

Special Section: Essays on Nationalism, Conflict and Media

Mediated Solidarities: Hyper-nationalist Indian Media and Transnational Alignment between Hindu Nationalism and the UK Far-Right

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Abstract: Contra-flows of communication mediated by diaspora groups are often viewed as anti-hegemonic, and diaspora media spheres have long been considered integral to Western democracies. However, the asymmetrical, multidirectional, and deregulated nature of today's internet-based communication requires a more critical approach to diaspora mediascapes. Social media platforms have transformed diasporic media networks into transnational political actors capable of influencing policies and public opinion in host countries. These flows can transmit polarising ideologies from homelands and mobilise diaspora communities through affect. Situated within scholarship on transnational communication networks, affective polarisation, and ethnic nationalism, the paper examines the role of Indian media in fostering transnational alignment between White and Hindu nationalist projects based on anti-Muslim sentiment. It argues that this partnership is intended to mobilise the Hindu diaspora and shape their perceptions of and connections with far-right movements across the Atlantic. Through a reflective thematic analysis of British far-right activist Tommy Robinson's interviews with Indian media outlets, the paper investigates the performance of victimhood and outrage intended to influence and incite the Hindu community and to cultivate support for Robinson's far-right project within the Indian diaspora in the UK. It also explores how India's hyper-nationalist media, through the enactment of reciprocal legitimacy with the far-right, contribute to and have the potential to affect intercommunal relations within the UK.

Keywords: Hindutva, White supremacy, Indian media, diaspora, ethnic nationalism, ethnopolitical entrepreneurs, Leicester riots, transnational flows, affective publics

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Introduction

The rise of exclusionary right-wing ethnonationalism is becoming a transnational threat. A review of the UK's extremism policy recently listed 'Hindu Nationalist Extremism' or 'Hindutva Extremism' for the first time as one of the risks to the UK's national security (Gilligan & Stott, 2025, p. 18). An intelligence report by the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) has expressed concerns over British far-right anti-Islam activist Tommy Robinson's¹ alliance with extremist Hindu groups to promote anti-Muslim hate in Britain, and the Indian media's cajoling attitude towards the far-right campaigner (Taher, 2025). The NPCC's assessment of the Indian media's welcoming attitude towards Robinson appears to be based on how the far-right activist is featured by hyper nationalist Indian media during polarising events in the UK.

This essay explores how right-wing Indian media facilitates the emotional alignment between Hindutva and far-right nationalism by articulating collective victimhood and performing mutual outrage that spreads virally and constitutes 'affective publics' (Papacharissi, 2014). The purpose of forming audiences, riled up by sentiment rather than rationality, is to cultivate support for Robinson's far-right project within the Hindu diaspora. By doing so, the Indian hyper nationalist media seeks to discursively construct a new social hierarchy in which Hindus claim proximity to Whiteness and regard themselves as superior to other migrant communities, especially in the West. Rooted in aversion to the common enemy, Islam and Muslims, this discourse legitimises right-wing ideologies within the Hindu Diaspora, and fosters support for Hindutva's political aspirations in India and beyond. The Hindu diaspora is seen as a strategic resource in the Global Hindutva project. The essay argues that the platformisation of Robinson by right-wing Indian media also aims to reinforce the Hindutva and far-right 'transnational epistemic community' (Ramos & Torres, 2020) that the UK's security agencies believe could threaten social cohesion. Such community formation is enabled by transnational information flows, which are often analysed as a means of amplifying subaltern voices and democratising global communication systems (Ademolu, 2024; Appadurai, 1996; Bernal, 2014; Karim, 2003; Thussu, 2010). The essay discusses how media contraflows can also empower like-minded groups to circulate hate globally.

¹ Stephen Christopher Yaxley-Lennon is commonly known as Tommy Robinson. Robinson purportedly uses a pseudonym to hide his criminal past.

Image 1: Screenshot taken by the author from OpIndia Editor Nupur J. Sharma's X timeline teasing her interview with the far-right agitator Tommy Robinson soon after the 2022 Leicester riots.



Image 2: Screenshot of Tommy Robinson's interview with Akanksha Swarup on the Indian TV channel CNN-News18, a few days after the anti-immigration riots in the UK in 2024.



