image of communal fear and anxiety, which often expresses itself in the need to protect the community's women and villainise the Muslim Other. The research introduced in this chapter provides important frameworks and background information from which my own primary research can be analysed. While the texts above discuss the cases of alleged forced abduction and conversion in either Egypt or India, none compare the two. With the aid of primary material,

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[78] Leela Dube, _Women And Kinship_ Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1997, p. 50.
[79] David James Strohl, "Love Jihad In India's Moral Imaginaries: Religion, Kinship, And Citizenship In Late Liberalism", p. 29.
[80] Charu Gupta, "Hindu Women, Muslim Men: Love Jihad And Conversions", _Economic And Political Weekly_ 44, no. 51 (2009): 13-15.
[81] Charu Gupta, "Hindu Women, Muslim Men: Love Jihad And Conversions", p. 14.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Charu Gupta, "Hindu Women, Muslim Men: Love Jihad And Conversions", p. 13.

I hope to provide a compelling analytical comparison of these narratives, specifically focussing on the use of the female body as a symbolic battleground within the nations' respective interreligious relations.

4.   Methodology

Through the analysis of this thesis, I aim to understand and present the gendered power dynamics at play within Egyptian and Indian society, and how the female body is used as a symbolic battleground over which political and ideological conflicts are waged.

In researching and answering my question, I have conducted purely qualitative research. By definition, qualitative research is an approach used to explore and understand meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.[84] Thus, I will be looking at the ways in which Copts and Muslims (in the Egyptian context), Hindus and Muslims (in the Indian context) and those writing about them, ascribe meaning to the perceived abductions and conversions of women, and where this leaves the women involved. In the main, the methodology follows qualitative document analysis (QDA) as described by Wood, Sebar and Vecchio and critical discourse analysis (CDA) as described by Wodak.[85] QDA provides a 'systematic methodological process for eliciting meaning' from documents which was useful in gathering and sorting my material.[86] From there, the detailed analysis followed the framework of CDA, delving into the particular use of language and its relationship with power and authority in any given situation.

Whilst it would have been interesting to conduct ethnographic research for a truly emic perspective, due to the delicate nature of the situations involved and the scope of the thesis, this has not been possible. Therefore, the sources analysed consist of academic texts and primary sources gathered during my own research.[87] While much of the background information and historical framework were found within scholarly writing early on, my research includes the sourcing and analysis of news articles, reports and images. For example, when researching alleged forced female conversion in Egypt, I began with the works of Saba Mahmood who provided details of two cases of alleged forced conversion: that of Camilia Shehata and Wafa Qustuntin. A triangulated search using the database

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[84] John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches,* California: SAGE Publications, 2013, chapter 1.

[85] L. M. Wood, B. Sebar and N. Vecchio, "Application Of Rigour And Credibility In Qualitative Document Analysis: Lessons Learnt From A Case Study", *The Qualitative Report* 25, no. 2 (2020): 456-470; Ruth Wodak, "What CDA Is About - A Summary Of Its History, Important Concepts And Its Development", in *Methods Of Critical Discourse Analysis* London: Sage, 2001, 1-14.

[86] L. M. Wood, B. Sebar and N. Vecchio, "Application Of Rigour And Credibility In Qualitative Document Analysis: Lessons Learnt From A Case Study", p. 457.

[87] M. Hennick, I. Hutter and A. Bailey, *Qualitative Research Methods*, London: SAGE Publications, 2010, chapter 1.

'Nexis Uni' revealed little additional information surrounding the latter, but a myriad of articles and reports surrounding the former. Through the process of QDA, I mapped the stance, timing, information and authorship of these sources through mind maps and began adding key dates and events onto tables.[88] These mind maps and tables gave clarity to my key arguments and helped solidify my understanding of the timeline of events surrounding the case.

Once I had absorbed enough information to make an informed judgement about the direction of my argument, I was able to search the news database function on 'Nexis Uni' more specifically. Before reaching this point, my searches and, subsequently, information had often provided vague background knowledge or details I later realised fell outside the scope of my task. Adding specificity to my searches enabled me to fulfil Bowen's requirement for 'quality' over 'quantity' going forward.[89] These processes helped inform the choices of themes to analyse. Wood, Sebar and Vecchio show that thematic analysis recognises that there are parts of the social world that are discoverable through documents and that coding (in my case, organisation via mind maps and tables) can be an 'effective tool to obtain trustworthy findings and offer alternative insights into that social world'.[90] The methodological process of these searches, tables and mind maps were not simply linear, but 'recursive and reflexive' and were updated and edited throughout the stages of research and writing.[91]

Research on Egypt preceded my knowledge of love jihad in India, which I came across initially in an article from *The Guardian*. The mind maps and tables already forming for the Egyptian case helped orientate the Indian research. While I was careful not to assume or accelerate similarities between the cases, the clarity given through the mind maps helped highlight connections such as the similarities in the portrayal of women in

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[88] L. M. Wood, B. Sebar and N. Vecchio, "Application Of Rigour And Credibility In Qualitative Document Analysis: Lessons Learnt From A Case Study", p. 463.

[89] G. A. Bowen, "Document analysis as a qualitative research method", *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27-40.

[90] L. M. Wood, B. Sebar and N. Vecchio, "Application Of Rigour And Credibility In Qualitative Document Analysis: Lessons Learnt From A Case Study", p. 461.

[91] L. M. Wood, B. Sebar and N. Vecchio, "Application Of Rigour And Credibility In Qualitative Document Analysis: Lessons Learnt From A Case Study", p. 457.

Coptic cinema popular in Egypt (Holy-wood) and that of Hindu women in Indian cinema (Bollywood).[92]

The other methodology used was critical discourse analysis (CDA) as described by Ruth Wodak. This methodology was important for this thesis as it frequently discusses power dynamics, specifically 'institutional, political, gender and media discourses'.[93] Wodak notes that there are three indispensable concepts within CDA, namely the concepts of power, history and ideology, all of which feature heavily in my research and subsequent analysis. Practically, I used the steps detailed above from the literature surrounding document analysis to gather and organise my material, but CDA helped navigate the voice of the piece and look critically at power. This critical examination of power was achieved mainly through analysing the use of language and assessing who has a platform to be heard and who does not.

Through the combined use of QDA and CDA, I have been able to focus on both the broad, thematic elements of research such as text gathering, selecting and organising, as well as delving into the minutiae of language analysis. In practice, then, the interlacing of these two methodologies have given me the three-point structure of the thesis as well as illuminating, for example, the nuances of language and power dynamics in speeches from Pope Shenouda III to members of the BJP.

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[92] Febe Armanios and Andrew Amstutz, "Emerging Christian Media In Egypt: Clerical Authority And The Visualizations Of Women In Coptic Video Films", *International Journal Of Middle East Studies* 45, no. 3 (2013): 513-533, doi:10.1017/s0020743813000457; Nadira Khatun, "'Love-Jihad' And Bollywood: Constructing Muslims As 'Other'", *Journal Of Religion And Film* 22, no. 3 (2018), https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol22/iss3/8.

[93] Ruth Wodak, "What CDA Is About - A Summary Of Its History, Important Concepts And Its Development", p. 2.

5. *An exploration of how cultural and religious conflict paved the way for alleged abductions and conversions*

5.1. *Introduction*

This chapter seeks to provide detailed background into the context of interreligious conflict in Egypt and India in which the narratives on forced conversion and abduction arise. Through an exploration of factors such as legal limitations dictated by identity cards, lack of representation in government and bureaucracy surrounding holy sites, this chapter aims to provide insight into the historical and contemporary framework of discrimination and fear within the two nations studied. The chapter will begin with a clarification of the majority and minority statuses of the countries studied, exploring how fear and 'threat of eradication' spur on violence and Othering.[94] This leads to a discussion on discrimination, specifically surrounding the politics of building holy spaces. This will be followed by an insight into India's caste system and intrareligious strife, showing the breadth of the framework of Othering in India. Having assessed the background of everyday discrimination in Egypt and India, the chapter will focus on the systemic side of such treatment and how Othering is ingrained in contemporary policing and politics. Finally, the analysis of historical and cultural interreligious conflict will be linked to the theme of rumoured abductions and conversions through an examination of the violence allegedly sparked or fuelled by such cases. In some instances, events such as protests and church bombings took place almost immediately, while in others, acts of violence carried out years after were attributed to cases of alleged abduction.

In the Egyptian case, this chapter will predominantly explore the secondary material of Brownlee, Mahmood and Iskander. These texts give clear academic background into Egypt's past and present interreligious conflict. From various viewpoints, they each focus on the Coptic minority position within the country. Whilst Brownlee focusses on giving a step-by-step account of historical conflict, Mahmood and Iskander explicitly concentrate on minority status and discrimination. Primary reports are taken from the U.S Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor and the U.S Office of International Religious Freedom

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[94] Febe Armanios, "The 'Virtuous Woman': Images Of Gender In Modern Coptic Society", *Middle Eastern Studies* 38, no. 1 (2002): 110-130, doi:10.1080/714004436, p. 114.

to show the continuation of such discrimination. Similarly, in the exploration of the Indian case, the chapter will rely on the secondary sources of Khatun, Anand, Iwanek, Strohl and Jauregui. Khatun and Iwanek give specific background on Othering in India and the relegation of Muslim citizens, which is supported by the work of Anand and Strohl who focus on Hindu nationalism and power, while Jauregui offers insight into contemporary politics and police violence. To show the continued relevance of these texts, they are supported by primary material from Indian newspapers *Hindustan Times, The Siasat Daily* and *The Hindu*, as well as the international reporting of *Aljazeera*, *DAWN*, *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*.

5.2.   *Power imbalances in Majority/Minority structures*

The majority/minority balance in Egypt and India are severe, with Hindus making up 82% of India's population, and Copts contrastingly making up just 10% of Egypt's.[95] This section will discuss the merging of culture, religion and politics in understanding the majority/minority balance in Egypt and India to ascertain how the numerical division of communities in Egypt and India dictate power balances in policy and practice.

        Due to sheer numerical difference and Egypt's historical social hierarchy, there are fewer Copts within the higher echelons of society, significantly within governance and law enforcement. Mahmood shows that this goes deeper than mathematical representation, but makes Copts feel 'treated as second-class citizens in their own country'.[96] This representational balance not only affects day to day discrimination, but also legislation. Egypt's legal system almost entirely follows Sharia law, naturally favouring the majority Muslim community in several ways. For example, Sharia law makes converting from Christianity to Islam simple and subtly attractive, while making the reverse legally 'far more difficult'.[97] This tension in the law plays into the cycle of anxiety within the Coptic community and their fear of losing members to the Muslim Other. Indeed, Mahmood suggests that this context of interreligious anxiety has made interfaith marriage 'one of the

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[95] Leela Dube, *Women And Kinship* Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1997, p. 10; Saba Mahmood, "Sectarian Conflict And Family Law In Contemporary Egypt", *American Ethnologist*, no. 39 (2012): 54-62, doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2011.01347.x, p. 56.
[96] Saba Mahmood, "Sectarian Conflict And Family Law In Contemporary Egypt", *American Ethnologist*, no. 39 (2012): 54-62, doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2011.01347x, p. 55.
[97] Saba Mahmood, "Sexuality And Secularism", in *Religion, The Secular, And The Politics Of Sexual Difference* New York: Columbia University Press, 2014, 47-58, p. 55.

most common causes of religious sectarian violence in pre- and postrevolutionary Egypt'.[98] Coptic anxiety is not confined to fear of interfaith marriage, however. Being Christian in a majority Muslim nation, surrounded by other Muslim nations, has led to issues of safety. 'Open Doors' (a non-denominational mission that supports persecuted Christians) states that 128 Christians were killed in Egypt 'for their faith' in 2017 alone, with a further 200 'driven out of their homes'.[99] The report attributes this rise in persecution to 'the overspill of Islamic terrorists driven out of Iraq and Syria'.[100] A spokesperson for 'Open Doors' describes how impossible it is for Copts to escape such discrimination because in Egypt, your 'religion is stated on your identity card'.[101] She explains that this makes activities such as applying for jobs and planning permits much more difficult than it would be for members of the majority religion, solidifying the view of everyday Coptic discrimination.[102]

The power imbalance caused by the minority and majority statuses of Indian Hindus and Muslims is similar to that of the Egyptian Copts and Muslims. As discussed throughout this chapter, in India the separation of (especially high caste) Hindus and Muslims is culturally encouraged, leading citizens to feel attached to a community and religion rather than, perhaps, the nation. Anand describes this as 'communalism as an ideology'.[103] Similarly, in Egypt, citizens are kept in their separate groups through the categorisation marked on their identity cards which not only explicitly shows their religion, but implicitly conveys their social status.[104] Again, citizens are defined by their religious identity, rather than their homogenous nationality. Although Egypt is a 'state party to a number of treaties which prohibit any forms of discrimination based on the grounds of religion', the Middle East and North Africa Deputy Director at Amnesty International has shown concern that Egyptian Copts 'face discrimination in law and practice and have been victims of regular

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[98] Saba Mahmood, "Sexuality And Secularism", in *Religion, The Secular, And The Politics Of Sexual Difference* New York: Columbia University Press, 2014, 47-58, p. 55.

[99] Harriet Sherwood, "Christians In Egypt Face Unprecedented Persecution, Report Says", *The Guardian*, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/10/christians-egypt-unprecedented-persecution-report.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Dibyesh Anand, *Hindu Nationalism In India And The Politics Of Fear* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p. 5.

[104] Justice.Gov, Last modified 2007, https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/eoir/legacy/2013/06/11/coptic%20christiansforced%20conversion%20to%20islam.pdf; Harriet Sherwood, "Christians In Egypt Face Unprecedented Persecution, Report Says", *The Guardian*, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/10/christians-egypt-unprecedented-persecution-report.

sectarian attacks while authorities systematically look the other way'.[105] The dual focus on discrimination in 'law and practice' shows the extent to which the majority/minority balance favours the Muslim population over Copts in Egypt.[106] This is heightened by the response of the 'authorities' who do not stand to oppose such treatment, as will be discussed later in the chapter.[107]

In India, the separation into communities means that the overarching commonality of nationality is lost as citizens are 'reduced to only a Hindu or only a Muslim identity'.[108] It is not only that citizens have gravitated towards members of their own religion, and therefore lost connections with those from other faiths; there is a history of division in the nation. The history of India's fight for Independence and the subsequent Partition appears to have influenced the nation's separatist consciousness. Indeed, an article in *The Siasat Daily* states that 'Muslims who decided to stay back in India post the creation of Pakistan were cast as the 'other' and subject to suspicion', making them 'vulnerable to hate crimes, prejudices, and the constant need to prove their loyalty to the nation'.[109] Within this narrative of abandonment of national connection in favour of communal or religious identity, comes a protection and centrality of the communal Self alongside the dehumanisation of the dangerous Other. Indeed, Anand shows that Othering and segregation are not simply by-products of Hindu nationalism (created by Hindu majoritarianism), but that the two are mutually exclusive. He shows that 'Hindu nationalism is a celebration and affirmation of the Hindu Self, but it derives its meaning only from a negation of the minority Others and their allies'.[110] Whilst the majority/minority balance in Egypt is perhaps less ideologically

[105] UK Home Office, "India: Religious Minorities", Country Policy And Information London, 2021, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/710134/India_-_Religious_Minorities_-_CPIN_-_v2.0__May_2018_.pdf; "Coptic Christians Must Be Protected From Sectarian Violence", *Africa News,* 2013, https://advance-lexis-com.proxy-ub.rug.nl/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:582D-39C1-DYR8-3054-00000-00&context=1516831.

