Techno-militia: Rightwing, Fake News and Cyberspace in India

P R Biju[1] *& O Gayathri*[2]

Abstract

Internet is increasingly seen as a war machine where ideas otherwise defeated are deployed for political mobilization. This new form of expression is made possible by an organized army of activists whose true identities remain hidden. Though the forces across the political spectrum are deploying the Internet as a theatre of articulation of their political doctrines, this paper tries to investigate only the activism of right-wing forces that converts the Internet into a war machine. The transformation of the Internet as an ideological apparatus which emphasizes social norms favourable for conservative forces; this research presumes, is made possible by secret band operating through the selective deployment of hashtags, Facebook pages, blogs, YouTube, websites, Instagram, Twitter and Facebook profiles. However, the nature of their activism can be tracked, identified and analyzed to predict their behaviour. Through a digital ethnography on the platform described above and content analysis of material produced and shared for public consumption by these secretive forces, this paper argues that a cultural atmosphere useful for the defense of conservative society is reinvented on the Internet; this paper refers to it as *techno-militia*. Through a networked channel of activists, who are united for a perceived clan consciousness, worked upon by certain identifiable characteristics is identified and discussed in the paper.

Key Word: *Techno-militia, Social Media, Right Wing, Hindutva, Internet, Hate Speech, Conservative Forces.*

Introduction

This paper presumes that the Internet is deployed for conservative politics in a way that helps mobilize the mass on cultural lines. The labels *techno-militia*, according to this paper is the new face of rightwing politics in India. The idea of an imagined community that had inherited a god world is the fuel that fires it. Powered by conservative insignia like mythical Rama, Ayodhya, Krishna, temples and *gaumata- Gau* means cow and *Mata* means mother- and united by anti-Muslim narratives, the rightwing ideology operates distinctly on the Internet. Hate is the operational mechanism of this militia, which operates through hydra-headed hashtags, Facebook timelines and online publishing platforms. WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube have emerged as their war machine. Here hidden actors behind the screen spaces on social media platforms deploy conspiracy theories to justify violence that followed the partition of India, re-script the history of India, in particular those in ancient India, the Varna system, the four-fold classification of society based on one's birth; is corroborated, caste fan pages exhort caste pride and perpetuate casteism, and even caste violence is glorified. Even crimes like honour killing are justified to defend the greater cause

of the nation made of pure blood, according to their imagination. The open practice of racism and making the nation a homogenous race is its priority. This militia's socio-economic composition comprises young, urban, educated, and middle-class India. The nexus between conservative radicalism and cyberspace in the Indian social context and fake news' role in the linkages finds space in the paper.

Literature review

Rightwing politics in India as a political doctrine evolved through canonical writings (Savarkar, 1925; 1928; 1949/1984; 1949/1984; 1985; 1970/1908; Golwalkar 1966; 1939; Upadhyaya, 1958, 1965, 1968). The piecing together of this literature forms what may be called Sangh literature. A plethora of scientific interpretations and anecdotes on the same had opened a vista of scholarship. Hindutva, one of the major forms of it, emerge as a political doctrine that mobilizes the mass in the cultural realm, according to several writers and scholarships in this area (Hansen, 1999; Andersen and Damel, 2018; Jaffrelot, et. al., 2019; Jaffrelot, 2005; 2007; Chatterjee, 1986; Mukhopadhyay, 2019; Noorani, 2019; Chopra, 2019; Dasgupta, 2019). Some literature that connects *Sangh* ideology with populism and other political ideology programmes shows how different organizations and political actors are attaining comparative advantage in visibility over the years by deploying populist tactics (Jha, 2019; Sharma, 2019; Ganguly & Dwivedi, 2019; Ullekh, 2015). Rightwing political actors' use of the Internet to mobilize support basis in India in the cultural realms to attain visibility and more public acceptability found space of attention in a couple of works (Laul 2018; Adhikari 2011; Guha 2013; Chaturvedi 2016; Overdorf, 18 June 2012; Rushdie, 1 February 2013). These writings show the troublesome nature of rightwing hate messages on the Internet.