Ethnonationalism in Europe and India

In the last few decades, two parallel and significant forms of ethnic nationalism have emerged from the fringes of the political arena to the mainstream: White supremacist movements in the United States and right-wing Hindu nationalism, or Hindutva, in India. However, the collaboration between these movements runs deeper. The leading ideologues of Hindutva, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar and Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, drew inspiration from and applied Italian fascist ideologies, such as a homogeneous identity, organisational structures, and the creation of an internal enemy as a reference point for developing Hindu nationalism (Marzia, 2020). Similarly, while shaping White supremacist discursive structures within their

movements, several far-right ideologues have been inspired by the social hierarchies of the caste system within Hinduism (Dutta et al., 2024). Hindu nationalists and White supremacists both claim to be victims of what they call the appeasement of minority groups by the political ‘elites’, who were supposed to maintain their supremacy (Ashutosh, 2022). Therefore, these nationalisms are not merely similar or imitative; they share an undeniable complementarity and have contributed to the fortification of one another (Thobani, 2019).

The far-right movements in the West and the Hindu paramilitary organisation Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which is regarded as an ideological parent of all Hindutva organisations, had maintained their own news publications for a very long time (Desk, 2016; Mudde, 2019, pp. 32-33), but the reach of these newspapers and magazines remained limited, and so did the influence of these movements. However, now, White and Hindu nationalists are effectively exploiting the internet to establish and sustain transnational communication structures. These online networks have allowed radical right groups to mobilise their supporters transnationally, bypassing laws and evading scrutiny by law enforcement agencies (Manuela Caiani, 2016, pp. 1-30; Therwath, 2012). The online ideological sphere is connected to the wider information ecology and mainstream media, especially television and talk radio (Benkler et al., 2018; Heft et al., 2021).

The entanglements between Hindu extremist and White supremacist groups are established and sustained through a media-driven transnational ‘hate circuit’ rooted in mutual sentiments, in which the anti-Muslim actions in India are depicted by White supremacists as a form of resistance (Rao, 2025). Thobani (2021) argues that by participating in the extreme politics of the American alt-right, Hindu hyper-nationalists in the diaspora have not only been instrumental in the preservation of White supremacy in the US but have also appropriated Whiteness to which they attempt to claim proximity. The most notable example of the American Hindu diaspora claiming closeness to White nationalism was their support for Trump in his 2016 Presidential election campaign. According to Thobani (2019), the ‘Hindu for Trump’ campaign on social media had significant overlaps with and frequent references to pro-Trump publications and organisations.

The shared worldview of White supremacists and Hindutva protagonists was evident in Anders Behring Breivik’s manifesto posted online before the terror attacks that killed 77 people in Oslo in 2011. Although Breivik acted alone, his more than 1,500-page manifesto presented a positive view of Hindutva. It contained several direct and indirect references to the anti-Muslim ‘hate circuit’ of Hindu extremist thinkers and media ecology. Nanda (2011) highlighted that nearly all references to India in Breivik’s manifesto were drawn from writers affiliated with the Delhi-based publishing house, ‘Voice of India’. Since its establishment in 1981, the publishing house has been ridiculing Islam as a demonic and violent political ideology, unworthy of respect and constitutional protections (Nanda, 2011, p. 61). More recently, Dutta (2025) has examined the link between Hindutva disinformation networks and

offline violence during the 2022 Leicester unrest. British far-right, anti-Islam activist Robinson and Nupur J. Sharma, the Editor of OpIndia, which is a right-wing alternative news website, are featured as central nodes in circulating and amplifying hate in this network.

Interviews with Robinson

The three interviews analysed in this essay were conducted by English-language Indian media OpIndia and CNN-News18 between 2022 and 2025. Although English-language Indian media routinely cover updates on Robinson's court cases and 'activism', the selected interviews represent his primary interactions with Indian media during three visibly polarising events in post-Brexit Britain: the 2022 communal clashes between groups of Hindus and Muslims in Leicester by OpIndia (Sharma, 2022), the 2024 anti-immigration far-right riots by CNN-News18 (Swarup, 2024), and the September 2025 'Unite the Kingdom' rally organised by Robinson by CNN-News18 (Swarup, 2025).

The interviews are publicly available online; they were transcribed verbatim and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019). The method goes beyond merely identifying themes, enabling a deeper analysis and interpretation of patterned meanings within the data. The RTA also places significant emphasis on the researcher's subjectivity and reflexivity. So, throughout the analysis, the researcher's positionality was not treated as a burden but as a resource for identifying discursive patterns and underlying themes.