[106] "Coptic Christians Must Be Protected From Sectarian Violence", *Africa News,* 2013, https://advance-lexis-com.proxy-ub.rug.nl/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:582D-39C1-DYR8-3054-00000-00&context=1516831.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Dibyesh Anand, *Hindu Nationalism In India And The Politics Of Fear*, p. 5.

[109] Amirullah Khan and Nahia Hussain, "Born A Muslim In India: The Present And The Future", *The Siasat Daily*, 2021, https://www.siasat.com/born-a-muslim-in-india-the-present-and-the-future-2114686/.

[110] Dibyesh Anand, *Hindu Nationalism In India And The Politics Of Fear,* pp. 13-4.

organised than this, Copts are constantly reminded that they make up a miniscule 10% of the population and are therefore of less value that the majority.[111]

Given that Indian Hindus have such a clear majority, why are they so preoccupied with Indian Muslims? What threat do they believe Muslims pose? Rather than focussing on the strength of their majority as Egyptian Muslims appear to, right-wing Hindu nationalists seem to fear the closing of the majority/minority gap. This fear is often characterised, as it is in the Egyptian case, by a protection and surveillance of young women, the biological and cultural carriers of culture and tradition. Berger and Sahoo show this nationalist fear to be threefold. Firstly, there is a concern that any conversion from Hinduism would 'increase their enemies'; secondly, that it would make Hindus 'a minority in their own nation'; and lastly, that conversions would 'endanger their agenda of making India a Hindu nation'.[112] With a majority of over 80% and figures of interfaith marriage as low as 2.1%, arguably this is a lot of worry over nothing.[113] Indeed, Strohl shows that such concerns have previously been dubbed a 'fear of small numbers' by academic Arjun Appadurai.[114] Whilst these fears appear hyperbolic, they have been acted upon with great conviction in the past.

Rhetoric of Islamophobia and conflict continue to this day. Indeed, to understand the framework of religious discrimination in India, one need look no further than Indian news during Covid-19. In 2020, the Tablighi Jamaatis (an Islamic missionary group) were singled out for bringing coronavirus to India.[115] An article in *Kashmir Observer* shows that 'months after the vituperative vilification campaign' against the Indian and international Muslims who had gathered at the mosque in New Delhi to celebrate a religious holiday, 'the Bombay High Court ruled that there was no proof' that they were responsible.[116] The

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[111] Saba Mahmood, "Sectarian Conflict And Family Law In Contemporary Egypt", *American Ethnologist*, no. 39 (2012): 54-62, doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2011.01347.x, p. 56.

[112] Peter Berger and Sarbeswar Sahoo, *Godroads. Modalities of Conversion In India,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020, p. 8.

[113] David James Strohl, "Love Jihad In India's Moral Imaginaries: Religion, Kinship, And Citizenship In Late Liberalism", p. 33.

[114] David James Strohl, "Love Jihad In India's Moral Imaginaries: Religion, Kinship, And Citizenship In Late Liberalism", p. 34.

[115] BBC News, "Tablighi Jamaat: The Group Blamed For New Covid-19 Outbreak In India", 2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-52131338; Dr. R. Raj Rao, "Children of Lesser God", *Kashmir Observer*, 2021, https://advance-lexis-com.proxy-ub.rug.nl/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:62GK-19R1-JB5M-W1SY-00000-00&context=1516831.

[116] Dr. R. Raj Rao, "Children of Lesser God", *Kashmir Observer*, 2021, https://advance-lexis-com.proxy-ub.rug.nl/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:62GK-19R1-JB5M-W1SY-00000-00&context=1516831.

journalist concludes that they were made the 'scapegoat for the government's failure to control the pandemic'.[117] This could be seen as a simple misunderstanding, until one takes into account the public response to Hindu festivities during the same pandemic which continued with the 'government and media' turning a 'blind eye'.[118]

This is perhaps proof of what Anand describes as Hindu nationalism's normalisation of 'fear and hatred' through a presentation of discrimination as 'defensive… to the threat supposedly posed by Muslims to the security of the individual Hindus as well as of the Hindu collective'.[119] Looking beyond an overview of everyday discrimination and focusing on the central topic of the narrative of abductions and forced conversions, Anand suggests that Hindu nationalist rhetoric often surpasses discrimination and becomes obsession. He labels 'its obsessive preoccupation with the predatory sexuality of the putative Muslim figure and the dangers to the integrity of the Hindu bodies' as 'porno-nationalism'.[120] This shows a direct causal link between ongoing interreligious conflict and allegations of forced female conversion. There is a fear of losing women to Islam and what that would do to the majority/minority balance (the communal Hindu body) as well as the purity of the individual Hindu body. This leads to a presentation of Muslims not simply as a religious minority or even as a human threat, but as 'animal-like…, refusing to accept the more advanced solutions of the Hindus and all the time trying to attack the civilised society and steal its daughters'.[121] Whilst alone as words, sentiments surrounding love jihad and animalistic Muslims seem little more than conspiracy theories, when given a platform such as right-wing Hindu nationalism and its prominent party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), conspiracy theories swiftly morph into rallying cries of discrimination.

5.3. *Holy buildings: the politics of their construction and destruction*

How is interreligious strife in Egypt and India played out in the religious sphere? A form of discrimination in Egypt which may appear insignificant but bears great symbolic importance

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[117] Dr. R. Raj Rao, "Children of Lesser God", *Kashmir Observer*, 2021, https://advance-lexis-com.proxy-ub.rug.nl/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:62GK-19R1-JB5M-W1SY-00000-00&context=1516831.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Dibyesh Anand, *Hindu Nationalism In India And The Politics Of Fear,* p. 1.

[120] Ibid.

[121] Krzysztof Iwanek, ""Love Jihad" And The Stereotypes Of Muslims In Hindu Nationalism", *Journal Of Alternative Perspectives In The Social Sciences* 7, no. 3 (2016): 355-399, p. 359.

centres on the building of religious structures. In Egypt, the renovation and construction of churches is a 'highly political process' which requires presidential approval.[122] Ordinarily, this would not be considered a problem. However, Brownlee shows that 'churches are a flash point for anti-Coptic attacks'.[123] Nearly every article and report found on the topic of Muslim and Coptic strife in Egypt details the bombing or burning of a church, often with worshippers inside.[124] For example, on New Year's Day in 2011, during a period of comparative interreligious peace, a celebration of midnight mass in Alexandria ended prematurely when a bomb killed 23 worshippers and injured many more.[125] Police officers in the area not only failed to catch the attacker, but 'stood by afterwards as Christians and Muslims scuffled in the surrounding area'.[126] This attack, which splintered the already fragile moment of sectarian peace, was followed by a sustained period of church attacks. In August alone, 40 churches were damaged or destroyed by arsonists in Upper Egypt.[127] Practically, such wide-spread destruction of churches means that worshippers have nowhere to meet and thus must rely on the ability to renovate old structures or build new ones. Whilst the freedom to renovate churches attacked in such a manner falls within the remit of 'essential practice for freedom of belief and religious equality' and the Egyptian Constitution's framework of religious freedom, Copts face a 'political minefield rather than a simple administrative process'.[128] This contributes to a sense of marginalisation, a lack of government support and recognition, as well as a practical barring from worship and community.

Although perhaps not as continuous as the church attacks in Egypt, the damage of religious places in India holds just as much symbolic and cultural significance. The destruction of the historic Babri Masjid Mosque in Ayodhya in 1992 has been described as

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[122] Jason Brownlee, *Violence Against Copts In Egypt* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013, p. 5.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Jason Brownlee, *Violence Against Copts In Egypt* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013, p. 13.
[125] Jason Brownlee, *Violence Against Copts In Egypt* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013, p. 12.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Jason Brownlee, *Violence Against Copts In Egypt* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013, p. 19.
[128] Jason Brownlee, *Violence Against Copts In Egypt* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013, p. 5; U.S. Department of State, "2019 Report On International Religious Freedom: Egypt", Office Of International Religious Freedom, 2020, https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/egypt/.

the 'most brutally violent manifestation' of the politics of Hindu homogeneity.[129] The details surrounding the demolition of such a holy place are chillingly premeditated. There was a prolonged nationalist campaign to build a Hindu temple to the god Ram in Ayodhya, and it was decided that it should stand in place of the mosque. A group of Hindu nationalist cadres travelled to the site, and 'reduced the mosque to rubble'.[130] Naturally, this action sparked a series of riots which significantly altered the political and religious landscape. The nearby cities of Delhi and Mumbai were affected by the aftermath of the riots and in the years that followed became targets of Islamic terror attacks, avenging the loss of a holy place.[131] Rather than being remembered as a time of great cultural loss, these attacks have been framed as a reaffirmation of the 'fear of the violent Muslim stranger', legitimising the Othering of Indian Muslims and their threat to the Hindu body.[132]

5.4. *India's intrareligious conflict*

An issue found within the Indian case which is not prevalent in the Egyptian case, but which is integral to an understanding of the power of right-wing Hindutva, is intrareligious conflict. This is characterised by caste disputes. Hindutva, as described by Anand, not only discriminates against Muslims, but also against lower castes.[133] Berger and Sahoo show that the 'oppressive social hierarchy of Hinduism' is organised and institutionalised through the caste system which historically 'treated a large section of India's population as 'slaves''.[134] Because of such treatment, there emerged a history of 'conversion as protest' whereby people of marginalised communities and lower castes would 'break with their past identities and experience of exploitation' and find a future in a new community.[135] This, in part, led to Hindu nationalists' politicisation of the issue of conversion, leading to both interreligious

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[129] Aastha Tyagi and Atreyee Sen, "Love-Jihad (Muslim Sexual Seduction) And Ched-Chad (Sexual Harassment): Hindu Nationalist Discourses And The Ideal/Deviant Urban Citizen In India", *Gender, Place & Culture* 27, no. 1 (2019): 104-125, doi:10.1080/0966369x.2018.1557602, p. 113.

[130] Aastha Tyagi and Atreyee Sen, "Love-Jihad (Muslim Sexual Seduction) And Ched-Chad (Sexual Harassment): Hindu Nationalist Discourses And The Ideal/Deviant Urban Citizen In India", *Gender, Place & Culture* 27, no. 1 (2019): 104-125, doi:10.1080/0966369x.2018.1557602., p. 113.

[131] Ibid.

[132] Ibid.

[133] Dibyesh Anand, *Hindu Nationalism In India And The Politics Of Fear* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p. 1.

[134] Peter Berger and Sarbeswar Sahoo, *Godroads. Modalities of Conversion In India,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020, p. 5.

[135] Peter Berger and Sarbeswar Sahoo, *Godroads. Modalities of Conversion In India,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020, p. 7.

and intrareligious 'violent clashes'.[136] Whilst this thesis focusses on interreligious conflict, it is important to demonstrate the lengths gone to in maintaining the strong sense of Hindu nationalism in India. A report from *India Today*, which is also discussed by Leela Dube, provides a relatively contemporary example of such violence. In 1991, a girl from the Jat caste announced her plans to elope with a Jatav boy. Jatavs are often called 'untouchable' and considered to be very lowly. The Jats, who essentially ruled the village, decided to inflict 'a punishment so severe that no Jatav would dare to touch a Jat girl again'.[137] The Jatav boy and his friend were both tortured and hanged, and the Jat girl was also hanged. The parents of the Jatav boys had been 'bullied' into agreeing to the punishment, but the Jat parents chillingly wished to take revenge on the boy and be rid of a daughter who had 'blackened their faces'.[138] C. J. Fuller suggests that 'castes are normally endogamous' with the 'vast majority of unions' in India still being made 'by a couple's parents according to endogamous (or hypergamous) rules'.[139] Therefore, this case not only broke the rule of who one should marry, but also who should decide. The example shows three things: how ingrained the caste system and its implications continue to be in parts of Indian society; the overwhelming strength of upper-caste Hindutva; and how far some would go to restore family honour, tainted by the choices of a girl.

5.5.   Interreligious conflict in politics and law enforcement

In Egypt, as I have mentioned, factors such as identity cards and their significance work to separate the minority Coptic community from the majority Muslim community. The existence of such a system shows the state's desire to continue this separation and, arguably, the conflict that accompanies it. Indeed, Brownlee suggests that the Egyptian state does 'little to remedy the situation' of discrimination and in certain instances has 'enabled the conflict' between the two communities.[140] He concludes that 'religion has

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[136] Peter Berger and Sarbeswar Sahoo, *Godroads. Modalities of Conversion In India,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020, p. 9.

[137] Leela Dube, *Women And Kinship* Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1997, p. 55;
W.P.S Sidhu, "Defying Caste System Results In Merciless Death Of Three Young People In Mehrana", *India Today*, 1991, https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/special-report/story/19910430-defying-caste-system-results-in-merciless-death-of-three-young-people-in-mehrana-814396-1991-04-30.

[138] Ibid.

[139] C. J Fuller, *The Camphor Flame* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 14.

[140] Jason Brownlee, *Violence Against Copts In Egypt* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013, p. 1.

served to fragment a society that is already split between rulers and ruled'.[141] The connection between religion and political governance can be seen in the turn towards piety in the 1970s which saw national television broadcasting the call to prayer and much of the country banning the sale of alcohol.[142] Such acts may in and of themselves seem insignificant, but added to a feeling of Othering and ostracization in the Coptic community, as the country to which they belonged became 'defined in terms that excluded them'.[143] This was perpetuated by the lack of government action over alleged human rights abuses and incidents of violence, especially those perpetrated by the nation's supposed protectors. The 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices shows that the Egyptian government 'inconsistently punished or prosecuted officials who committed abuses', contributing to a 'climate of insecurity'.[144]

Jason Brownlee shows that historically Egyptian police officers have allowed violence against Copts to go unchecked, or indeed on occasion 'used lethal violence against unarmed Copts' themselves.[145] Unfortunately, there is a sense amongst Egyptians that their police force and military represent and protect their political leaders rather than the country's people; when violence erupts, they are often 'absent or complicit'.[146] Historically, reporting such events has not led to justice, but to more violence. In 2010, Khaled Said threatened to expose police involvement in trafficking. Two police officers in Alexandria found him in a cybercafe, dragged him outside and beat him to death.[147] In a flashpoint of Egyptian unity which dwindled quickly, the call: 'We are all Khaled Said' echoed round the country.[148] Police absence was felt strongly in the Coptic community in 2011 when several individuals were abducted and held for ransom. Without police intervention, these events were allowed to become commonplace. An official from the Ministry of Interior was quoted saying: 'Kidnapping Christians is an easy way to make money… [They] don't have the tribal or clan backup that will deter kidnappers and they are happy to pay the ransom to gain the

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[141] Jason Brownlee, *Violence Against Copts In Egypt* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013, p. 4.
[142] Jason Brownlee, *Violence Against Copts In Egypt* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013, p. 4.
[143] Ibid.
[144] U.S. Embassy in Egypt, "2020 Country Reports On Human Rights Practices: Egypt", Bureau Of Democracy, Human Rights, And Labor, 2021, https://eg.usembassy.gov/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices-egypt/; Jason Brownlee, *Violence Against Copts In Egypt*, p. 5.
[145] Jason Brownlee, *Violence Against Copts In Egypt*, p. 1.
[146] Jason Brownlee, *Violence Against Copts In Egypt*, p. 5.
[147] Jason Brownlee, *Violence Against Copts In Egypt*, p. 3.
[148] Jason Brownlee, *Violence Against Copts In Egypt*, p. 3.

freedom of their loved ones'.[149] Indeed, the director of security for Luxor governorate told Human Rights Watch that the role of the police was not to intervene and 'stop killings' but to 'investigate afterwards'.[150] This statement shows the state and police response to Copts within the country's interreligious conflict. Given such a blasé attitude towards crime, it is no wonder that members of the Coptic community take it upon themselves to act when members of their community are allegedly abducted, rather than trusting official procedure.

