December 27, 2018,

To
Justice HL Dattu,
Hon'ble Chairperson,
National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)

Urgent Attention: Complaint regarding hate speech by Deepak Sharma

Dear Sir/ Madam,

We at Citizens for Justice and Peace have come across an individual, Deepak Sharma's Facebook profile. In our view the profile intends to spread hate and is full of inciting and provocative content that needs your immediate attention.

Deepak Sharma is a Hindutva activist who claims to be from Jaipur but, according to the police, lives in Uttar Pradesh's Hathras district. He is the founder of Rashtriya Swabhimaan Dal (RSD), an organisation that ostensibly works to protect the interests of the Hindu *dharma* and the nation. Sharma gained notoriety when he "released a video where he beat up a young boy, and accused him of creating memes or 'maymays', as he called them, about his religion. The self-proclaimed protector of Hinduism (in fact a politicised version of the faith) beat on the defenceless boy, while threatening other such meme creators," FirstPost noted. Sharma maintained in an interview to ANI that he had not "only talked about Hindu religion; I have included every religion in that context. It has been seen in 'the film' that people will have to face the repercussion of their behaviour, if they harm the sentiments of the society."

Sharma did not stop there. In September 2018, he was caught on video with protesters who were calling for Akbar Road in New Delhi to be renamed to Atal Bihari Vajpayee road. "In the video, Sharma is seen telling the reporter that Vajpayee was a true nationalist and should be duly honoured. Upon being asked about his objection to the name Akbar, Sharma said that Vajpayee, in his poems, wrote extensively against the Mughals. Sharma, however, appears clueless about Vajpayee's literary works. He had very little knowledge about Vajpayee's political career too," InUth noted. Sharma told InUth, "There are two types of history, one is positive and other is negative. Mughals represent everything that is negative," later adding, "We have to remove all symbols of Mughals from our history".

In October 2018, he visited Noida's Sharda University, and allegedly incited Indian students against Afghan students a day after the two groups clashed on campus. District Magistrate B. N. Singh told The Indian Express then that he would invoke the National Security Act (NSA) against Sharma if he applied for bail.

In May 2018, Deepak Sharma was involved in the demonstrations calling for the removal of the portrait of Muhammad Ali Jinnah from the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) campus. Last year, Sharma visited the Taj Mahal and attempted to perform a pooja there, but was detained. CJP found a video clip of him calling for another Godhra. In another clip, he seemed to voice his support for Shambhulal Regar, who allegedly hacked to death a Muslim labourer in Alwar, Rajasthan in December 2017.

In May 2017, his organisation, the RSD, announced that it would offer a Rs. 51,000 reward to anyone who would pull out the beard of Kolkata's controversial Imam Nuroom Rehman Barkati.

Sharma's Facebook profile has a host of provocative posts. In September, he shared a post made by another Facebook user that said, "If a priest or maulvi comes to me for religious conversion then I will file an SC/ST case against them". It added, "If I am removed from the temple and insulted in front of Muslims then they will also be stuck inside". Sharma shared this post, saying he agreed. Sharma's Facebook profile has more than 40,000 followers, indicating that the scope of his reach is large.

It is known that Sharma has been booked for at least one instance of instigating violence, with even the local administration at Noida having mulled invoking the grave NSA against him.

Social media has long since evolved from the time when everything was virtual. Today, sales are made through social media, as are careers, awareness is raised, and, unfortunately, hate is spread. Hate speech is bad enough on its own, hurting the sentiments of marginalised communities, be they religious or otherwise. However, hate does not always stop at hate speech. Often, hate speech is the first step in creating a hostile atmosphere that may result in violence against those being targeted, who already face structural marginalisation. Hate speech online can have major impact offline.

Earlier this year, in October, CJP wrote to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) as well as Facebook, highlighting a recent targeting of the St. Thomas Church in Varanasi and hate-filled Facebook posts connected to the incident. While the posts we flagged seemed to have been taken down (although it is unclear whether the users took them down or Facebook), tackling individual posts in what seems to be a tidal wave of hate speech on social media platforms has little effect.

It is clear that action needs to be taken against individuals who routinely spread hate on social media, particularly because it moves offline as well, either through them, or their acolytes. CJP is calling for:

1. An investigation into Deepak Sharma by the local police's cyber crimes cell
2. Charges against Deepak Sharma for inciting communal hatred
3. A permanent ban on Deepak Sharma's Facebook profile and associated pages

Kindly take immediate action on this as his actions are fairly problematic and a cause for concern.

Hoping to hear from you,

Thanks and Regards,

Teesta Setalvad on behalf of the CJP team

CJP's video on Deepak Sharma can be seen here
https://cjp.org.in/another-hindutvavadi-spreading-hate/