During the familiarisation phase, the interviews were listened to multiple times and the transcripts read closely. Analytical notes were taken and initial observations recorded, including the words, phrases and discursive patterns used in boundary construction. Drawing on the primary concept of ingroup and outgroup (Us vs Them), the coding process was carried out using a flexible inductive-deductive approach, considering both semantic and latent meanings. Initial coding was iteratively refined into 16 sub-themes, which were then organised under four categories, namely 'Assistance', 'Performance of Outrage', 'Solidarity' and 'Threat', underpinning the conceptual framework of the data. The analysis was guided by what the Indian journalists asked Robinson and how he responded, rather than by his controversial and well-known views on Islam and Muslims. Two major themes emerged from the analysis.

Performative solidarity through victimhood

Performance is a key part of mobilisation and boundary formation. It is a subjective, context-dependent, crafted process that uses elements like emotions and body language to influence the audience (Goffman, 1990 [1956]). According to Jaffrelot (2008), Hindu nationalists strategically use organised, targeted, and politically manufactured performances of outrage for mobilisation. Long-distance nationalism in the internet age has made diaspora communities more susceptible to becoming

actors in such projects, as was the case during the demolition of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, India. In the 1980s and 1990s, the highly performative campaign to build a temple at the 16th-century Babri Mosque site was led by right-wing leaders in India but was galvanised and partially funded by the Hindu diaspora in Britain and America (Anderson, 1998). Hindutva ideologues claim that the mosque was built at the birthplace of Hindu Lord Ram.

A persistent pattern that emerged during the analysis of the interviews was the display of solidarity and the construction of a boundary in which Hindu nationalists see themselves as allies with White supremacists, and Hindutva philosophy as the most closely aligned to far-right ideologies. The rapport between the interviewers (Indian journalists) and the interviewee (Robinson) was friendly, almost to the point of appeasement. The interviewers showed a lack of journalistic rigour when they failed to challenge, ask critical questions, or seek evidence for Robinson's claims, some of which were misleading, untrue or based on hate speech. For instance, in the OpIndia interview, Robinson stated that Muslims were aggressive and hostile, and accused them of "pumping heroin into our communities" (Sharma, 2022, 39:19). In the same interview, in response to Robinson's prompt that he had heard Hindus were leaving Leicester, OpIndia's editor Sharma claimed she had been informed that 200 Hindu families were possibly displaced from Leicester due to the unrest (Sharma, 2022, 00:40:22). Leicester police denied any such reports.

Image 3: A screenshot taken by the author from OpIndia Editor Nupur J Sharma's X timeline. In a highly viral post, she insinuated that almost 200 Hindu families were repatriated from Leicester after unrest, fearing 'violence by Islamists'. Police denied the reports.



Similarly, in the CNN-News18 interview with Akanksha Swarup, Robinson claimed that "the police literally run away when Muslims come out to protest. They literally hide" (Swarup, 2024, 12:16). He also said that Islam is a violent fascist ideology that

promotes war, rape and slavery of non-Muslims and the “barbarian” who founded Islam was “a rapist and a murderer” (Swarup, 2024, 03:09).

Through these softball interviews, the Indian journalists presented the far-right activist as “a national figure” who had “shaken up the establishment even more so after his ‘Unite the Kingdom’ rally” (Swarup, 2025, 00:56), someone who was keen to help the Hindu community (Sharma, 2022, 05:27), and who had been wronged by the British judiciary and police, and vilified by “the Guardian and the likes of the BBC” (Swarup, 2024, 10:10). Forty times, the questions posed by these journalists contained implicit and explicit assumptions, bias, a lack of criticality, sweeping statements, generalisations, allegations, and, in OpIndia’s case, intent to incite. For example, CNN-News18 anchor Akanksha Swarup asked Robinson, “How do you respond to all of those who say that it is the far-right movement which is dividing Britain right now?” (Swarup, 2025, 03:29). “Tommy, your critics have accused you of being Islamophobic and racist. Is that true?” (Swarup, 2024, 02:20). “What do you have to say about the newly elected UK Labour Party” (Swarup, 2024, 13:12) “Are you and the English Defence League stirring violence and spreading misinformation online?” (Swarup, 2024, 09:30). While these questions sound relevant and legitimate for opening the interview, they were in effect uncritical opportunities for the far-right activist, allowing him to rationalise, without challenge, his controversial actions and positions, some of which had landed him in prison. Not just the content, but also the timing of these interviews is quite telling and needs to be contextualised as an attempt to build Robinson’s rapport as an underdog and antihero among a specific audience, the Hindu diaspora in the UK, at the junctures when he had been criticised for bringing the country to the brink of chaos.