The connection between religion, governance and conflict is felt even more keenly in India's current political climate. Modern Hindu nationalism is wedded to Indian politics through its connection with the Sangh family.[151] The outward facing, political branch associated with the family is the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This connection was proven in the 1990s, when the end of the Indian National Congress's dominance and the rise of the BJP saw the growing popularity of 'political Hindutva'.[152] It is no coincidence that the majority of love jihad rumours centre around BJP states, especially Uttar Pradesh. It is in this state (followed by a number of other BJP-run states) that recent legislation has been put in place to tackle love jihad. The bill proposed amendments to the 2002 Freedom of Religion Act, to 'ensure stringent punishment for forced religious conversions'.[153] Although this may sound reasonable, so far the arrests made suggest this bill is a thinly veiled attempt by the BJP to disrupt all interfaith marriages. This is in direct opposition to the Special Marriage Act of 1954, which sets clear guidelines and allowances for interreligious marriages.[154] Whilst technically no legislation exists mentioning love jihad, with the central government admitting it has 'no official records of any incidents of the practice', this new ruling unequivocally targets the Muslim community.[155] Indeed, of the first 85 arrests, 79 were Muslim men accused of 'enticing a woman and forcing her to convert to Islam'.[156] The

[149] Jason Brownlee, *Violence Against Copts In Egypt*, pp. 14-15.

[150] Jason Brownlee, *Violence Against Copts In Egypt*, p. 19.

[151] Dibyesh Anand, *Hindu Nationalism In India And The Politics Of Fear,* p. 2.

[152] Dibyesh Anand, *Hindu Nationalism In India And The Politics Of Fear,* p. 3.

[153] Darshan Desai, "Gujarat Passes Bill Against 'Love Jihad'", *Hindustan Times*, 2021, https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/gujarat-passes-bill-against-love-jihad-101617303478618.html.

[154] Apoorvanand, "India's 'Love Jihad' Laws: Another Attempt To Subjugate Muslims", *Aljazeera*, 2021, https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/1/15/indias-love-jihad-laws-another-attempt-to-subjugate-muslims.

[155] Hannah Ellis-Peterson, "Muslims Targeted Under Indian State's 'Love Jihad' Law", *The Guardian*, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/14/muslims-targeted-under-indian-states-love-jihad-law.

[156] Apoorvanand, "India's 'Love Jihad' Laws: Another Attempt To Subjugate Muslims", *Aljazeera*, 2021, https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/1/15/indias-love-jihad-laws-another-attempt-to-subjugate-muslims.

newspaper *Aljazeera* has condemned the legislation, stating that by allowing the 'so-called "love jihad" laws… the Supreme Court increased the vulnerability of India's Muslims, who are already subject to immense discrimination' under the rule of the BJP.[157] The police do not require a warrant to make arrests under the new law, leading to many 'falling foul of the vaguely worded' rules.[158] One example shows an 18-year-old Muslim being jailed after going out for pizza with a Hindu friend because her father complained to the police.[159]

Some articles voice a concern that such legislation will encourage a crackdown on consensual interfaith relationships under the guise of protecting female citizens.[160] The bill did not go unchallenged, and although it has become law in some BJP states, other members of congress disagreed with it entirely. For example, the Congress legislator from Ahmedabad, Imran Khedawala, tore his copy of the Bill in the House. *Hindustan Times* shows that he was outraged at the insinuation that 'the daughters of the Hindu community' are targeted by men from 'a specific community'.[161] Declaring his deep 'hurt' at the words of the minister, he condemned interreligious segregation, proclaiming that women 'from any religious community, will always be our daughters' and that in no religion is it 'written to forcibly convert anyone'.[162] *The Hindu* states that through the election, the BJP have consistently used their platform to discuss their 'pet topics, 'love jihad' and the 'disproportionate allocation of minority benefits''.[163] The juxtaposition of love jihad and a bemoaning of allocation of minority benefits reveals the BJP's discrimination against Muslims. This falls in line with Anand's assessment of Hindu nationalism as 'a political

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[157] Apoorvanand, "India's 'Love Jihad' Laws: Another Attempt To Subjugate Muslims", *Aljazeera*, 2021, https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/1/15/indias-love-jihad-laws-another-attempt-to-subjugate-muslims.
[158] Anon., "The BJP's Next Mission: Eradicating 'Love Jihad' In India", *DAWN*, 2020, https://www.dawn.com/news/1597599.
[159] Anon., "The BJP's Next Mission: Eradicating 'Love Jihad' In India", *DAWN*, 2020, https://www.dawn.com/news/1597599.
[160] Hannah Ellis-Peterson, "Muslims Targeted Under Indian State's 'Love Jihad' Law", *The Guardian*, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/14/muslims-targeted-under-indian-states-love-jihad-law; Apoorvanand, "India's 'Love Jihad' Laws: Another Attempt To Subjugate Muslims", *Aljazeera*, 2021, https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/1/15/indias-love-jihad-laws-another-attempt-to-subjugate-muslims.
[161] Darshan Desai, "Gujarat Passes Bill Against 'Love Jihad'", *Hindustan Times*, 2021, https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/gujarat-passes-bill-against-love-jihad-101617303478618.html.
[162] Ibid.
[163] K. S. Sudhi, "Caste, Religion Take Centrestage In Poll Debate", *The Hindu*, 2021, https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/caste-religion-take-centrestage-in-poll-debate/article34216294.ece.

movement seeking to purify culture' by making it entirely Hindu and thus 'transform society in India'.[164]

This need to 'purify' can be seen further in India's right-wing policing methods. Discourse suggests that Uttar Pradesh's Chief Minister, Yogi Adityanath, not only allows but actively encourages police violence. Adityanath is no stranger to controversy, frequently making headlines for his 'hardline rhetoric, often directed against Muslims'.[165] Beatrice Jauregui shows that *thoki raj* (ruling by force) is prominent in Indian policing.[166] Speaking at a conference I recently attended, she discussed the topic of Indian 'encounter killings': deaths allegedly occurring in self-defence in the line of duty.[167] Rather than downplaying these deaths, there has emerged a celebration and 'Bollywoodization of the incorruptible police officers who do whatever is needed in the name of justice'.[168] Drawing on stories of 'righteous killings' and notions of 'divine justice', some officers believe it is their role to 'purify' society.[169] This quest for purification has led to the formation of 'encounter specialists', conflating state protection with vigilantism.[170] Encounter specialists are plain clothed officers who make it their task to stop Muslim plots like love jihad through violence. This regime's connection to politics is highlighted through Adityanath's public celebration of these killings. He has even taken to Twitter to publish the results of encounter killings, ranking statistics of deaths and injuries.[171] One update was uploaded on 6th December: the anniversary of the demolition of the Babri Masjid Mosque.[172] Such examples of political and police hatred show the firm relegation of Muslims in parts of India and how far some are willing to go to build a 'pure' India.

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[164] Dibyesh Anand, *Hindu Nationalism In India And The Politics Of Fear,* p. 4.
[165] BBC, "Yogi Adityanath: 'Muslims Did No Favour To India By Staying Here'", 2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-51382414; Anon., "The BJP's Next Mission: Eradicating 'Love Jihad' In India", *DAWN*, 2020, https://www.dawn.com/news/1597599.
[166] Beatrice Jauregui, in *Workshop On Post-Secular Policing – Utrecht University – 'From "Love Jihad" To "Thoki Raj": The Brutal Communalism Of Hindutva Policing In North India*, 2021.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Ibid.
[172] Ibid.

5.6.   Reactions to alleged forced conversions and abductions:
protests, violence, murder

How is this background of interreligious violence connected to the rumours of abduction and conversion? Having examined and understood the backdrop of cultural and religious division and the conflict that often accompanies it, it is time to view the attacks and protests sparked by love jihad rhetoric and Egyptian rumours of female abduction and conversion. Whilst one might assume that the focus of the rumours is the woman who has allegedly been abducted and the man who has allegedly abducted her, news articles and reports often brush past those involved and go straight to descriptions of protests and conflict. In the next chapter, I will tackle the rumours more extensively, with a greater focus on rhetoric. Here, the focus will be on the violence as part of a seemingly continuous chain of sectarian conflict in India and Egypt. Following Camilia Shehata's disappearance in 2010, a crowd of 2,000 Copts and Muslims protested in Imbaba.[173] 13 were killed in ensuing clashes, and two churches were burned down.[174] The violence was not restricted to Egypt, however, with news articles showing that 'Islamist militants carried out a church bombing as far away as Iraq' over the allegations.[175] Due to a breakdown in communication over women being held in 'the prisons of [Coptic] monasteries' following their alleged conversions to Islam, an Al-Qaeda group in Iraq declared Christians 'legitimate targets'.[176] Indeed, the mass beheading of 21 Copts in Libya five years after Shehata's temporary disappearance was attributed in part to her case. The message in the IS video claimed that 'the beheadings were revenge for the treatment of Shehata, who they claim was held against her will by the Church post-conversion'.[177]

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[173] Jason Brownlee, *Violence Against Copts In Egypt* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013, p 15.
[174] David D. Kirkpatrick, "Clashes In Cairo Leave 12 Dead And 2 Churches In Flames", *The New York Times*, 2011 https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/09/world/middleeast/09egypt.html.
[175] Ibid.
[176] France24, "Al Qaeda-Linked Group Says Christians Are 'Legitimate Targets'", 2010, https://www.france24.com/en/20101103-qaeda-linked-group-says-christians-are-legitimate-targets-iraq-isi-site.
[177] France24, "Al Qaeda-Linked Group Says Christians Are 'Legitimate Targets'", 2010, https://www.france24.com/en/20101103-qaeda-linked-group-says-christians-are-legitimate-targets-iraq-isi-site.

One particular allegation of love jihad in a town in northern India is recorded as the spark of communal rioting which ended in the death of 62 people.[178] The 'Muzaffarnagar riots' began when the police released a Muslim boy who had allegedly been stalking a young Hindu woman.[179] A VHP member confirmed the story to the press, saying it was part of a love jihad plot by Muslim youth in the area.[180] A further source states that the brothers of the Hindu woman killed the Muslim boy for molesting their sister. In retaliation, 'a congregation of Muslims in the village… brutally beat up and murdered' the brothers.[181] In the rioting that followed, 'people were killed, displaced, looted and sexually violated'.[182] This incident led to 14,000 people around the Muzaffarnagar district in Uttar Pradesh leaving their homes.[183] These examples show that what may be explained away as civil unrest or conspiracy theory has bloody, long-lasting impact for the Egyptians and Indians living through these events. They show that love jihad and allegations of abductions and conversions are not stand-alone issues in India and Egypt, but rather flashpoints of continuous interreligious strife.

5.7.   Conclusion

This chapter has sought to provide a detailed examination and analysis of the cultural and religious conflict in which the narratives on female abductions and conversions emerge. Through factors such as identity cards, lack of representation, safety while worshipping and the failure of the police and government to support citizens, the discriminatory treatment of Egyptian and Indian minorities is long established and set to continue. The alleged phenomenon of abducted and forcibly converted women are not distinct narratives, but sit alongside rich histories of strife characterised in part by a Coptic fear of obsoletion and victimisation, and a Hindu fear of a loss of majority control and deep-seated Othering.

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[178] David James Strohl, "Love Jihad In India's Moral Imaginaries: Religion, Kinship, And Citizenship In Late Liberalism", p. 30.

[179] Aastha Tyagi and Atreyee Sen, "Love-Jihad (Muslim Sexual Seduction) And Ched-Chad (Sexual Harassment): Hindu Nationalist Discourses And The Ideal/Deviant Urban Citizen In India", *Gender, Place & Culture* 27, no. 1 (2019): 104-125, doi:10.1080/0966369x.2018.1557602., p. 107.

[180] Ibid.

[181] Aastha Tyagi and Atreyee Sen, "Love-Jihad (Muslim Sexual Seduction) And Ched-Chad (Sexual Harassment): Hindu Nationalist Discourses And The Ideal/Deviant Urban Citizen In India", *Gender, Place & Culture* 27, no. 1 (2019): 104-125, doi:10.1080/0966369x.2018.1557602., p. 107.

[182] Ibid.

[183] Ibid.

The historical, political and religious histories of India and Egypt are complex and peppered with contrasting periods of peace and catastrophic conflict. Understanding the countries' past and present political and religious standing is a crucial part of this comparative analytical thesis. It is only through, for example, an in-depth examination of modern Hindutva, politically spearheaded by the BJP, that the significance of love jihad allegations can be fully appreciated.

6. *Discourse analysis: The rumoured discourse and its implications*

6.1. *Introduction*

This chapter will examine and analyse the focus and language of media pertaining to rumours of love jihad and Egyptian allegations of abductions and forced conversions. This will begin with a general examination of how news platforms and reports describe the alleged phenomena. Particularly in the Indian case, views here fall into two distinct camps. The first are sources which describe these rumours as entirely real and as an immediate cause for concern. These sources range from giving advice to Hindu parents on how to protect their daughters, to describing a pre-meditated 'pan-Islamic plot' to convert Hindu women in order to tip the country's majority status from Hinduism to Islam.[184] The second camp views these rumours as a highly politicised, or at least paranoid and fearmongering, display of Islamophobia which 'insults' Muslim men and 'demeans' Hindu women.[185] Analysis of the language and focus of the reports and news articles generated around the Indian and Egyptian cases allow crucial insight into the nature of the nations' sectarian conflicts. Whilst it is not the task of this thesis to establish whether these rumours are true, the way in which they are reported gives insight into the respective countries' views on female agency and interreligious conflict. This chapter will predominantly rely on material from primary sources. These sources offer a diverse selection of opinions and focusses, ranging from a report commissioned by Christian Solidarity International and the Coptic Foundation for Human Rights to articles from the Arabic newspaper, *Aljazeera*. Having started with a general overview of how the phenomena are described in the press and published reports, the chapter will analyse how the women allegedly abducted and converted are described and how their agency or objectification is portrayed. Finally, the chapter will analyse the documents which ignore or limit the significance of the women involved and focus on other factors. For example, in cases where conflict is seen as being sparked by forced conversion, the woman involved is often a footnote in the story rather than a centralised figure. This analysis will show how, in some cases, the apparent focus of

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[184] Saba Mahmood, "Sectarian Conflict And Family Law In Contemporary Egypt", *American Ethnologist*, no. 39 (2012): 54-62, doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2011.01347.x, p. 57.

[185] Jyoti Punwani, "Myths And Prejudices About 'Love Jihad'", *Economic And Political Weekly* 49, no. 42 (2014): 12-15, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24480870, p. 14.

the cases is overtaken by the noise of sectarian conflict, leaving the women involved in a precarious position.