The literature reviewed points toward the scholarship that is currently in vogue. That all furnishes the abundance of information about the rise of rightwing politics, the arch pillar of which is Hindutva; that the journey over the last seven decades from a state of the least accepted entity to a state of dominating political actor is not a simple one. Though the literature reviewed documented plenty of works related to the rise, modus of organization, tactics and propaganda mechanism of rightwing forces in India, the least attention is currently found on how the Hindu social order and organized campaigns by rightwing forces find expressions profoundly on the Internet. The literature that sheds light on the fact that it is through organized hate-filled propaganda on the Internet that the *rightwingers* in India cultivate a cultural capital is scanty. So this review of the literature finds that there exist literature gaps in investigating the synergy developed between rightwing forces and cyberspace, towards which this paper caters attention.

In the light of extensive literary surveys undertaken for this work, we have used conceptual models, social media, saffron science, rightwing, Hindutva, Internet, hate speech, and conservative forces. These concepts are extensively used in this work. *Social Media* refers to any media platforms on Internet where content in the medium is created by those who use the platforms. *Right Wing* refers to any ideology propagating a society based on the glory of

the cultural past. *Hindutva* refers to a political ideology that tries to execute a polity in India that is pure by blood, race, language, and broadly Indian culture sanctioned by Hindu scriptures. *Internet* refers to any system of computer networks where data is transported from one end to another. *Hate Speech* refers to politically motivated information dissemination in which a 'perceived' enemy is targeted, and their sentiments are hurt on the question of their loyalty to nation, religion, caste, race, region, or language, who are more likely minorities in a majoritarian state. *Conservative Forces* refer to any social groups that believe in undisputed loyalty to culture, scripture and tradition. In this paper, this expression is used interchangeably with the expression right Wing.

Methodology

This paper presumes that a techno-militia operates on Internet, the basic traits of which are as follows: fake profiles, Hindu, upper caste, male, blind faith in the leader, irrational logic to scientific questions, lack of reasoned thinking and poor sense of history. Accordingly, the paper randomly collected profiles and hashtags on Twitter and Facebook as well as websites and blogs that cater to a conservative society in which fake news is a feeder that spreads information of a sort pushing conservative political mobilization on cultural lines. A select number of profiles of politicians, political parties and their followers were scrutinized, which are then analyzed on www.trackalytics.com as well the researchers themselves reviewed it to trace the analytics such as the number of posts, followers, likes, and most discussed topics. From the profiles of politicians and political parties, a series of fake social media accounts is collected to reference them with viral hashtags, where this paper presumed that techno-militia are active promoters of false political information. The followers of politicians and political parties are traced in order to find out fake social media profiles, which this paper defines as social media accounts with no profile picture, no activities and engagements, no followers and are primarily inactive and where the online activities are reviewed to infer the mechanism by which techno-militia furthers false information through a process which this paper called rightwing radicalism. This paper presumes that techno-militia is closely affiliated with fake profiles that explode a list of similar profiles across the social media landscape. Hashtags and their nature are examined with reference to the conflict zones of India, such as religion, caste, and gender. Content analysis is organized to evaluate the nature of engagements and type of information being shared through hashtags, and equal attention is furnished to examine the affiliation of the inactive, fake profiles vi-a-vis hashtags. The paper also sourced evidence of techno-militia that is likely used by rightwing forces to prove the argument that rightwing forces have more proclivities towards perpetuating conflict zones of India through the dissemination of false information.

Analysis of Social Media Activism

Social media platforms of information dissemination are selectively deployed as an ideological apparatus by a secret band of activists affiliated with rightwing politics. This

paper first surveyed social media profiles of politicians and political parties on Twitter, Facebook, Website, and Instagram. Their selection is executed objectively. The most popular profiles of politicians and political parties across the broad political spectrum are surveyed over a period of two general elections- 2014 and 2019, see *Table I*. Research assumes that hate-filled trolls, fake accounts that secretly function for the right wing and false news that are deployed for indoctrinating ordinary users are found in the follower list of the politicians, see *Table I*. However, this paper does not find evidence to prove a correlation between these fake profiles and political actors surveyed for their direct involvement. Fake profiles follow the politicians surveyed on social media sites, and the paper does not find evidence for their direct knowledge of the followers and their fake character.