The OpIndia interview was conducted at the peak of tensions in Leicester in 2022, when the UK authorities feared that the communal riots between the groups of Hindus and Muslims could extend to other parts of the UK. The OpIndia editor, throughout her interview, used inflammatory language and invoked the tropes of grooming gangs and terrorism to characterise the entire Muslim community. At the start of the interview, while discussing Islamophobia, Sharma said, “My viewers are well aware of what I think about the term Islamophobia. Phobia is an irrational fear, but fearing the knife and the sword of the Islamist is not irrational” (Sharma, 2022, 06:22). She further said after India, “we have also seen this menace growing in the UK substantially, where these no-go zones are established, where these Sharia-friendly zones have been established” (Sharma, 2022, 56:54). At another point, in the same interview, she said, “I think it’s extremely important, through you (Robinson) British public to understand how the Hindu community is being branded as Hindu nationalist, as far right, as Nazis, as fascists. Basically, all the words that they have used for you (Robinson) as well are being used for the Hindu community” (Sharma, 2022, 32:32). By drawing these parallels, OpIndia’s editor attempted to construct a narrative of shared victimhood, again, positioning Hindus alongside White nationalists, who were ‘fearful’ for their safety from Muslim men portrayed both the interviewer and the interviewee as terrorists, perverts and criminals.

During the interview, Sharma repeatedly equated her experiences with those of her guest, Robinson. She asked:

For the past decade or so, we have been very vocal; we've been writing about Islamism and all of that. How did you deal? How did your family deal with the kind of vilification that comes with the path that you've chosen? Because I struggle. (Sharma, 2022, 01:19:38)

She mentioned that she was attacked by leftists from India and abroad when she announced she was interviewing the far-right activist, and that it was good to know that someone, meaning Robinson, receives far more abuse online than she does (Sharma, 2022, 05:53). The analysis of the interviews reveals that Nupur J Sharma, the editor of OpIndia, and Akanksha Swarup, the news anchor of CNN-News18 by deploying such ingroup and outgroup strategies, in which they presented left leaning politicians, activists and the media as 'the allies' of the Muslim community, were trying to build bridges between the far-right activist and the Indian Hindu diaspora in the UK. They used rhetorical questions and steered the conversations towards topics that allowed Robinson to destigmatise himself in the eyes of ordinary diaspora Hindus, who are not extremists and see him as a racist and a bigot due to his chequered past as reported by mainstream British media.

Performative solidarity through the construction of a shared 'Other'

The CNN-News18 anchor, Akanksha Swarup, during her October 2025 interview, prompted the far-right leader to discuss his views on the alleged racially motivated rape of a Sikh woman by white men in England three days before his 'Unite the Kingdom' rally. Robinson went to great lengths to clarify that he did not endorse such acts and would use his influence to prevent Hindus and Sikhs from being unfairly targeted (Swarup, 2025, 17:57). During the interview conducted soon after the 2024 race riots in Britain, while Robinson was carrying on with his rhetoric, Swarup asked what looked like a malicious question, "In fact, as we speak", she said, "Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer has announced that he will be protecting the mosques and the Muslim community." (Swarup, 2024, 12:57). The enraged far-right activist responded by calling PM Starmer a "coward" and his statement "insulting". Robinson said "we want our children to be safe, we want our women to safely walk down the streets" and then clarified that when he says 'our women', he means Hindu, Sikh, Christian, and Jewish women (Swarup, 2024, 13:15 to 14:16). OpIndia editor portrayed Robinson as a victim of big tech, someone who had been deeply maligned, and stated that the same media was linking Hindu nationalists to White supremacists (Sharma, 2022, 01:05:36).