6.2.   Media descriptions of love jihad and Egyptian abductions

In order to closely analyse the language and focus of media presentations of alleged abductions and conversions, I will begin with an overview of general descriptions surrounding the topic. Even in this short overview, the rhetorical and focal patterns of media and report portrayals should become evident. The first example comes from a report published by the Refugee Review Tribunal. The text was published in Australia in 2007 and details accounts from several international departments on the case of alleged forced conversions. These include the Netherlands Department of Foreign Affairs and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin & Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD). The report describes the situation in Egypt as a 'psychologically demeaning tactic against the minority' whereby 'Islamist groups practice forced conversions on members of the Coptic community… under police manipulation'.[186] It refers to the cases of Camilia Shehata and Wafa Qustuntin, stating that by targeting wives of priests 'and attempting their conversion to Islam under the protection of local police and media propaganda', Copts felt insulted by the Muslim community and 'took to the streets'.[187] Similar to the love jihad allegations, the report suggests that the women involved are sometimes offered 'financial or property incentives, especially in economically underprivileged areas'.[188] Unlike other documents which suggest Coptic women are simply abducted, this implies a range of coercive methods, some requiring the woman's input.

Another report describes the 'emerging patterns of force, fraud and coercion' as corresponding to definitions of human trafficking used by the United Nations, 'with the UN identifying it as a "crime against humanity"'.[189] It could be suggested, however, that this report is biased towards Coptic protection, as it was commissioned by Christian Solidarity International and the Coptic Foundation for Human Rights. A further report which is

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[186] Justice.Gov, Last modified 2007, https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/eoir/legacy/2013/06/11/coptic christians-forced conversion to islam.pdf.

[187] Ibid.

[188] Ibid.

[189] Hrlibrary.Umn.Edu, Last modified 2009, http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/research/Egypt/The Disappearance, Forced Conversions, and Forced Marriages.pdf, p. 1.

arguably biased comes from the organisation Coptic Solidarity. The text uses strong language mirroring rhetoric from the Indian case, describing the alleged Egyptian abductions as 'jihad of the womb'.[190] Further parallels can be drawn between the rhetoric of this report and that of the Indian case. The report provides a list of the top three ways Coptic women can be abducted by Muslim men. These include 'overpowering and kidnapping women' who have been identified as Copts through wearing a cross necklace or simply not wearing a hijab; 'engaging in superficial theological debates', which seems to mean persuading 'relatively uneducated' women to convert; and finally, 'luring minor Coptic girls into romantic relationships'.[191] The latter scenario uses very similar rhetoric found in Hindutva media, playing on the same fear of the Islamic Other. This scenario involves a consensual (though arguably misleading) engagement or elopement, ending with the woman 'at the mercy of her captors'.[192] The report quotes Raymond Ibrahim, an American author and critic of Islam, who suggests that the Egyptian case is part of a wider phenomenon related to Salafist groups, just as love jihad has been described as a 'pan-Islamic plot'.[193] He says: 'Muslim clerics present this 'procreation' jihad as a way of killing two birds with one stone: seize and seed non-Muslim women with Muslim babies. Doing so depletes the infidels' ranks of women and the non-Muslim babies they might have birthed, while simultaneously increasing both for Islam'.[194] In this brief overview of rhetoric utilised in media and reports for the Egyptian case, the pattern of denying or downplaying the significance of female agency and encouraging a view of Muslim men as devious and plotting already emerges.

Indian media is incredibly divided on its engagement with love jihad rumours. At this stage, I will share an example from either side of the spectrum. The first example comes from Vijaykant Chauhan, an Indian citizen who has made it his task to prevent love jihad at any cost, even storming registry offices with false paperwork to break up interfaith weddings.[195] In an interview for *The Guardian*, he shows the cultural significance of the

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[190] Coptic Solidarity, "'Jihad Of The Womb': Trafficking Of Coptic Women & Girls In Egypt", 2020, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/jihad-of-the-womb-report-fa.pdf.
[191] Coptic Solidarity, "'Jihad Of The Womb': Trafficking Of Coptic Women & Girls In Egypt", 2020, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/jihad-of-the-womb-report-fa.pdf, pp.4-5.
[192] Coptic Solidarity, "'Jihad Of The Womb': Trafficking Of Coptic Women & Girls In Egypt", p. 5.
[193] Ibid; Saba Mahmood, "Sectarian Conflict And Family Law In Contemporary Egypt", *p. 57.*
[194] Raymond Ibrahim cited by: Coptic Solidarity, "'Jihad Of The Womb': Trafficking Of Coptic Women & Girls In Egypt", p. 5.
[195] Aman Sethi, "'Love Jihad' In India And One Man's Quest To Prevent It", *The Guardian*, 2015.

rumours, saying: 'our strength… comes from four pillars: our cows, our temples, our ancient culture and our girls. Anyone who attacks any one of these pillars should be put to death'.[196] He suggests that the Islamic plot goes beyond a wish to increase their minority presence in the country, but is part of a plan to take Hindu land, wealth, daughters, and breed terrorists 'who want to destroy India'.[197] The other side of the rhetoric is far more sceptical about allegations of love jihad, but is equally concerned with the implications of such allegations. An article by *DAWN,* Pakistan's largest English-language newspaper, discusses the implications of believing love jihad rumours. It shows that while there is 'no credible evidence of an organised mass attempt to convert Hindu women to Islam and bring about Muslim domination', the 'conspiracy theory' is widespread in 'Hindutva circles'.[198] The article shows that although many believe love jihad to be nothing more than right-wing propaganda, discrimination and conspiracies are becoming enshrined in law by the BJP with dire consequences for the nation's citizens.

6.3.   *Media focus on the women involved*

While supposedly central to the discourse surrounding forced conversion, the women involved are rarely the key focus in news articles and reports. If they are given more than a passing mention, it is often only as background information to the allegation before the details of the main event. It is extremely rare to hear from the women involved, or indeed any Egyptian or Indian female voice on the matter. Possible reasons for this silence will be developed in the final analytical chapter. There are exceptions to the lack of media focus around the women involved, however, and in the interest of a balanced analysis, they are presented here. The Refugee Review Tribunal report, for example, focusses on the case of Wafa Qustuntin (here: Konstantin) far longer than other sources. It details how, in December 2004, she 'took refuge in a police station… and announced that she had converted to Islam'.[199] She allegedly asked to be protected from her 'co-religionists, who sought to convince her to return to her husband's side'.[200] Again, while it is not the task of

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[196] Aman Sethi, "'Love Jihad' In India And One Man's Quest To Prevent It", *The Guardian*, 2015.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Anon., "The BJP's Next Mission: Eradicating 'Love Jihad' In India", *DAWN*, 2020, https://www.dawn.com/news/1597599.
[199] Justice.Gov, Last modified 2007, https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/eoir/legacy/2013/06/11/coptic christians-forced conversion to islam.pdf.
[200] Ibid.

this thesis to ascertain the truth to the allegations and rumours, it is interesting here to read a different interpretation of events surrounding Qustuntin's disappearance. The report admits it is 'difficult to know what might have motivated her' but theorises that an 'unhappy marriage' and the Church's ban on divorce which is 'all the more stringent for priests' could be to blame.[201] These suggestions are seconded by Saba Mahmood, who shows that a number of Egyptian commentators believed that Coptic family law was central to such allegations.[202] Since 1971, Copts have been banned from divorcing or remarrying unless on the basis of adultery or religious conversion.[203] Mahmood says this has 'served as an impetus for Coptic men and women to convert to Islam' in order to divorce or remarry.[204] Details of the cases of Shehata and Qustuntin, including the fact that they were both married to Coptic priests 'with whom they reportedly had marital problems lent credence to this claim'.[205] The report goes on to quote an interviewee for the Arabic newspaper, *al-Dustur*, who says: 'they seem convinced that the best way to prevent sectarian clashes is to forcibly prevent people from converting to the religion of their choice'.[206] This is a rare example in the reporting of the Egyptian case where female agency is touched upon, and yet it is still shrouded in the language of the nation's interreligious conflict.

A report from Islamic Human Rights Commission, however, maintains its focus on the agency and religious freedom of Camilia Shehata. The report shows that the headmaster of the school Shehata worked at confirmed she had booked a 15-day holiday and taken her pay before her disappearance, suggesting a consensual or at least predetermined plan to change her circumstances.[207] The head of the local Post Office corroborated this story, saying Shehata withdrew a large sum of money from her bank account.[208] Just as we must acknowledge bias in reports commissioned by Christian organisations, it is necessary to

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[201] Justice.Gov, Last modified 2007, https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/eoir/legacy/2013/06/11/coptic christians-forced conversion to islam.pdf.
[202] Saba Mahmood, "Sectarian Conflict And Family Law In Contemporary Egypt", 54.
[203] Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference In A Secular Age: A Minority Report* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015, p. 113.
[204] Ibid.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Justice.Gov, Last modified 2007, https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/eoir/legacy/2013/06/11/coptic christians-forced conversion to islam.pdf.
[207] Action Alert: Egypt – Enforced Disappearance Of Camilia Shehata – IHRC". Ihrc.Org.Uk, Last modified 2010. https://www.ihrc.org.uk/activities/alerts/9509-action-alert-egypt-enforced-disappearance-of-camilia-shehata/.
[208] Ibid.

consider that this text portrays Copts as suspicious and looks favourably upon Islamic conversion. The opinion of the report is that the only non-consensual act was that of the Church hierarchy and the security forces who 'forcibly handed an adult citizen, against her will, to the church', as this action is a violation of the Egyptian Constitution.[209] It appears, therefore, that whether the allegations and rumours are true or not, Shehata's agency and freedom of choice were limited by men. On the other side of the argument, but with an ironically similar focus, the Coptic Solidarity article states that the 'rampant trafficking of Coptic women and girls is a direct violation of their most basic rights to safety, freedom of movement, and freedom of conscience and belief'.[210] This argument surely equally applies to the Coptic decision to have Shehata not only returned to the Church, but sequestered there, where she is reported to have undergone 'psychotherapy sessions' and has barely been heard from since, as seen in the Islamic Human Rights Commission report.[211]

Although infrequently, female agency has been mentioned in relation to the new BJP law. A news article from *Aljazeera* focusses on how the 'love jihad laws' are not only 'undermining India's secular constitution' but are 'denying agency to women'.[212] Last year, when newly-weds Muskan and Rashid went to register their marriage in Uttar Pradesh, Rashid was arrested under the new legislation, and Muskan was sent to a state-run women's shelter. After two weeks, the court proceeded to find no charge against the couple and allowed them to return home. In a rare example of maintained female focus, the article then turns its attention to Muskan. While detained in a shelter, she became unwell and suffered a miscarriage.[213] The implication is that the stress of the couple's unnecessary detainment caused the loss of their baby. Moreover, another article from the same newspaper focusses on a woman's right to choose her partner. The article is about a

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[209] Action Alert: Egypt – Enforced Disappearance Of Camilia Shehata – IHRC". Ihrc.Org.Uk, Last modified 2010. https://www.ihrc.org.uk/activities/alerts/9509-action-alert-egypt-enforced-disappearance-of-camilia-shehata/.
[210] Coptic Solidarity, "'Jihad Of The Womb': Trafficking Of Coptic Women & Girls In Egypt", 2020, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/jihad-of-the-womb-report-fa.pdf.
[211] "Action Alert: Egypt – Enforced Disappearance Of Camilia Shehata – IHRC". Ihrc.Org.Uk, Last modified 2010. https://www.ihrc.org.uk/activities/alerts/9509-action-alert-egypt-enforced-disappearance-of-camilia-shehata/.
[212] Apoorvanand, "India's 'Love Jihad' Laws: Another Attempt To Subjugate Muslims", *Aljazeera*, 2021, https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/1/15/indias-love-jihad-laws-another-attempt-to-subjugate-muslims.
[213] Apoorvanand, "India's 'Love Jihad' Laws: Another Attempt To Subjugate Muslims", *Aljazeera*, 2021, https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/1/15/indias-love-jihad-laws-another-attempt-to-subjugate-muslims.

campaign called the India Love Project (ILP). The project turns love jihad rhetoric on its head and celebrates stories of interfaith romance on social media. Tanvir Aeijaz, a professor at Delhi University is quoted for the article, saying: 'the concept of 'love jihad' is an attack on Hindu girls'.[214] She urges feminists to actively engage in the debate, an action which could arguably shift media rhetoric from fearmongering to supporting female choice.[215]

In contrast to the over-representation of male voices in the narrative accounts, when carrying out a simple Google Image search for love jihad, no men were pictured in the first five images.[216] All fifteen figures in the first five images were women. Four out of five of these images appear to be from the same protest, showing a sign reading 'love is not a crime'. The group of women represented appear to come from both Muslim and Hindu communities, as some are wearing the hijab and niqab, and others have their hair showing and are wearing bindis. The fifth image shows the opposite side of the debate, depicting a woman with a sign reading: 'Hindu girls, beware of Love Jehad'. It is interesting that the majority of images surrounding love jihad are focussed on women, and yet the majority of documents published focus on the male-dominated spheres of interreligious conflict, violence and laws. This suggests a disconnect between the face of the issue, and the voices heard. Due to a lack of female representation in the narrative of love jihad, it would be easy to assume that women do not have an opinion on the matter, or do not wish to voice one. However, these images show otherwise. The women have made signs, congregated in an interfaith group, and protested the narrative of love jihad. Whilst I must be careful not to ascribe liberal feminist sentiments to this narrative, these images show how important the issue is to them; the slogans on their signs surely reveal how important their personal choice of partner is.[217] The prevalence of women in this Google Image search as well as their protesting stance suggests that female voice is central to the love jihad debate. Yet document analysis says otherwise.

I read the article attached to one of the images from the Google Image search, assuming it would be connected to the faces in the photograph. It was an article written for *The Guardian* and rather than focussing on the protest presented in the image, it centred

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[214] Chinki Sinha, "Countering 'Love Jihad' By Celebrating India's Interfaith Couples", *Aljazeera*, 2021, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/10/countering-love-jihad-by-celebrating-indian-interfaith-couples.
[215] Ibid.
[216] Appendix 1.
[217] Appendix 1.

around the new BJP 'love jihad law' and the way it 'targeted' Muslim men.[218] The image attached shows women holding signs saying: 'love is not a crime', 'let women choose' and 'women have brains too', yet the words written below, although important, continue to reflect a male narrative.[219] There is an exception, however. At the very end of the article comes the only direct quotation from a woman involved in love jihad allegations that I have found in my research. It is from Muskan Jahan, the woman who suffered a miscarriage in Uttar Pradesh mentioned above.[220] Her quote is tagged to the very end of the article, without further comment. Her words show the frustration and fury that must accompany the removal or questioning of one's right to choose one's own partner: 'I am an adult, I am 22 years old. I got married of my own free will'.[221] This placement at the end of the article could be read as the journalist giving Jahan the final word, or as an afterthought: a trivial addition to a political piece. Either way, it is a rarity within the narrative.