Table I
Politicians on Website, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube October 2021

Politicians	Website	Twitter	Facebook	Instagram	YouTube Subscribers
Narendra Modi	narendramodi.in	72.1m	46.78m	61.5m	9.3 m
Amit Shah	amitshah.co.in	27m	14m	3.8m	35.9k
Aravind Kejriwal	aamaadmiparty.org	23.2m	8.8m	1.1m	41.1k
Rajnath Singh	rajnathsingh.in	20.7m	6.9m	1.1m	36.3k
Rahul Gandhi	rahulgandhi.in/en	19.5m	4.5m	1.7m	513k
Yogi Adityanath	yogiadityanath.in	15.5m	6.7m	2.4m	3.9k
Akhilesh Yadav		14.83m	7.4m	590k	
SmritiIrani		11.8m	5.3m	1.1m	
Piyush Goyal	piyushgoyal.in	10.4m	9m	922k	83.7k
Shashi Tharoor	shashitharoor.in	8.1m	1.5m	551k	423k
Nitish Kumar		7m	1.7m	14.1k	
Lalu Prasad Yadav		5.9m	1.1m	44.8k	
Sambit Patra	sambitpatra.in/	5.2m	1.6m	60.1k	2.88k
Vasundhara Raje	vasundhararaje.in	4.5m	9.3m	367k	18.6k
Nirmala Sitharaman		4.4m	Less than 1m	259k	
Priyanka Gandhi Vadra		4.1m	4.4m	512k	
M.K.Stalin	stalinani.com, mkstalin.in	2.7m	10m	884k	199k
Sharad Pawar	sharadpawar.com	2.3m	Less than 1m	696k	
Jagat Prakash Nadda	jagatprakashnadda.in	2.3m	1.1	209k	604
Mayawati		2.1m		47.8K	
Mamata Banerjee		6.2M	4.7M	177K	

The *Table I* indicates that political actors on the right of the political spectrum have fan following bigger than the rest of the players. The table included prominent politicians in national politics, where the audience is comparatively higher for BJP. That also means their messages directly go to a wider audience. The table also shows that compared to other players, the leadership of the BJP has a higher fan following. The survey randomly selected possible fake profiles operating in the profiles to understand further the fan following.

The number of fake profiles among the BJP audience is higher, as with the number of followers. Though most profiles surveyed have the existence of fake fan profiles, those among the rightwing political players have a distinct pattern. Its identity cannot be established, but its activities tell something unique about its existence. See column I of *Table III* about fake accounts on rightwing social media profiles. They have similar nature- images denoting Hindu deities, posts praising rightwing leaders and demonizing opponents, and their activities identify with hate against minorities. Hashtags seen tagged by fan following of the rightwing profiles are similar when compared with others in the political spectrum. *Table III* shows hashtags that were viral over the election seasons. Some of the rightwing hashtags closely observed under this survey indicate that it originates from a clear motif.

A Twitter profile @Maryam89837825, which follows Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, has no profile picture, followers, or tweets. There are plenty like this; for instance, @GN3366, @Sunilsabal13, @Mechmagic2, @abhishe36556828 do not have a profile picture, followers, and tweets which are created recently and seem to increase the followers of the Prime Minister. But there is more to this story as a scroll down gives the clear impression that these profiles, which are most probably fake, operate as a bridge, as a facilitator and a potential re servoir of something hidden in the architecture of the communication possibilities of the Internet.

Political parties, whose huge followers are also clear instances of how techno-militia can operate and perpetuate fake news in a system where technology architecture helps actors to disseminate information in their favour, see Table II.

Table II

Political Parties on Facebook, Twitter by October 2021

Political parties	Website	Twitter	Facebook	Instagram	YouTube
Congress	aicc.org.in	8.4m	6.1m	1m	1.66m
Bhartiya Janata Party	bjp.org	16.8m	16 m	4M	3.89m
Samajwadi Party	samajwadiparty.in	2.6 m	2.8 m	89.3K	185K
BahujanSamaj Party	bspindia.org	15.9K	3,200	73.4K	231
AamAadmi Party	aamaadmiparty.org	5.7m	5m	560K	1.48m
DMK	dmk.in	735.5K	Less than1 million	89.1K	
Rashtriya Janata Dal	rjd.co.in	673.8K	Less than1 million	64.1K	
All India Trinamool Congress	aitcofficial.org	510.2K	1.3M	84.6K	400K

The same pattern can be traced here, too; for example, @leo36798 on the Congress profile, @Modiiiiiii7 on the BJP profile, @Amit69394171 on the Aam Aadmi Party profiles have no profile picture nor any tweets. More importantly, these profiles on verification found that they were created on October 2021. We have selected the profiles of politicians in *Table I* based on their social media presence, who represent different strands of political ideology in the political spectrum, and the same rationale has been applied to political parties.

