ILLUSTRATION: **KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO**

# The one thing missing from the conversation

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What Priya Saha cited to Donald Trump is a statistical fallacy, and downright irresponsible, but what is way more problematic was our reaction to it.

In the course of a week, she has quickly become not just the talk of the town, but also the target of the general populace's hatred. In a video interview uploaded on YouTube by her NGO, the woman claimed there are people protesting in front of her house, threatening to break down the gates, and how she fears for the physical safety of her family. In the digital sphere, her name has been dragged through the mud, a family photo of her husband and her two daughters have been spread widely for the purpose of ridicule. There are social media posts demanding the woman (and her husband) be hanged to death, she has been called sexually derogatory terms, has been threatened online with violent rape, and has been categorically called the nation's oldest and most popular slur for Hindus.

Lawyers attempted to file sedition cases against Saha—cases where the highest punishment is life imprisonment. Over the course of the week, the charges were dropped, but only after the country's premier sent out an order forbidding hasty legal actions.

Her plea for help to Donald Trump was ridiculous, seeing that the state of minority rights has worsened during his tenure as president of the US. Her statistics are grossly inflated—both Hindu-Buddhist-Christian Oikkya Parishad and Dr Abul Barkat, one of the prime researchers on Hindu out-migration in the country, said so, last week. But no matter what untruths she said, our outrage is simply working to prove her point.

It feels like the obvious has to be stated here--discrimination against a certain group does not mean blood needs to be shed, or that homes need to be vandalised. Discrimination can be systemic, perpetuated by our societies and institutions (like social media platforms). It can be as simple as treating a person or an event differently, based on their identity.

The lengths to which the public reaction to Saha's comments went, seems to stem from her identity as a minority perpetrator, and the aggrieved population's identity as the majority. Such outrage was not in fate for the fives temples vandalised this year. Two temples each were desecrated in Madaripur and Faridpur between April 21 and 25, but the fifth one, to my surprise, was in Dhaka.

Last February 28, Mirpur Central Mandir was desecrated—a man forced his way into the temple and destroyed Kali's idol. A social experiment could be to go around asking people in Dhaka whether or not they have heard about this incident. I know I hadn't even though I'm in the profession of news reporting—and unless one reads newspapers cover to cover or religiously follows television news, one wouldn't either.

Very ironically, the way I got to know about the temple being vandalised is from a press release going viral right now, for a very particular reason. Around the same time as when the temple was vandalised, Priya Saha's paternal home went up in flames in what the community claims was an act of hate-crime. So, Hindu-Buddhist-Christian Oikkya Parishad issued a statement protesting both the temple being vandalised, and Saha's home being destroyed. That statement is now being circulated at this point in time, because the population has an active interest in Saha's life—what her past is, and what were her motivations behind going to Trump. It was while reading that press statement that I realised a temple had been vandalised this year, in my own city, months ago, and I had no clue. It really goes to prove that public interest shapes social media algorithms, and vice versa—and the whole system is inherently rigged regarding who and what it chooses to be more outraged about.