6.4.   *Alternative media focusses*

Whilst the sources above present the exceptions to the rule, in the main, media focus around allegations of female abductions or forced conversions refers to the women involved as a narrative detail or bypasses them entirely. The main focus is on rioting or acts of violence seen as sparked by a woman's disappearance or conversion. In a *New York Times* article about clashes in Cairo following Shehata's disappearance and subsequent return to the Coptic community, the focus is on details of violence and on the underlying interreligious conflict of the state.[222] Shehata is mentioned by name in the latter part of the article, in the narrative framework explaining the pattern of 'recent episodes of Muslim-Christian violence… started with rumors about an interfaith romance and a woman's abduction'.[223] The article does not present two opposing sides fighting for the rights of a

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[218] Hannah Ellis-Peterson, "Muslims Targeted Under Indian State's 'Love Jihad' Law", *The Guardian*, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/14/muslims-targeted-under-indian-states-love-jihad-law.
[219] Appendix 2.
[220] Apoorvanand, "India's 'Love Jihad' Laws: Another Attempt To Subjugate Muslims", *Aljazeera*, 2021, https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/1/15/indias-love-jihad-laws-another-attempt-to-subjugate-muslims.
[221] Hannah Ellis-Peterson, "Muslims Targeted Under Indian State's 'Love Jihad' Law", *The Guardian*, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/14/muslims-targeted-under-indian-states-love-jihad-law.
[222] David D. Kirkpatrick, "Clashes In Cairo Leave 12 Dead And 2 Churches In Flames", *The New York Times*, 2011 https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/09/world/middleeast/09egypt.html.
[223] David D. Kirkpatrick, "Clashes In Cairo Leave 12 Dead And 2 Churches In Flames", *The New York Times*, 2011 https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/09/world/middleeast/09egypt.html.

woman to remain in the religion of her choice, with Copts believing she was coerced to convert and thus the conversion is void, and Muslims believing she converted voluntarily and has been abducted by the Copts. Instead, it shows there was no 'organized group' or even 'guiding ideology behind the violence'.[224] Rather, both sides were fuelled by 'frustrated and underemployed young men'.[225] The article stands to confirm my theory that the rhetoric and actions surrounding the alleged abductions and forced conversions of women in Egypt are not focussed on individual women or Coptic women in general, but are outlets for 'long-suppressed sectarian animosities'.[226] No example shows this more clearly than the IS video preceding the murder of 21 Copts in Libya.[227] Among other things, the video claims that the beheadings were revenge for the treatment of Shehata, 'who they claim was held against her will by the Church post-conversion'.[228] Considering the treatment of women throughout the narrative (which will be explored in greater detail in the final chapter), it is implausible that the Church's treatment of Shehata contributed to such a violent attack, in another country, five years after the event. This must be seen as a legitimisation of violence.

Rhetorically, some media presentations of the cases of violence following women's disappearances appear to place blame with the women, rather than the patriarchal structures which allegedly coerce and control them, or those personally involved in the violence. For example, one article states: 'the two cases threatened the fragile sectarian balance of the country' whilst another says the Shehata case 'provoked' protest and a third refers to an alleged conversion which 'sparked a sectarian dispute'.[229] Further examples refer to Shehata's return to the Church as 'triggering protests', and a video supposedly

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[224] David D. Kirkpatrick, "Clashes In Cairo Leave 12 Dead And 2 Churches In Flames", *The New York Times*, 2011 https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/09/world/middleeast/09egypt.html.

[225] Ibid.

[226] Ibid.

[227] John Hall and Sara Malm, "Egypt Retaliates With Air Strikes After ISIS Marches 21 Coptic Christians Along A Lonely Libyan Beach And Beheads Them En Masse For Their Faith", *Daily Mail*, 2015, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2955249/Egypt-retaliates-air-strikes-ISIS-beheads-21-Coptic-Christians-Libya.html.

[228] Ibid.

[229] France24, "Al Qaeda-Linked Group Says Christians Are 'Legitimate Targets'", 2010, https://www.france24.com/en/20101103-qaeda-linked-group-says-christians-are-legitimate-targets-iraq-isi-site; John Hall and Sara Malm, "Egypt Retaliates With Air Strikes After ISIS Marches 21 Coptic Christians Along A Lonely Libyan Beach And Beheads Them En Masse For Their Faith", *Daily Mail*, 2015, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2955249/Egypt-retaliates-air-strikes-ISIS-beheads-21-Coptic-Christians-Libya.html.

featuring her as 'firing up' violence.[230] The terms 'threatened', 'provoked', 'sparked', 'triggering' and 'firing up' are not neutral, and with the only people named (and often pictured) in these narratives being Shehata or Qustuntin, these words often seem unduly targeted at or attached to them. Whilst the focus is on violence rather than the women explicitly, this rhetoric changes them from apparent victims to the cause of violence. Neither representation manages to take into account the individual woman's humanity or agency.

In articles conveying news of violence, protests and killings, the focus on lives lost rather than on one woman's religious freedom and freedom to choose a partner seems a fair judgement call. However, it calls into question the societal importance of these women. Do the protests and acts of violence surrounding them feature outraged civilians looking to protect the liberty of their fellow citizen? Or do they merely provide 'excuses' to fight their long-term rival?[231] Or both? Whatever the motive, a cycle of violence has been created, with women stuck in the centre.

Rhetoric concerning the Indian case often springs from vigilante or semi-organised initiatives supposedly protecting young Hindu women from the threat of love jihad. One such initiative is the anti-love jihad programme headed by the 'Hindu Helpline'.[232] The helpline deals with alleged cases of love jihad in Kerala and claims to have dealt with 10,000 cases, having filed 4,500 habeas corpus petitions to Kerala Court.[233] According to an article written for the Indian news platform, *My Nation*, the volunteers working for the helpline 'put their lives at risk' and are fully trained in countering 'Jihadi activity and [rescuing] the Hindu girls'.[234] Whilst the group started out with a 5% 'rescue rate', it claims to currently stands at 90%.[235] The helpline says there are organised love jihad events in Kerala 'funded

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[230] France24, "Al Qaeda-Linked Group Says Christians Are 'Legitimate Targets'", 2010, https://www.france24.com/en/20101103-qaeda-linked-group-says-christians-are-legitimate-targets-iraq-isi-site.

[231] Justice.Gov, Last modified 2007, https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/eoir/legacy/2013/06/11/coptic christians-forced conversion to islam.pdf.

[232] Vicky Nanjappa, "Will Kerala Become Kashmir Or Pakistan? How Hindu Helpline Is Fighting Love Jihad", *My Nation*, 2020, https://www.mynation.com/views/will-kerala-become-kashmir-or-pakistan-how-hindu-helpline-is-fighting-love-jihad-q72i9y.

[233] Vicky Nanjappa, "Will Kerala Become Kashmir Or Pakistan? How Hindu Helpline Is Fighting Love Jihad", *My Nation*, 2020, https://www.mynation.com/views/will-kerala-become-kashmir-or-pakistan-how-hindu-helpline-is-fighting-love-jihad-q72i9y.

[234] Ibid.

[235] Ibid.

by the Middle East' such as 'the kiss of love', where Hindu girls are encouraged to break ties with their community.[236] Another organisation set up to take down love jihad is the Facebook group 'Anti-Love Jihad Front', discussed by Strohl and Iwanek.[237] One of the images posted on the Facebook page is an 'appeal from Hindu brothers', and warns Hindus that Muslim men are disguising themselves as Hindus in order to seduce, marry and impregnate Hindu women.[238] Strohl suggests that the text blames the upsurge of love jihad on the allowance of female agency; that when women choose love for themselves, they are 'easily duped' and make catastrophic decisions.[239] The image shows a besotted young woman (with a heart above her head for emphasis) sitting behind a grinning man on a motorbike, riding away from the safety of the Hindu temple in the distance.[240] Strohl shows that the way she sits 'flirtatiously behind a suitor' breaks 'several social mores about female chastity'.[241] Depicting the Hindu girl this way helps the viewer believe she has been easily led astray and arguably suggests that women should not have the power to make romantic decisions unaided. Iwanek's analysis of the Anti-Love Jihad Front suggests that the group move between the image of a cunning, duplicitous man as the image suggests, to a portrayal of Muslim men as 'half-wild' and with 'no true culture at all'.[242] This would suggest that, rather than presenting a consistent view of protecting women from harm, the group takes every opportunity to insult and dehumanise the Muslim Other.

As shown in the previous chapter, the main focus of love jihad rhetoric comes down to politics and right-wing Hindu propaganda, centred on the BJP. Several political schemes have been pushed in recent years which encourage Islamophobia under the guise of protecting young women. The first of these was a rhetorical campaign entitled '*Bahu laao,*

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[236] Vicky Nanjappa, "Will Kerala Become Kashmir Or Pakistan? How Hindu Helpline Is Fighting Love Jihad", *My Nation*, 2020, https://www.mynation.com/views/will-kerala-become-kashmir-or-pakistan-how-hindu-helpline-is-fighting-love-jihad-q72i9y.

[237] "Anti Love Jihad Front| Facebook", Facebook, Last modified 2021, https://www.facebook.com/Anti-Love-Jihad-Front-War-Against-Love-Jihad-267858483372462/photos/.

[238] Appendix 3.

[239] David James Strohl, "Love Jihad In India's Moral Imaginaries: Religion, Kinship, And Citizenship In Late Liberalism", *Contemporary South Asia* 27, no. 1 (2018): 27-39, doi:10.1080/09584935.2018.1528209, p. 34.

[240] Appendix 3.

[241] David James Strohl, "Love Jihad In India's Moral Imaginaries: Religion, Kinship, And Citizenship In Late Liberalism", *Contemporary South Asia* 27, no. 1 (2018): 27-39, doi:10.1080/09584935.2018.1528209, p. 34.

[242] Krzysztof Iwanek, ""Love Jihad" And The Stereotypes Of Muslims In Hindu Nationalism", *Journal Of Alternative Perspectives In The Social Sciences* 7, no. 3 (2016): 355-399, p. 357.

beti bachao' ('bring in a daughter-in-law, save a daughter').[243] Rhetoric similar to this was used in a BJP speech in the 2016 elections. This idea is essentially a reverse love jihad scheme which is apparently entirely accepted by the right-wing Hindu citizens who oppose love jihad. The idea is that, to counter the effects love jihad has on India's majority/minority balance, Hindu men should marry and convert Muslim women. This was not only a rhetorical suggestion, but a genuine action plan. An article in *The Times of India* describes a scheme whereby 'the right wing outfit' of Bajrang Dal planned to 'approach mothers of marriageable Hindi men in order to persuade them to marry off their sons to Muslim or Christian girls' in order to 'save girls' by introducing them to the 'rich cultural and traditional values of Hinduism'.[244] In stark contrast to the treatment of interfaith couples when the woman is Hindu and the man is Muslim, in cases of '*Bahu laao, beti bachao'*, the RSS promise 'protection to couples if the boy is a Hindu'.[245] This strategy derived credence through mirroring an initiative set up by Prime Minister Narendra Modi entitled '*Beti Bachao, Beti Padhoo'* ('save the nation, educate the daughters'), aimed at educating women about government services to end the practice of female feticide.[246] While both these ideas are rhetorically framed at supporting and rescuing women, it is not difficult to uncover the real focus of both schemes: the nation. 'Save the nation' clearly refers to maintaining a Hindu majority through maintaining and increasing the number of children born into the Hindu community.[247]

The second political rhetorical display of Islamophobia disguised as concern over love jihad and its implications for women comes once again from the nation's current Prime Minister. Following the 2002 riots in Gujarat, Modi 'famously evoked a contrast between Hindu and Muslim families' in a speech.[248] He said: *'Hum do, hamare do. Woh panch, unke*

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[243] David James Strohl, "Love Jihad In India's Moral Imaginaries: Religion, Kinship, And Citizenship In Late Liberalism", p. 30; Nadira Khatun, "'Love-Jihad' And Bollywood: Constructing Muslims As 'Other'", *Journal Of Religion And Film* 22, no. 3 (2018), https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol22/iss3/8, p. 11.

[244] Ishita Mishra, "Bajrang Dal to launch 'bahu laao, beti bachao' in Feb", *The Times of India (TOI),* 2014, https://advance-lexis-com.proxy-ub.rug.nl/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5DY3-Y5H1-DXJR-H106-00000-00&context=1516831.

[245] Ibid.

[246] David James Strohl, "Love Jihad In India's Moral Imaginaries: Religion, Kinship, And Citizenship In Late Liberalism", p. 30.

[247] Ibid.

[248] David James Strohl, "Love Jihad In India's Moral Imaginaries: Religion, Kinship, And Citizenship In Late Liberalism", p. 33.

pachees' which means 'Us two, our two. Those five, their 25'.[249] The comment refers to how the two religious groups supposedly procreate, suggesting that Hindus multiply responsibly, and Muslim men take on multiple wives, each having many children. This encourages an image of the Muslim community as animalistic and misogynistic. Circulation of a common RSS slogan solidifies the claim that right-wing Hindu rhetoric surrounding love jihad is simply Islamophobic propaganda. The slogan reads: 'love ever, jihad never', suggesting that any romanticism involving a Muslim is contradictory and 'cannot be genuine'.[250] This reinstates the idea that even if Hindu women believe their interreligious partnership is consensual, she has somehow been misled.

6.5.   Conclusion

The media surrounding love jihad and Egyptian allegations of forced conversions rarely maintain their natural focus on the women who have been allegedly targeted. Instead, the Egyptian case often skips over details of the women involved to reach the main event: the violence proceeding their disappearance; while the Indian case does the same to reach their own agenda: a discussion of politics and Islamophobia.[251] Whilst it often makes sense in the news articles presented to focus on events such as protests or mass beheadings rather than details of a woman's disappearance, there is a disconnect between the apparent focus of the Egyptian and Indian cases, and the real priorities of the reports. This can be seen most clearly in the fact that 15/15 figures shown in the first line of the Google Image search of love jihad are female, and yet in all the reports and news articles studied, only one

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[249] David James Strohl, "Love Jihad In India's Moral Imaginaries: Religion, Kinship, And Citizenship In Late Liberalism", p. 33.

[250] Krzysztof Iwanek, ""Love Jihad" And The Stereotypes Of Muslims In Hindu Nationalism", *Journal Of Alternative Perspectives In The Social Sciences* 7, no. 3 (2016): 355-399, p. 371.

[251] David D. Kirkpatrick, "Clashes In Cairo Leave 12 Dead And 2 Churches In Flames", *The New York Times*, 2011 https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/09/world/middleeast/09egypt.html; Heba Saleh, "'Conversion' Sparks Copt Protest", *BBC*, 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4080777.stm; France24, "Al Qaeda-Linked Group Says Christians Are 'Legitimate Targets'", 2010, https://www.france24.com/en/20101103-qaeda-linked-group-says-christians-are-legitimate-targets-iraq-isi-site; John Hall and Sara Malm, "Egypt Retaliates With Air Strikes After ISIS Marches 21 Coptic Christians Along A Lonely Libyan Beach And Beheads Them En Masse For Their Faith", *Daily Mail*, 2015, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2955249/Egypt-retaliates-air-strikes-ISIS-beheads-21-Coptic-Christians-Libya.html; Apoorvanand, "India's 'Love Jihad' Laws: Another Attempt To Subjugate Muslims", *Aljazeera*, 2021, https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/1/15/indias-love-jihad-laws-another-attempt-to-subjugate-muslims; Hannah Ellis-Peterson, "Muslims Targeted Under Indian State's 'Love Jihad' Law", *The Guardian*, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/14/muslims-targeted-under-indian-states-love-jihad-law.

quotation details the words of a woman involved. The disconnect, unfortunately, does not end there. The next chapter will stretch the focus of female agency beyond the rumours of forced conversions to religion, love and marriage in order to ascertain the cultural significance of women and their choices.