BJP has the most considerable presence on the Internet, which outnumbers most political parties and politicians by many millions. It is clear from the data that BJP has a bigger audience; hence their narratives are likely to get more acceptability among its fan followers.

Table III

Fake Profiles and Hashtags

Twitter Profiles Surveyed		**Hashtag**
1	**2**	**3**
Fake Twitter Profiles	**Twitter Profiles where fake profiles with militant nature active**	**Activity Strong**
@imsumit99, @Internet_Hindus, @Damru, @68e11543967046d, @atulkumarawasth, @as_465, @PBhavit, @RAMESHK43308659, @valaramkalbi981, @Prakash9696P, @Ganesh47224, @laxminarayan793, @ashutosh6485, @sunnytyagi545, @HinduDharma1, @sagenaradramuni, @Bhaskarg77G	@SwamyBhakt, @68e11543967046d, @vhskerala, @vhs_karnataka , @vhsindia, @harishmohamed58, @psjangin, @tiwariumeshlkw, @yogeshjangid592, @imaakhyan, @nimi2biju, @MukeskK, @atulkumarawasth, @avinashchoubey, @Prakash9696P, @Ganesh47224, @valaramkalbi981	#RamMandir, #Remove Mughal History, #Gaumata, #Prayagraj, #Ayodhya, #Hindutva, #hindunationrow, #Nationwantsrammandir, #NaamVaapsi , #RamMandir, #AntiNationals, #TajMahal, #Tejomahalya

Filtering is a strategy in which information is disseminated to the target audience. On Twitter, the profiles we have tested in column 1 in *Table III* indicate that fake profiles with no profile picture are intentional with a hidden purpose. The profiles we have discovered are fake news sources in the landscape of political communication. Here, when one politician posts a particular message, it goes to a target audience networked through these profiles.

There are blogs and Facebook that talk to a conservative audience; the information disseminated through these blogs is less scientific. However, they are opinionated and partisan, which get high treatment, appreciation and acceptance among a vast audience, see *Table IV*.

Table IV

Blogs and Facebook Speaking to Conservative Audience	
Facebook Page	**Blogging Site**
1	**2**
the sanatanadharmis, Anti Reservation India	indiannationalisticpost.blogspot.in, hinduonline.blogspot.in, varnam.nationalinterest.in, opindia.com, hindujagruti.org

Posting and information contents that prefer divisive nationalistic sentiments have more takers; Facebook pages are proofs; see column 1 of *Table IV*. Hashtags subjected to rigorous digital ethnographic scrutiny give hindsight to the increasing attempt to discredit nationalist leaders and stalwarts of the freedom movement in which polarizing the society on communal lines are commonplace (see column 3 of *Table III*). Political opponents being presented as inefficient and corrupt are more fashionable, for which scrutiny conducted on Twitter profiles are examples; see table V.

Table V

Populist Twitter Profiles	
Twitter profiles	**Hashtag Distorting History**
1	**2**
@PBhavit,	#Nationwantsrammandir,
@RAMESHK43308659,	#NaamVaapsi,
@valaramkalbi981,	#RamMandir,
@Prakash9696P,	#AntiNationals,
@Ganesh47224,	#TajMahal,
@laxminarayan793,	#Tejomahalya
@ashutosh6485	

There were scenarios in profiles identified in column 1 of *Table V* in which they were found aggressively sharing and promoting caste-related news; see column 1 in *Table IV*. We have found that hashtags are created and shared by well organized cyber armies; see column 2 in Table III. The content goes to the fan following, who further shares the same with their extended networks. Thereby they are writing down their perspectives on the head of the audience.

