

MOUNTING TENSIONS: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE THREAT TO SOCIAL HARMONY IN UTTARAKHAND

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June 17, 2023 12:10 am | Updated 12:16 am IST

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Festering communal tensions in Purola in Uttarakhand, nearly 400 kilometres north of Delhi, have resulted in the fleeing of most of the town's handful of Muslims. A clutch of self-styled protectors of Hindu interests had called for a congregation on June 15, which was [cancelled at the eleventh hour](#), even as the Uttarakhand High Court asked the State government to ensure that law and order was maintained. Tensions arose from [an alleged attempt by a Muslim man](#) to kidnap a minor Hindu girl from the town, on May 26. The man and his Hindu friend were arrested, and the incident soon became the new war cry for outfits that have been peddling the notion of love jihad, an alleged Islamic scheme to entrap Hindu girls in liaisons. Muslims in Purola became the target of a social boycott, and Hindu landlords were reportedly forced to evict their Muslim tenants. Several such incidents of targeting interfaith relationships have been reported in Uttarakhand in recent months. In a rather bizarre case, an interfaith couple had to call off their marriage even after their families had agreed to their match. Individual rights and choices are being trampled upon by hooligans who claim to protect community interests, a trend that is a serious threat to the rule of law and social harmony.

The Chief Minister of Uttarakhand, Pushkar Singh Dhami, has amplified the hate rhetoric of love jihad in recent months even as these disturbances continue. He also ordered the demolition of over 600 tomb shrines associated largely with Muslims, on grounds of encroachment of public or forest land. He has promised strict action against the so-called love jihad and a vaguely framed 'verification drive' of people to keep the State free of disturbances. Meanwhile, random organisations that seek the cleansing of 'devbhoomi' — a reference to Hindu shrines in the Himalayan State — of other faiths, are finding the ruling party's tacit or direct endorsement. A demand for excluding Muslims from the businesses associated with the Chardham pilgrimage circuit is also being given a sympathetic hearing by the administration. Since 2017, Uttarakhand has been in the news for campaigns and hate speeches against people from the minority community, which has been noted by both the Supreme Court of India and the High Court. The State should remain impartial in enforcing the law. The criminal case of attempted kidnapping in Purola should be investigated quickly, and nobody should be allowed to make use of it to propagate communal politics. The leaders should be fair and impartial, and be seen so.

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