7.   *Women as subject, agent, object and victim in religion, love and marriage*

7.1.   *Introduction*

Having examined the discourse surrounding alleged female abductions and conversions and presented the wider history of interreligious violence in which such discourse thrives, it is time to analyse the real and symbolic role of women in this narrative. The chapter begins with a discussion of women's place within the Hindu and Coptic faiths, before moving onto their role within love and marriage. In both settings, women are presented with many ideals and examples, often seemingly contradictory, informing how they should act. These ideals can dictate who a woman loves, how she dresses, worships and even deals with domestic violence. Some archetypes are considered hyperbolic and therefore not followed in everyday life, but others hold real sway over female actions and the ways in which men around them protect or hide them from perceived threats. The chapter will then delve into specific examples of these ideals, as shown in myth, literature and cinema. Insight into women's position within religion and marriage in this chapter comes from Armanios, Miller, Gupta, Dube and Punwani. The more specific focus on symbolism and cinematic examples of womanhood are attributed to Khatun, Armanios and Amstutz. Such analysis will help show the significance of the female body to Coptic and Hindu communities and the way in which this image is inextricably linked to the narrative of alleged forced conversion and abduction.

7.2.   *Women's place in religion*

In both cases, but especially in India, religious identity is entangled with ideas of national pride and culture. Straightaway this interwovenness takes us into the realm of the symbolic, meaning that when women intersect with these topics, archetypes and ideals are created, rather than achievable suggestions of everyday conduct. This is especially true when, as in the Egyptian case, the religious body that is the Church becomes the 'ultimate authority' in Coptic life.[252] This centrality and overarching nature of the Coptic Church has solidified 'gender hierarchies' far beyond the remit of religion, and into matters 'ranging from legal

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[252] Febe Armanios and Andrew Amstutz, "Emerging Christian Media In Egypt: Clerical Authority And The Visualizations Of Women In Coptic Video Films", *International Journal Of Middle East Studies* 45, no. 3 (2013): 513-533, doi:10.1017/s0020743813000457, p. 514.

rights to leadership roles'.[253] Armanios and Amstutz show that the Church is 'classically patriarchal in its structure and historically men have played a far more visible role than women'.[254] Indeed, when asked in an interview in 1999 why there were so few female leaders in the church, Pope Shenouda replied that two out of twenty-four Coptic Communal Council members were women, saying: 'What do you want? A whole council made up of women?'.[255] Just as femininity is wedded to nationalism in India through the revered figure of 'Mother India', the formation of the Coptic family is seen to be a 'microcosm of the nation' with the woman in her role as mother and wife, acting as 'keeper' of this sphere.[256] Coptic women must 'police' the family's purity and achieve 'spiritual cleanliness' through prayer and fasting specifically to compensate for their husbands' 'expected preoccupation with the outside world'.[257] Historically, in a woman's capacity as life-giver and ruler over the spiritual realm, she is identified with 'nature' and the private sphere, while men are connected more with 'culture' and the public sphere.[258] That these roles are confined to the private sphere does not stand to diminish their importance within concrete societal structures. Within Egyptian law, for example, it is illegal for Copts to proselytise to the Muslim community, meaning that the only realistic way to maintain Coptic numbers is to ensure that those who are born Coptic, stay Coptic.[259] By entrusting women with the purity and spirituality of the family (as the microcosm of the Church and nation) their individual lives and conduct become imbued with symbolic value for the whole community.

In the same way that Coptic women are assigned and take on the role of protecting the family's purity and spirituality, Hindu women 'embody the virtue and honor' of their families.[260] Female sexuality is viewed as 'both valuable and dangerous', having the dual

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[253] Febe Armanios and Andrew Amstutz, "Emerging Christian Media In Egypt: Clerical Authority And The Visualizations Of Women In Coptic Video Films", p. 514.

[254] Ibid.

[255] Febe Armanios and Andrew Amstutz, "Emerging Christian Media In Egypt: Clerical Authority And The Visualizations Of Women In Coptic Video Films", p. 518.

[256] Nadira Khatun, "'Love-Jihad' And Bollywood: Constructing Muslims As 'Other'", *Journal Of Religion And Film* 22, no. 3 (2018), https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol22/iss3/8, p. 4; Febe Armanios, "The 'Virtuous Woman': Images Of Gender In Modern Coptic Society", p. 114.

[257] Febe Armanios, "The 'Virtuous Woman': Images Of Gender In Modern Coptic Society", *Middle Eastern Studies* 38, no. 1 (2002): 110-130, doi:10.1080/714004436, p. 114.

[258] Sherry Ortner, cited by: Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, 1st ed. London: SAGE Publication Ltd., 1997, p. 6.

[259] Febe Armanios, "The 'Virtuous Woman': Images Of Gender In Modern Coptic Society", p. 116.

[260] Cynthia J Miller, "Landscapes of Encounter: Gender And The Morality Of The Road In South India", p. 187; Jyoti Punwani, "Myths And Prejudices About 'Love Jihad'", p. 187.

capacity to 'lure or nurture', to bring 'honor or shame' to their communities and families, specifically the men to whom they are connected.[261] This duality makes a woman 'powerful – auspicious – and highly regulated'.[262] When a woman breaks the confines of her expected 'reserved, chaste, and virtuous' demeanour, it is not only she who suffers, but her community.[263] Gupta shows this in her example of discourse from the 1920s. Alleged abductions and conversions in India in the 1920s serve as a precursor to modern love jihad, in which already ingrained fears of Muslim men moved from folklore to communal unease. The focus here was not only on the sinister Muslim men but on the women they preyed upon. Gupta says: 'The abducted and converted Hindu woman was metamorphosed into a symbol of both sacredness and humiliation, and hence of the victimisation of the whole Hindu community'.[264] As we saw in the previous chapter, this statement shows women as at once victims and perpetrators of their own downfall. That a woman should be abducted is almost an embarrassment.

There is another layer here, however: through her abduction, the woman becomes sacred, symbolic; she ceases to be a particular woman, but represents the supposed victimisation of the entire religious community. The contrasting characteristics in this metamorphosis, as described by Gupta, are 'sacredness and humiliation', highlighting the dual nature of women in Hindu communities as at once subordinate and powerful.[265] In being raised to this symbolic platform, they are sacred. Yet, in this ascension, their flaws are heightened, and their weaknesses displayed. We see this in both cases. Coptic men and Hindu men are spared this dual presentation because their communal existence lies within the realm of reality and action: the public sphere. The framework of women as keepers of the metaphysical realms of spirituality, nationhood and honour allows this metamorphosis to a being at once sacred and symbolic to one community and yet victimised and abused by another. This duality can be explained with assistance from C. J. Fuller. In his book, *The Camphor Flame*, he describes the lack of 'distinction between divine and human beings' singular to Hinduism.[266] Through this blurred line, Hindu women can be at once submissive

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[261] Cynthia J Miller, "Landscapes of Encounter: Gender And The Morality Of The Road In South India", p. 187.
[262] Ibid.
[263] Ibid.
[264] Charu Gupta, "Hindu Women, Muslim Men: Love Jihad And Conversions", *Economic And Political Weekly* 44, no. 51 (2009): 13-15, p. 13.
[265] Ibid.
[266] C. J Fuller, *The Camphor Flame* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 3.

to their husbands and personifications of the goddess's characteristic of *'Shakti'* (power), which I shall return to.[267]

When questions of female agency are added to this dual notion of women, strange things happen. Even though women are given theoretical power over their families' honour and faith, when it comes to personal decisions, their power is often diminished. Expectations and choices are specific and limited, for example, when choosing a partner. Fuller shows that 'even today, very few Hindus outside the liberally minded urban elite freely make "love marriages"', so it is therefore unsurprising that when confronted with the idea that women want to convert from Hinduism to Islam, some 'Hindus lose their logical faculties', as discussed by Gupta.[268] It is 'impossible' for them to conceive that women in their religious community can 'voluntarily elope and convert'.[269] This leads, in part, to the cultural reframing of interfaith marriage as 'forcible conversion'.[270] Although difficult to extricate the two topics, this leads to a wider discussion of women's role within love and marriage.

7.3.   *Women's place in love and family matters*

The entanglement of love, religion and female agency can be seen in the framework set up by Copts in the postcolonial era. Throughout the colonial era, the idea of Coptic families as microcosms of the nation was established, with the man as the 'caretaker' and the woman as responsible for maintaining the family unit's spirituality and purity but also 'entirely accountable to her spouse, her family, her God, and her community' in terms of these familial and social responsibilities.[271] In the postcolonial era, the Coptic Church 'appropriated (and "religified") secular nationalist understandings of domestic femininity'.[272] Practically, this meant that a woman's duty shifted from serving her Pharoah-like husband to her Christ-like husband, moving from one patriarchal structure into

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[267] C. J Fuller, *The Camphor Flame* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 24.
[268] C. J Fuller, *The Camphor Flame*, p. 14; Charu Gupta, "Hindu Women, Muslim Men: Love Jihad And Conversions", *Economic And Political Weekly* 44, no. 51 (2009): 13-15, p. 1**5.**
[269] Charu Gupta, "Hindu Women, Muslim Men: Love Jihad And Conversions", p. 14.
[270] Ibid.
[271] Febe Armanios and Andrew Amstutz, "Emerging Christian Media In Egypt: Clerical Authority And The Visualizations Of Women In Coptic Video Films", p. 515.
[272] Ibid.

another.[273] It would be reasonable to assume here that the framing of husbands as 'Christ-like' would raise them to symbols or at least enforce frameworks of saintly behaviour as we have seen with women. However, it seems that in being 'Christ-like', men are allowed to remain human and individual, whilst the role of women take on an additional layer of symbolism yet subordination. Within that subordination and enshrined devotion towards and acceptance of the Coptic husband, came legal changes. 'To the dismay of feminists and other activists', regulations from the 1938 Code of Personal Status were thrown out in the 1980s.[274] These regulations permitted divorce on the basis of 'life-endangering or physical harm inflicted by a spouse' and 'blatant violation of marital rights leading to a state of contempt between the spouses'.[275] This has led to the acceptance and 'deep silence' surrounding domestic abuse in Coptic communities.[276] With this in mind, it is easy to reconcile the notion that a woman might secretly leave her marital home in order to convert to Islam as this is one of the few remaining ways in which Coptic women can procure a legally legitimate divorce.

In a 1998 article written by Pope Shenouda III, he outlined the expectations of Coptic women. In response to discourses about female agency, he wrote: 'Many speak about a woman's rights… but the more pertinent issue is that a woman is virtuous'.[277] This is a definitive response on the issue of a woman's place within the religious and cultural framework of the Coptic community from *the* Church patriarch. The article makes no distinction between woman and wife, and proceeds to tell wives not to 'nag' her husband or force him to return home quickly after work.[278] These actions will only serve to push a husband to 'search for his freedom' elsewhere.[279] Instead, a Coptic wife should strive to 'win him over' with kind words.[280] Finally, a Coptic wife should make sure to always look better at home than outside the home, lest her appearance be only for 'foreign export and

[273] Febe Armanios and Andrew Amstutz, "Emerging Christian Media In Egypt: Clerical Authority And The Visualizations Of Women In Coptic Video Films", p. 515.
[274] Febe Armanios and Andrew Amstutz, "Emerging Christian Media In Egypt: Clerical Authority And The Visualizations Of Women In Coptic Video Films", p. 519.
[275] Ibid.
[276] Febe Armanios and Andrew Amstutz, "Emerging Christian Media In Egypt: Clerical Authority And The Visualizations Of Women In Coptic Video Films", p. 522.
[277] Pope Shenouda III cited by: Febe Armanios, "The 'Virtuous Woman': Images Of Gender In Modern Coptic Society", p. 110.
[278] Ibid.
[279] Ibid.
[280] Ibid.

not for local consumption'.[281] Within these short quotations, there is a lot to unpack. Firstly, the way in which Shenouda merges the idea of 'woman' and 'wife' may seem uncomfortable to some audiences. However, this view is very much in line with Coptic tradition which sees the words 'woman' *(al-mar'a)* and 'family' *(al-'a'ila)* as 'interchangeable'.[282] This view is presented by Coptic journalist, Ramzi Tadrus, who once wrote: 'I see family through the image of a woman… and I discern nothing within a woman except family'.[283] Secondly, Febe Armanios, who grew up in a Coptic community, offers insight into the strict specifications of Coptic women as detailed by Shenouda. She shows that because of the minority status of the Copts, their history of religious persecution and 'near-extinction', great emphasis has been placed on a Coptic, and specifically female, imperative to reproduce.[284] As part of this, Copts feel they need the 'literal breeding of a specific type of woman' to continue the physical and spiritual lineage of the people.[285]

One of the complications of this manufactured notion of the female and her role emerges when the patriarchal Church suddenly rescinds a key message and demands women to follow another, entirely different path. This has been the case in regard to the Coptic (and indeed, conservative Christian) emphasis on virginity. Through female presentation in hagiographies, there is a focus on female virgin-saints and their example to ordinary women. This ideal is indoctrinated throughout a Coptic girl's childhood. However, when she comes to marry, she is expected to shift, 'often within an instant', into a woman who will sexually please her husband and provide him with children.[286] This has led to communal anger and reprimands when young women do not want to give up their carefully guarded chastity and articulate a wish to remain unmarried.[287] Armanios shows that Church writers appear not to have perceived this staunch contradiction 'inherent in their promotion of relatively strong-minded, independent and militant virgin-saints along with their expectation of virtuous but unmistakably humbled, married women'.[288] She says that even

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[281] Pope Shenouda III cited by: Febe Armanios, "The 'Virtuous Woman': Images Of Gender In Modern Coptic Society", p. 110.
[282] Febe Armanios, "The 'Virtuous Woman': Images Of Gender In Modern Coptic Society", p. 113.
[283] Ramzi Tadrus cited by: Febe Armanios, "The 'Virtuous Woman': Images Of Gender In Modern Coptic Society", p. 113.
[284] Febe Armanios, "The 'Virtuous Woman': Images Of Gender In Modern Coptic Society", p. 114.
[285] Ibid.
[286] Febe Armanios, "The 'Virtuous Woman': Images Of Gender In Modern Coptic Society", p. 121.
[287] Febe Armanios, "The 'Virtuous Woman': Images Of Gender In Modern Coptic Society", p. 119.
[288] Febe Armanios, "The 'Virtuous Woman': Images Of Gender In Modern Coptic Society", p.121.

the 'most sympathetic' writers have 'not attempted to reconcile the disparities between the two ideals'.[289]

In Hindu societies there is also a focus on female virginity and the dangers of female sexuality. During adolescence, girls must be carefully guarded. From puberty when 'sexual desire is believed to awaken', such desire needs 'control and harnessing'.[290] Thus commences a battle between strong, deceitful desire and the 'fragile' state of female purity.[291] Fuller suggests that, just as earthly women are encouraged to marry, the goal for a Hindu goddess is to live in partnership with a god.[292] On the one hand, Fuller's presentation of goddesses and their synonymity with power stands to provide a strong, empowering image for Hindu women. On the other, he shows that this power is 'dangerous' and must be sated through union with a god whereby she 'inevitably becomes an inferior wife and relinquishes control of her power to her husband, who acts for both of them as a married pair'.[293] Traditionally, a single goddess's power and 'violence' has been linked to her 'unreleased sexual energy', suggesting that her sexuality must be guarded and controlled, just like that of an adolescent girl.[294] This duality, and the notion that an any moment a woman's desire might overpower her purity and lead her astray, arguably leads to the removal of her choices in favour of another's decisions about her.