We had undertaken a keyword search on Facebook with the hashtag- #Nationwantsrammandir, which led us to a whopping list of profiles, Facebook forums and discussions about Ram Mandir, a disputed site in India that, according to both Hindus and Muslims, is a sacred place of their faith. Some profiles which were tagged by the hashtag are listed in *Table VI*

Table VI

Profiles Tagged with #Nationwantsrammandir			
Pages	**Followers**	**Personal Profiles**	**Followers**
@Resurgingdharma	32826	ShivangiKharwal (facebook.com/shivangiABVP1)	17157
@pratapgarhdevelopment	223862	R J Kiran (facebook.com/Kiranmai.RJ/)	80543
@bhagwanshriganesh	14720	Niladri Bose (facebook.com/NiladriBose2015)	5232
@swayamsevaks	23944	Vishal Sharma (facebook.com/vishalsahotas)	

These fan pages and profiles aggressively follow Hindutva, rightwing ideologies and share partisan information. However, the authenticity of the shared news is not their priority; rather, ardent faith in leaders, ideologies and rightwing causes defined their activities, see *Table VI*.

Consider the profile description of a Twitter user we studied in the digital ethnography, @avinashchoubey on 12 June 2014. It showed that "IT professional. Honorable PM Shri Modiji follows me. Blocked by Anti Modi Folks- Sushma, Rajdeep, Sagarika, Farhan, Mahindra, Javed Akhtar, etc". This profile is an example for partisan political communication. The user describes that the anti-Modi faction blocked him, so he may not be seeing competing perspectives on the Internet. Our survey on Twitter profiles like @HinduDharma1, @sagenaradramuni, @Bhaskarg77G have found that aggressive partisan sharing of information is most sought after; see coloumn 1 in Table III. Twitter activities, Facebook posts, and streaming videos appear on parochial and subjective political culture. The caste splinter group, communal factions, lobby bloc, militants, and hate mongers take up on their partisan dialogue colonies spreading fake news.

Results

The following section discusses the variables derived from the data profiled from social media profiles. The profiles surveyed are distinct by their themes that serve rightwing radicalism: justifying violence for the cause of an imagined culture, dogmatizing the Varna system - the Indian form of racism, inactive profiles to push hate, fan pages catering to the caste system, glorification of caste violence, open expression of caste pride, open use of caste surname, friend request just because of caste names, justifying honour killing. Making cyberspace a conservative social order, users' activities draw some patterns analogous to a hierarchical feudal social order. Below are some patterns that the Internet gives way to perpetuating a feudal caste social system using fake news as a weapon of social mobilization.

The science of violence

Scanning news feeds or comments on Facebook and Twitter, we have found that there are attempts to portray that some types of violence in the past are scientifically justifiable. There are pieces of information in the news feeds that draw scientific explanations to the Sati system- The Indian tradition of a wife immolating herself on the funeral pyre of her dead husband. Partition violence is a fake story to some people; communal riot is a fabricated narrative because violence is not the Indian culture. Justification for honour killings, gender violence and mob lynching goes to the consumption of an audience formed and united by divisive ideas. Narrative and conspiracy theories justify rape to execute a higher political goal. Consider the Facebook profile of Internet Hindu facebook.com/thesanatanadharmis, a group which says it is against all those who were 'sickular' and pseudo secular. The page says:

'If we find out that you are nothing but a leftist/communist/secularist/Marxist/Hindu-hating who is only here to spread discord among fans, you will mercilessly be thrown out'.

The Twitter profile of Internet Hindu, @Internet_Hindus, claims to protect the motherland from pseudo secular. It is one among the cyber army recruits whose only purpose is to give logic to an irrational social system by hate trolls and fake news. One can get enormous information about blogs and websites like indiannationalisticpost. blogspot.in, hinduonline.blogspot.in and varnam.nationalinterest.in, which disseminate the idea that presents logic to a feudal social system. These types of blogs and web links give one a detailed description of the Mahabharata date based on Archaeology and other information that explains ancient knowledge and technique in India with claimed scientific evidence.