Throughout all these interviews, Robinson repeatedly expressed admiration for Hindu and Sikh migrants, describing them as peaceful, entrepreneurial, hardworking, economic contributors, accepting of British culture, and, in the case of Hindus, a community that needs protection. Robinson was also asked about his views on Elon Musk, Donald Trump and Narendra Modi, for whom he expressed great admiration. During these discussions, not only the guest but also the journalists depicted

Muslims as groomers, murderers, terrorists, drug dealers, rapists, a drain on the economy, and a community unable to integrate. At times directly by participating in anti-Muslim rhetoric and other times by failing to object or challenge the demonisation of the entire Muslims community by the far-right agitator. Similarly, as their guest, the interviewers, Sharma and Swarup, also characterised those framed as ‘allies’ of Muslims negatively, portraying them as facilitators of what Robinson called the ‘pillaging’ of Britain by Islam, either directly or through leading questions. Those branded as Muslim ‘allies’ included the British establishment, state institutions such as the judiciary, police, left-wing politicians and media. This persistent critique of Muslims’ ‘allies’ echoes Anders Breivik’s manifesto, in which he labelled the supporters of Muslims and other minorities ‘cultural Marxists’. Breivik declared that ‘cultural Marxists’ pose a greater threat to White nationalism in Europe and to Hindu nationalism in India than Muslims, because of their tolerance and support for equality (Nanda, 2011, p.64).

Ethnopolitical Entrepreneurship

The cherry picking and amplification of statements by the interviewers, such as “Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer has announced that he will be protecting the mosques and the Muslim community” (Swarup, 2024, 12:58) or asking Robinson that why legacy media is so threatened by him and his movement (Swarup, 2025, 12:30), and that “the police did not act as they should have in your case” (Sharma, 2022, 43:28), or asking him to assess the reasoning of his arrest (Swarup, 2024, 07:12) were neither innocent nor incidental. They epitomise an ideological and well-coordinated discursive synergy between the two nationalisms, White supremacy and Hindutva, in which the ‘Godi Media’ does not merely act as a facilitator or conduit for communication but as an actor, and hyper-nationalist Indian journalists perform as ‘ethnopolitical entrepreneurs’ (Brubaker, 2002).

The 2022 OpIndia interview was conducted amid communal tensions between the groups of Hindus and Muslims in Leicester, at a time when Robinson was already banned on several social media platforms, including Twitter (now X). Clearly, the intent was to incite further tensions and to pre-emptively pressure the UK authorities against implicating Hindutva ideology as a factor in the clashes. The interviewer asked Robinson three times what he would advise the Hindu community in Leicester to do to ‘protect’ itself. She asked him to clarify to the British public that Hindus were ‘unjustly’ incriminated in the riots. She hoped that Leicester Hindus would align with Robinson, who could go to the city and ‘assist’ them. Robinson, on the other hand, offered advice to British Hindus twenty-four times in the interviews analysed for this paper. The advice included forming a resistance, forging alliances with communities that could send reinforcements, calling out the police for their cowardice, and demanding mass arrests of opponents. Robinson insisted that ‘cowering and hiding’ were not a solution, and the Hindu community needed to confront the ‘dedicated fanatics’ of Islam. The far-right leader also expressed willingness to send far-right activists, who he claimed were desperate to volunteer in huge numbers,

to 'defend' the Hindu community in Leicester. OpIndia delayed publication of the interview for three months, purportedly due to pressure and safety concerns for British Hindus.

Since Robinson is not a well-known figure in India, the intended audience for these interviews was likely the Hindu diaspora in the UK, as discussed above. The interviewees appeared to want to achieve two things. First, they sought to cultivate empathy for the far-right campaigner by presenting him as an underdog and an ally of Hindus, so that members of the diaspora who do not approve of his White supremacist hate politics would come to treat him as being on their side. The second goal was apparently to create fear and anxiety among British Hindus toward Muslims, so that more diaspora Hindus would be drawn to the nationalist project linked to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party in India (UK Parliament, 2025). The interviews reveal that the mutual performance of solidarity and outrage by Hindutva and far-right forces is not merely a discursive stance; depending on the social and political context, it can cascade into more substantial forms. The 2022 unrest in Leicester is one such example in which weeks of disinformation and fear speech from all sides resulted in unprecedented street violence (Bhatt et al., 2026). Thus, while multidirectional subaltern information flows have helped communities gain more agency over their narratives, maintain their identities, present alternative perspectives, and challenge the media hegemony of the Global North (Appadurai, 1990; Castells, 2011; Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2019; Thussu, 2010), they have simultaneously created a space for the formation of transnational 'hate circuits' (Rao, 2025) that are capable of intensifying divisions, harming social cohesion and destabilising democracies.

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