Indeed, Dube shows that if a woman chooses a partner poorly (at the whim of her overzealous desire) 'the pollution she incurs through sexual intercourse is internal', long-lasting and spread through her body, while for men it is only external and thus easily cleansed.[295] As she holds the power to honour or shame her family, such 'pollution' spreads from her to her family, to her community. What is seen by some as the 'traditional practice' of honour killings (generally associated with Middle Eastern and South Asian families who murder a female relative whose actions have brought dishonour) shows the significance of female honour and the male need to harness it.[296] Just as Coptic purity is taught through hagiopics, there is a long tradition of mythology and folk literature depicting the 'miraculous

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[289] Febe Armanios, "The 'Virtuous Woman': Images Of Gender In Modern Coptic Society", p.121.
[290] Leela Dube, *Women And Kinship* Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1997, p. 50.
[291] Ibid.
[292] C. J Fuller, *The Camphor Flame*, p. 47.
[293] C. J Fuller, *The Camphor Flame*, pp. 45, 47.
[294] C. J Fuller, *The Camphor Flame*, p. 45.
[295] Leela Dube, *Women And Kinship,* p. 50.
[296] Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015, p. 114.

powers' that accompany chastity, and the 'dangers of uncontrolled female sexuality'.[297] It is within this framework of male guardianship of female sexuality that the acute anger and suspicion surrounding love jihad can be understood. In a piece of Hindu literature advising communities how to combat love jihad, there is a large discrepancy between the amount of advice aimed at the girls and women at risk, and their parents and community.[298] There are three bullet points for girls and twenty-six for their parents. Advice ranges from prohibiting the wearing of a headscarf (as a girl covering her hair becomes 'difficult to recognise' when sitting behind a ''Love Jihadi' on a two-wheeler') to checking a girl's incoming calls, remembering that the number of a 'Love Jihadi' may be under a false name.[299]

Punwani discusses interfaith marriages in Indian communities and how the issue of conversion is played out. As mentioned before, numbers of interfaith marriages in India are very minimal, only accounting for 2.1% of unions.[300] Punwani shows that there is some rationality in the fear of love jihad, however, as most non-Muslims do convert to Islam when they marry Muslims. This is due to the specificities of the Muslim marriage ritual (*nikaah*) which is not valid as a religious ceremony 'unless both parties are "people of the book"'.[301] Whilst this is the norm, Punwani's text details seven cases of interfaith marriages, and only three women involved had in fact converted to Islam: 'one on the insistence of her mother-in-law, the second on the insistence of her spouse, and the third of her own volition'.[302] She goes on to say that in the first two cases, the conversion was simply a formality; the women kept their maiden names, never actively practiced Islam, but were 'treated with affection' by their husband's parents.[303] This suggests conversion here was a matter of compromise that kept all parties happy, while the third and final example shows a woman's choice to convert and join her husband in his faith. This narrative of choice and compromise is entirely negated by the rhetoric of love jihad, which assumes that a woman is either incapable of making the decision to convert to Islam, or that she simply never would. Punwani's text

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[297] Leela Dube, *Women And Kinship*, p. 67.

[298] "Love Jihad : Precautions To Be Taken By Hindu Girls, Women And Hindu Parents - Hindu Janajagruti Samiti", Hindu Janajagruti Samiti, Last modified 2021, https://www.hindujagruti.org/news/20490.html.

[299] Ibid.

[300] David James Strohl, "Love Jihad In India's Moral Imaginaries: Religion, Kinship, And Citizenship In Late Liberalism", *Contemporary South Asia* 27, no. 1 (2018): 27-39, doi:10.1080/09584935.2018.1528209, p. 33.

[301] Jyoti Punwani, "Myths And Prejudices About 'Love Jihad'", *Economic And Political Weekly* 49, no. 42 (2014): 12-15, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24480870, p. 12.

[302] Ibid.

[303] Ibid.

shows that the women she interviewed do not fit into the parameters of such a narrative. Love jihad rhetoric dictates women are 'easily seduced' and swept up in a speedy romance which ends in her conversion and unhappiness.[304] None of the women interviewed in the text 'had taken the plunge impulsively', but had waited years for their parents to discuss, negotiate and eventually agree to the match.[305] There is nothing foolish or secretive about these matches or the combined female and male agency that powered them.

If anything, there is bravery in a Hindu woman asserting that she will marry someone from another religion, especially a Muslim, considering the deep national history of Islamophobia and Othering. Everything about the Hindu structure prepares girls for marriage within their own community. The 'cultural ideal' for Hindus, particularly those in the upper and middle castes, is a 'three-generational or four-generational, residential and commensal joint family' unit.[306] Breaking with this tradition is extremely significant. Kathleen Gough shows that this structure depends upon 'solidarity among the males and upon the subordination of the women to their husbands'.[307] At marriage, similar to the implication of the western tradition of 'giving the bride away', a daughter is transferred from one family to another through a ceremony called *shim*.[308] Sons are the carriers of the family name, land and lineage while daughters are entitled to gifts and a dowry.[309] Having entered in to her husband's family, a woman gives up her rights as daughter of her original family. Leela Dube shows the significance of the institution of Hindu marriage through the words: 'If a girl remains unmarried she continues to bear the name of her natal family or her father, but she cannot represent it as a full-fledged member'.[310] This suggests that a woman is not considered whole without attachment to a husband. Perhaps this sheds light on why the choice of a young woman to marry outside of her community is at best questioned and at worst turned into a horrifying scandal. Whilst there are specific dictates around the role of a Hindu wife, it is important not to oversimplify the matter. For example, Fuller shows that 'despite the inferiority and subordinations that attach in varying degrees to wifehood', wives have 'real power and influence,… personify auspiciousness and, like goddesses, they

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[304] Jyoti Punwani, "Myths And Prejudices About 'Love Jihad'", p. 14.
[305] Jyoti Punwani, "Myths And Prejudices About 'Love Jihad'", p. 14.
[306] Jyoti Punwani, "Myths And Prejudices About 'Love Jihad'", p. 10.
[307] Kathleen Gough cited by Jyoti Punwani, "Myths And Prejudices About 'Love Jihad'", p. 14.
[308] Jyoti Punwani, "Myths And Prejudices About 'Love Jihad'", p. 18.
[309] Ibid.
[310] Leela Dube, *Women And Kinship* Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1997, p. 35.

possess a ritual power upon which men (and gods) partly but significantly depend'.[311] This
provides a glimpse at the complex nature of womanhood and wifehood in India.

7.4.   *From Holy-wood to Bollywood: an exploration of the symbolic presentation of women*

Women are taught their place in Coptic and Hindu society through cultural norms, literature
and religious practice. A modern addition to this list is cinema. Through the Coptic hagiopics
known colloquially as 'Holy-wood' films, to the better known Indian institution of
Bollywood, society and religion present everyday women with an example of who to be, and
who not to be.[312] Since the late 1980s, hagiopics have been a 'favorite tool' used by the
leaders of the Church to 'disseminate conceptualizations of clerical power, religious mores,
monastic ideals, and gendered roles'.[313] Burke and McDowell suggest that a strength of
these films is their ability to 'present traditional gender roles in new packaging', reinforcing
gender hierarchies while entertaining.[314] The nature of the medium means that messages of
gender roles are spread not only throughout Egypt, but also through North America,
Australia and parts of Europe and watched in a range of spaces such as church gatherings,
family homes and on the internet.[315] Due to its timing, this movement can arguably be seen
as a 'reaction to feminist movements', including a growing demand for gender equality
within the institutions of marriage and the Church.[316] Armanios and Amstutz suggest
hagiopics also hint at the Church's 'anxieties around broader modern developments'
shaping the lives of women such as an increase in educational opportunities, integration
into work forces and 'expanding autonomy in choosing marriage partners'.[317]

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[311] C. J Fuller, *The Camphor Flame*, pp. 22, 24.
[312] Febe Armanios and Andrew Amstutz, "Emerging Christian Media In Egypt: Clerical Authority And The Visualizations Of Women In Coptic Video Films", p. 519.
[313] Febe Armanios and Andrew Amstutz, "Emerging Christian Media In Egypt: Clerical Authority And The Visualizations Of Women In Coptic Video Films", p. 513.
[314] Kelsy Burke and Amy McDowell cited by: Febe Armanios and Andrew Amstutz, "Emerging Christian Media In Egypt: Clerical Authority And The Visualizations Of Women In Coptic Video Films", p. 513.
[315] Febe Armanios and Andrew Amstutz, "Emerging Christian Media In Egypt: Clerical Authority And The Visualizations Of Women In Coptic Video Films", p. 514.
[316] Febe Armanios and Andrew Amstutz, "Emerging Christian Media In Egypt: Clerical Authority And The Visualizations Of Women In Coptic Video Films", p. 516.
[317] Ibid.

Women are not only encouraged to be 'subservient' and 'humbled' through the hagiopics, but sometimes taught to endure 'emotional and physical violence for the sake of marital sanctity and family cohesiveness'.[318] This can be seen in the film *Umm al-Ghalaba,* an exploration of the life of Umm 'Abd al-Sayyid, well known for her spiritual leadership and charity. In the first scene, she tries to assist her husband in getting dressed, but he pushes her aside. In response, she prays to God to forgive her. A few scenes later, she is beaten by her husband before he abandons her. She 'withstands the abuse with another prayer, asking God to forgive her husband'.[319] In the film, Umm 'Abd al-Sayyid is portrayed as morally contrasting Fahima, her husband's mistress. While Umm is portrayed as the perfect, humble Coptic wife, Fahima is 'beautiful, greedy and capricious'.[320] She is presented as a femme fatale, and whilst in other contexts we may view her characteristics as empowering or attractive, the message of the film is that she is unholy and not to be imitated. The film ends with Umm 'Abd al-Sayyid forgiving her husband for his unfaithfulness and abuse, laying all the blame on Fahima for 'seducing and corrupting her husband'.[321] The message to women is clear: be an Umm 'Abd al-Sayyid and not a Fahima. Female suffering is seen as a wife's duty and maybe even a 'way to achieve sanctity'.[322] Following the Church is seen as elevating, while pagan women such as Fahima with their 'hypersexual, overconfident, and often overly Westernized' mannerisms, are turned into cautionary tales.[323]

While Coptic hagiopics are important tools for spreading the message of a religion, in postcolonial India, cinema is used as a resource for 'propagating the idea of nationalism'.[324] Whilst a great deal of focus in Bollywood films is given over to the portrayal of Hindu heroes and the Othering of Muslim characters, a secondary concern is with the continuation of gendered stereotypes. Nadira Khatun shows that 'one of the important features of the new-found Hindu nationalism is the construction of the image of the ideal woman as virtuous,

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[318] Febe Armanios and Andrew Amstutz, "Emerging Christian Media In Egypt: Clerical Authority And The Visualizations Of Women In Coptic Video Films", pp. 521-22; 525.

[319] Febe Armanios and Andrew Amstutz, "Emerging Christian Media In Egypt: Clerical Authority And The Visualizations Of Women In Coptic Video Films", p. 525.

[320] Ibid.

[321] Ibid.

[322] Febe Armanios and Andrew Amstutz, "Emerging Christian Media In Egypt: Clerical Authority And The Visualizations Of Women In Coptic Video Films", p. 523.

[323] Ibid.

[324] Nadira Khatun, "'Love-Jihad' And Bollywood: Constructing Muslims As 'Other'", Abstract.

chaste, without sexual desire, self-sacrificing, and Hindu'.[325] These descriptions (if 'Hindu' is swapped for 'Coptic') can be directly applied to Umm 'Abd al-Sayyid. Whilst through her subservience and faith, Umm 'Abd al-Sayyid is shown as an archetypal Coptic women worthy of respect and imitation, a Hindu woman's worth in society is dictated by the honour she gives the men associated to her. Indeed, Khatun shows that women, as subjects, 'are excluded from the concept of nationalism except as being carriers of abstract notions of honour'.[326]

In the Bollywood film *Padmaavat*, the purity of heroine Padmavati is conveyed through her comparison to mythological characters like Savitri.[327] She is presented as an example to Hindu women and yet her connection to mythology, singularly applied to her in the film, makes such an imitation unattainable. Another female character, Jodhaa, maintains her purity and virginity throughout marriage.[328] While this message is hard to reconcile with the Hindu nationalistic imperative to procreate, it provides an example of purity and strength. Indeed, the film is careful to show that even though the marriage is unconsummated, Jodhaa is entirely submissive to her husband.

An example that shows the connection between cinema and the phenomenon of alleged female abduction and conversion can be seen in media preoccupation with the marriage of Hindu Bollywood star Kareena Kapoor and her Muslim co-star, Saif Ali Khan. At the time of their wedding in 2012, Khan received death threats accusing him of promoting love jihad.[329] *The Hindu Mahasabha* has challenged 'the Khans' (Shahrukh Khan, Amir Khan, and Saif Ali Khan) to convert to Hinduism 'if they really love their wives'.[330] Discourse surrounding the case led to the VHP women's magazine *Himalaya Dhwani* printing a 'morphed photo' of Kapoor on its cover.[331] The image shows half of Kapoor's face as Hindu: with a prominent bindi, uncovered hair and a visible, smiling mouth.[332] The other side shows a crudely edited on niqab, with only the eye showing. Just to hammer the point home,

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[325] Nadira Khatun, "'Love-Jihad' And Bollywood: Constructing Muslims As 'Other'", p. 21.
[326] Nadira Khatun, "'Love-Jihad' And Bollywood: Constructing Muslims As 'Other'", p. 6.
[327] Ibid.
[328] Ibid.
[329] Nadira Khatun, "'Love-Jihad' And Bollywood: Constructing Muslims As 'Other'", p. 17.
[330] Ibid.
[331] Ibid.; India Today, "Kareena Kapoor Free To Sue Us For Using Morphed Photo: VHP On Love Jihad Cover", 2015, https://www.indiatoday.in/india/north/story/kareena-kapoor-free-to-sue-us-for-using-morphed-photo-vhp-on-love-jihad-cover-234692-2015-01-08.
[332] Appendix 4.

flames roar behind her. The caption reads: *'Dharmaantaran se Rashtraantaran'* (Conversion of nationality by religious conversion), showing the Hindutva opinion that to be Hindu is to be Indian, and the Muslim community is excluded from that.[333] If she chose such a fate, Kapoor has relinquished her Indianness; if she was forced into it, it has been stolen from her.

Yuval-Davis shows that women have historically been required to carry the 'burden of representations' as they are 'constructed as the symbolic bearers of the collectivity's identity and honour, both personally and collectively'.[334] This symbolic significance of women in India seems to diminish individual female agency in favour of their position as communal role models. For example, the figure of 'Mother India' is a strong female symbol, and yet can be seen to hinder real women. Paul Tillich says that symbols 'participate in the reality of that to which they point'.[335] He uses the example of a flag: 'the flag participates in the power and dignity of the nation for which it stands... An attack on the flag is felt as an attack on the majesty of the group in which it is acknowledged'.[336] The same is true of the symbol of 'Mother India', and by extension, Hindu women. This connects to analysis from Khatun, who suggests that when the female body came to symbolise the nation, 'it was supposed to be protected from outsiders or the 'Other' by the male members of the community'.[337] The nation, and thus the female bodies associated with it, became 'out of bounds for the 'Other''.[338] This idea has leached into the communal notion of womanhood and tampered with individual female agency. Tillich shows that 'if the nation is someone's ultimate concern' (which within Hindutva circles, it arguably is) 'the name of the nation becomes a sacred name and the nation receives divine qualities which far surpass the reality of the being and functioning of the nation'.[339] This idea can be extended to the image of 'Mother India' and, to a lesser extent, symbols of subservience in Coptic culture. Yuval-Davis

[333] India Today, "Kareena Kapoor Free To Sue Us For Using Morphed Photo: VHP On Love Jihad Cover", 2015, https://www.indiatoday.in/india/north/story/kareena-kapoor-free-to-sue-us-for-using-morphed-photo-vhp-on-love-jihad-cover-234692-2015-01-08.