Fake Profiles

The social media profiles that follow conservative political actors have profile pictures decked by fake images. It is unclear why they were not using the real picture, but we have assumed it got a purpose, see *Table III*. Their activities are proof of their hidden intentions. Following

political actors standing the right of the political spectrum, culture, history, ancient science, and religious insignia are favourite discussion topics. Nothing falls to their attention except their levels of engagement to feed conservative politics. But their fake pictures try to hide identifying information, all because they engage in hate speech that perpetuates deep fissures in the conflict zones of India.

Science of the Varna

Some profile pictures and bio lines directly refer to a feudal social order. It glorifies the Varna system, which according to many user profiles, is scientific. They have deities, temples and saffron-coloured flags as profile pictures. Some profiles claim that the Varna system — the four-fold classification of society in early Indian history based on birth was a superior social order. It gives what is due to each individual according to their virtue. They claim that those who criticize the Varna system are mean who lack the correct perspective about Indian society and its history. The essay posted on sulekha.com shared by a Facebook user and reviewed by this paper discusses the science behind the Varna system. It says that linking the Varna system with caste is unfortunate. An average citizen passing through this discussion shared on social media newsfeeds fails to think about the veracity of shared information.

Inactive Profiles

Some profiles are inactive see *Table III*. All the repeated visits to Twitter handles would find that not only are they inactive, but the profiles give the impression that they follow some select political leaders. Hence, they can increase the list of followers and the particular leader can boast of the increasing fan following. A quick survey of the list of huge fan followings of political actors provides hints to the plenty of idle profiles. Interestingly, they follow none other than a particular leader and no longer are they followed by any other profile. Then what is the purpose of profiles like this remains curious.

Caste Fan Pages

People with similar interests find solidarity in caste forums see *Table III* and *V*. AI based news feeds in the caste pages on Facebook enable its huge audience to see an ocean of caste news. The pages glorify *Manu*, the ancient lawgiver, and endorse the idea that 'Manu the progenitor of humanity, and the initiator of the Indian Varna system'. Facebook pages like 'Anti-Reservation Community', and 'India Against Reservation' are disseminating information that disowns any affirmative policies giving caste-based reservation. There are conversations about the superiority of one's caste; such divisive conversations were uncommon in traditional public spaces. The commutation of caste solidarity within the caste forum is higher than those between different caste groups. Caste groups look at each other with contempt and belittle the other by sharing mythological stories. The exchange of

information among members of each caste forum is greater. No traditional media or public forums give space to articulate caste feelings like this.

The profiles and caste fan pages are testimony to the fact that three or four people can go to any extreme to push an agenda and set prime-time TV debates in the nation. These feudal actors can make any information trending and viral among a greedy audience of caste news. It is an army of the conservative political constituency defended by rightwing politics.

Caste violence glorified on Social Media

Hate messages circulated through WhatsApp have contributed to violence against the lower caste communities in Karnataka in 2017 (Agarwal, July 15, 2017). Similar other incidents reported in different parts of India pointed that they are not stray incidents. There are clear patterns. Social media profiles glorify members of the caste community involved with caste-based violence; see *Table III*, *IV* and *V*. Using memes and selfie videos to spread messages of hate against other caste, exchanges based on caste feelings are not only fanning hate, but it also glorifies violence to protect a perceived sense of purity of the clan. Members of other communities retaliate similarly on cyberspace, mainly on WhatsApp and Facebook. Those creating abusive casteist videos, memes and spreading hate are young people; actors who find vote banks on caste identity taps on their innocence. The caste violence celebrated contains selfie videos where some show weapons like swords and praise their own caste while threatening members of other castes.

Caste Pride

We found that people who otherwise never openly use their caste identity are copiously using it on cyberspace. Profiles and fan groups where people mask their identity with fake profiles engage in activities that extol their caste and openly showcase caste pride. Some other groups would go farther and talk voraciously about the merits of their caste and brag a lot about famous people from the world of sports, business tycoons, literature and film. They persuade other members in the caste forums to be proud of famous people of their caste. The discussants in caste fan pages find nothing wrong in praising caste status; they extol the legends and more popular figures of their caste.