[334] Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, 1st ed. London: SAGE Publication Ltd., 1997, p. 45.

[335] Paul Tillich, *Dynamics Of Faith*, 1st ed. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958, p. 42.

[336] Ibid.

[337] Nadira Khatun, "'Love-Jihad' And Bollywood: Constructing Muslims As 'Other'", *Journal Of Religion And Film* 22, no. 3 (2018), https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol22/iss3/8, p. 10.

[338] M. A. Mubarki, cited by Nadira Khatun, "'Love-Jihad' And Bollywood: Constructing Muslims As 'Other'", *Journal Of Religion And Film* 22, no. 3 (2018), https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol22/iss3/8, p. 10.

[339] Paul Tillich, *Dynamics Of Faith*, 1st ed. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958, p. 44.

presents a similar contradiction in relation to women: that they 'often symbolize the collectivity unity, honour and the *raison d'être* of specific national and ethnic projects, like going to war' and yet they are 'often excluded from the collective 'we' of the body politic, and retain an object rather than a subject position'.[340] She goes on to state that the 'construction of womanhood has a property of 'otherness'', which can be seen as mirroring the construction of Muslim men within the narrative of alleged abductions and conversions.[341] The issue is that in one space, 'woman' cannot be divine and also an agency-less fool who gets duped into marriage. She cannot be the reason for conflict, and also ignored within the discourse surrounding that conflict. The disconnect is too large, and the consequence is that individual women are belittled and infantilised.

7.5. *Conclusion*

This chapter brings to a close the analysis of love jihad and the Egyptian case of alleged abductions and conversion, delving into how women are symbolically imagined and how such imaginings have shaped and limited the role of real women in India and Egypt. Women's roles have been analysed through the framework of their positioning within religious hierarchies, the domestic sphere of love, marriage and family, and their presentation in cinema. The duality of women is neither a new nor nationally specific idea. The contrasting female tropes of saint or sinner, virgin or whore, mother or barren can be found in myth, literature and cinema in a variety of cultural settings. What is interesting to this case is that the female ideal is not one thing. It is the female ideal to be all of the following: chaste, fruitful, mother, submissive, strong enough to nurture and manage the family's spirituality, holier than her husband (but without formal religious authority), symbolic of the nation and the conveyor of honour and shame. It is hardly surprising with a list this long and contradicting that women often slip up and do what patriarchal society views as unforgivable. Leaving their community, whether by choice or by force, is not within the remit of being a good woman. This is how women are viewed as both victim and perpetrator of violence within the narrative of love jihad and forced conversion. Khatun says that 'sometimes the image and 'plight' of women are used to awaken the collective

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[340] Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, 1st ed. London: SAGE Publication Ltd., 1997, p. 47.
[341] Ibid.

conscience of the nation, while at other times it is made a tool for gaining political power'.[342] She is right to put 'plight' in quotation marks. As we have seen throughout this analysis, the 'plight' of women in Egypt and India is constantly talked about and acted upon, but rarely through the lens or voice of the supposed focus: women. Although framed as central to this discourse, it is hard to see that women have anything to do with the current discourse of love jihad and alleged forced conversion which focus on the male dominated space of conflict.

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[342] Nadira Khatun, "'Love-Jihad' And Bollywood: Constructing Muslims As 'Other'", pp. 1,2.

8. *Conclusion*

This thesis has offered an analysis of the symbolic battleground of the female body in flashpoints of interreligious conflict in Egypt and India, with a specific focus on alleged female abductions and forced conversions. It began with an exploration of primary and secondary sources on the topics, identifying the strengths, weaknesses and gaps in current research. Whilst texts reported on the Indian and Egyptian cases separately, none discussed them comparatively. Although there are notable differences between the cases such as the minority/majority statuses of the religions involved, similarities in societal female status, media presentations and underlying conflict were sufficient to make an analytical comparison compelling.

In order to fully understand the framework of violence surrounding the rumours of female abductions and forced conversions, the analytical comparison of the cases in India and Egypt began with an overview of the nations' history of interreligious conflict. This included a discussion of power imbalances which created a setting of fear of obscurity in Egyptian Copts and fear of a slipping majority in Indian Hindus. These fears are not only played out in communal consciousness, but in the public spheres of policing and politics. The most current and pressing example of the significance of interreligious strife in the countries studied is characterised by the success of the BJP party and the Islamophobia within their campaigns and leadership. This analysis lay the political and historical groundwork for understanding the rhetoric used in the rumours studied. The research undertaken was purely qualitative, broadly following qualitative document analysis, with the specific use of critical discourse analysis for exploring and analysing the language and focus of the rumours. Whilst the women who had been allegedly abducted or converted seemed an obvious focus of media publications on the rumours, I found their literary representation to be tokenistic and transparent: background for the main event of interreligious violence. In the accounts where women were offered more than a passing mention, they were contradictorily characterised as naïve victims or perpetrators of violence. This connected with the final analytical chapter, examining the female metamorphosis with the symbolic, which is at once an ascension and relegation. A framework in which women are required to be at once virginal and fruitful, strong and yet submissive, sets up an impossible expectation for women. Just as these societal

expectations set up a binary framework for women which they must somehow enact simultaneously, the rhetoric of the rumours surrounding alleged abductions and conversions allow for only two female positions. Either a missing woman was taken against her will and is considered a vulnerable victim; or she was foolish enough to be led astray by a Muslim man and should be returned home. These binaries and the lack of alternative interpretations serve to undermine the choices of women in favour of a fabricated or overemphasised narrative of Islamic schemes which, due to entrenched interreligious conflict, have repeatedly resulted in violence.

Presenting the need to protect women as a legitimisation of conflict and violence is not a new phenomenon. Khatun discusses this at length, showing that within colonial India, it was the 'subaltern' position of women that enabled British colonisers to 'justify imperialism as a 'civilizing mission' in which they were rescuing Indian women from the reprehensible practices of a traditional Hindu patriarchal society'.[343] A more contemporary example can be found in President Bush's rhetoric surrounding his War on Terror. The need to protect vulnerable women was frequently cited as a justification of violent actions, just as ongoing debates on veiling often claim to be liberating oppressed women, while ignoring testimonies of the Islamic women who wish to veil.[344] The idea that women are in need of rescue and protection connects to the wider symbolism surrounding female purity and submission in society found in literature, myth, religion and cinema. Indeed, even the ferocious Hindu goddesses are sated and cooled through marriage, while Coptic hagiopics continually present Egyptian Coptic women with the blueprints of virtuous wifehood. These symbolic ideals may appear to be simply rhetorical or literary presentations, examples of which span across religions and nations. However, as examples in this thesis have demonstrated, girls and women have been severely punished for falling short of these cultural ideals. Hindu girls who have become romantically involved with boys from other castes or faiths have been murdered, Coptic women sequestered in churches and never heard from again.[345]

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[343] Nadira Khatun, "'Love-Jihad' And Bollywood: Constructing Muslims As 'Other'", *Journal Of Religion And Film* 22, no. 3 (2018), https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol22/iss3/8, p. 2.

[344] Joan Scott, "Secularism And Gender Equality", in *Religion, The Secular, And The Politics Of Sexual Difference* New York: Columbia University Press, 2013, 25-45.

[345] Leela Dube, *Women And Kinship* Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1997, p. 55; Saba Mahmood, "Sectarian Conflict And Family Law In Contemporary Egypt", *American Ethnologist*, no. 39 (2012): 54-62, doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2011.01347.x, p. 55.

It would be reductionist to make a sweeping comment on what agency means to all women, especially when taking into account phenomena such as the Egyptian Mosque Movement as researched by Mahmood. This movement saw devout Muslim women choosing to 'pursue practices and ideals embedded within a tradition that has historically accorded women a subordinate status', specifically seeking to 'cultivate virtues that are associated with feminine passivity and submissiveness'.[346] Indeed, Mahmood warns against the liberal feminist simplification that agency is a 'synonym for resistance' while Yuval-Davis shows that 'focusing on certain social and cultural practices in isolation ignores some of the trade-offs that the continued existence of certain practices might have had on the lives of women'.[347] With this in mind, I cannot come to a conclusion about women's desire for agency in other societies. I can, however, draw to a close my analysis on the use of the female body as a symbolic battleground in interreligious relations in India and Egypt. In some of the examples discussed above, women have been used as political pawns in furthering Islamophobic causes or playing out scenes of violence. Muslim men have repeatedly been constructed as the enemy and women as the object of protection, and yet both groups seem to have been subjected to profound Othering. Whether the rumours studied are true or not, the women at their core do not appear to have been aided by the violent displays seemingly made to protect them. It is time for political and religious leaders to relinquish the battleground of the female body.

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[346] Saba Mahmood, "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, And The Docile Agent: Some Reflections On The Egyptian Islamic Revival", *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 2 (2001): 202-236, doi:10.1525/can.2001.16.2.202, p. 205.
[347] Saba Mahmood, "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, And The Docile Agent: Some Reflections On The Egyptian Islamic Revival", p. 203; Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, p. 118.

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10. Appendices

Appendix 1: Screenshot of Google Image search for 'love jihad'[348]
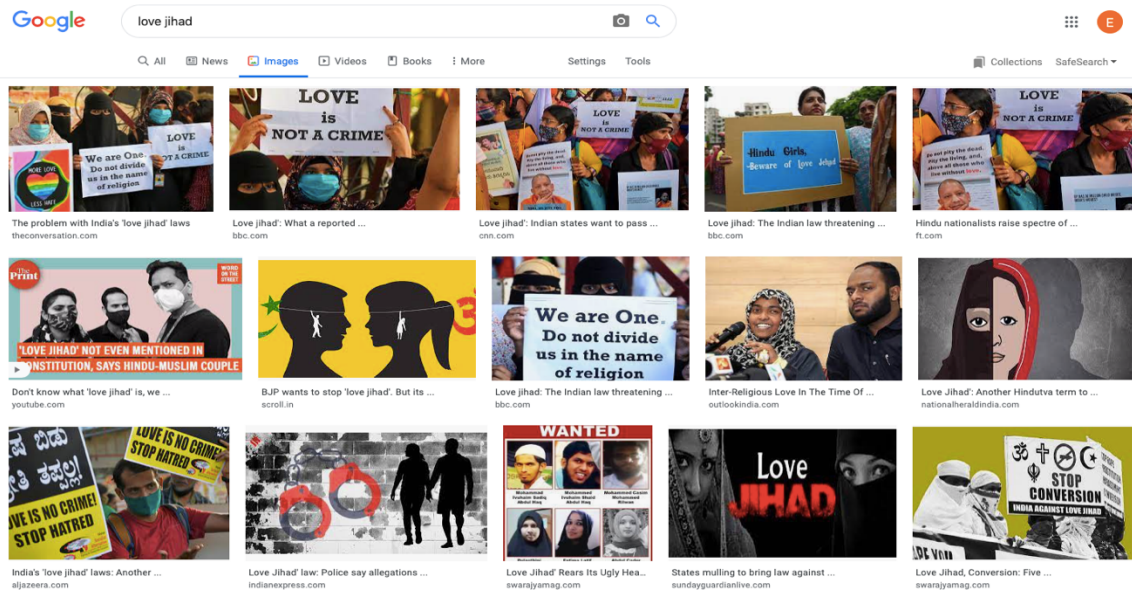
Appendix 2: Screenshot of *The Guardian* article on 'love jihad' law[349]

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[348] Google Image. *'Love Jihad' Image Search*. Image, 2021.
https://www.google.com/search?q=love+jihad&tbm=isch&ved=2ahUKEwiUq6H9947wAhUTMRoKHUwPCyEQ2
-
cCegQIABAA&oq=love+jihad&gs_lcp=CgNpbWcQAzIECAAQQzIECAAQQzIECAAQQzICCAAyAggAMgIIADICCAAyB
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gAQGgAQtnd3Mtd2l6LWltZ8ABAQ&sclient=img&ei=tuR_YJT4OJPiaMyerIgC&bih=720&biw=728&safe=strict.
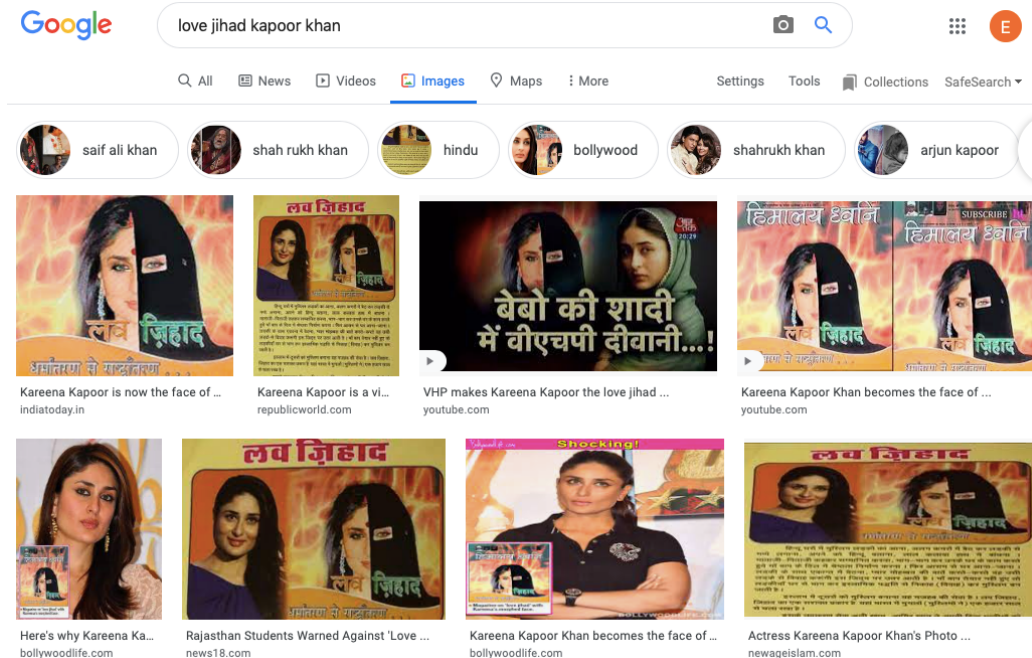[349] The Guardian. *Muslims Targeted Under Indian State's 'Love Jihad' Law*. Image, 2020.
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/14/muslims-targeted-under-indian-states-love-jihad-law.

Appendix 3: Screenshot from Anti-Love Jihad Front (Facebook group)[350]

Appendix 4: Screenshot of Google Image search for 'love jihad Kapoor Khan'[351]

[350] Anti Love Jihad Front. *Anti Love Jihad Image*. Image, 2014. https://www.facebook.com/Anti-Love-Jihad-Front-War-Against-Love-Jihad-267858483372462/photos/?ref=page_internal.

[351] Google Image. *'Love Jihad Kapoor Khan' Image Search*. Image, 2021. https://www.google.com/search?q=Love+jihad+Kapoor+Khan&safe=strict&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjE6ez7947wAhUpQkEAHTbJCvYQ_AUoA3oECAEQBQ&biw=728&bih=720.