Open Use of Caste Names

People find it easy to appear as Majumdar, Patel, Awasthi, Aiyar or Kapoor on social media sites and form an audience for casteist fake news with like-minded people who love to hear similar news. They engage in hate activities and perpetuate caste pride. At the same time, people from the lower castes are usually hesitant to appear with their caste names on social networking profiles. There are different caste names in different states and languages. Menon, Nair, Nambiar, Reddy, Naidu, Rao, are examples of caste names in south India. In North

India, names such as Sharma, Verma, Shastri, Mishra are dominant. In western India, Patel, Shah, Desai, Naik and Shinde are the forward castes. Chatterjee, Mukerjee, Patnaik, Hota, Panda, Banerjee, Sen, and Roy are forward castes in Eastern parts of India. These are invariably, caste, sub-caste, clan or sect names. These names have increasingly been cited on social media profiles, with updates, photo shares, chat and forums. They boast of their upper-caste heritage.

Friend Request on Caste Name

Sometimes one receives friend requests only because of caste names. Groups update their status almost frequently, and some churn out hate via 'posts', 'likes' and 'shares'. On community pages, admins sometimes post questions to members about their caste identity. While doing so, their sentiments are against those who decry upper caste. The paper found that fault lines in the social system are rattling on social media. Social networking sites are not only places where citizens can connect with fellow nationals, meet friends, and talk to a wider audience, but also places where one can meet others of one's own caste, race, and religion. All of them shape one's identity, which divides society rather than unites it also finds expression in cyberspace. The Internet attains a perilous combination in the conflict zones of India.

Justification to Honour Killing

Some profiles justify caste-based honour killings. They are against inter-caste love and inter-faith marriage. Caste and gotra are pure, which cannot be mixed according to them. You can meet people who find no remorse in the rape of a woman born in a lower caste, who are still considered the property of men in the upper caste. There is nothing wrong with caste-based mob lynching, according to them.

Young, Urban Educated Middle Class

The caste-based groups are young, and few are engineers, commerce degree holders, software professionals, post-graduates and doctors. Such online groups are made up of people from the metropolises like Mumbai, Delhi, Pune, Kolkata, Hyderabad and Bangalore.

Open Racism

We have found that social media users are practising racism. Hima Das, an eighteen-year-old girl from the Indian state of Assam, won track gold in the 400 metre final at the Tampere's World U20 Championships held in Finland; the online news shared plenty on social media sites. However, a curious section on social media was busy searching her caste. Anti-reservation and racist campaigns have gone viral on social media following the appointment of Sreedhanya Suresh, who became the first tribal girl to win the civil services examination

in Kerala; as Assistant Collector in Kozhikode district on May 2020 (Express News Service 7 April 2019).

In the past, racist discrimination was confined only to a particular locality and community. Now it got huge visibility as social media can bring news and trolls to as many people as possible within the blink of an eye. Fake news and hate trolls normalize racism through seemingly lighthearted humour and satire. Neo-Brahmanic and reactionary groups strategically tap social media through fake news, trolls, and other jokey content degrading and dehumanizing people. By using distorted facts and false history to propagate that Brahmins are vegetarians and never practice violence, these news contents connect with new members who love to see more of this and spread casteism in an online culture that deliberately uses media platforms to legitimize Varna social hierarchy. Several casteist and racist groups have already peppered their social media pages with misinformation implying that their race and caste are natural. They brag a lot about their *gotra*, and belittle others.

Caste Conspiracy Theories

Fake news is the only single route that unites all these identity formations on the Internet. It creates fiction, which serves the role of history. The Internet meticulously reproduces what people have been doing in the physical life world. Notions of family, gender, language, territorial affinity, etc., have been reproduced on social media. One can even construct all these on the Internet by one's fancies. Since fake news is the preferred communication style among these hidden forces, they can go to any extent.

Conspiracy theories are everywhere, perhaps the most widely circulated one being the claim that upper caste Brahmins are vegetarians; they never use violence, nor are they aggressive. Then how do they practice caste violence, they ask followers. One can find comments like these being stated in the social media updates, which goes to consumption among a growing caste audience. Caste violence is doctored, a conspiracy theory of the leftists and liberals, who plans to destroy India's age-old social system; discussions are going on among caste-based social media forums like this.

There are also dozens of racist conspiracy theories on social media, including one that weaves narratives about India's past glory by giving credit to the Vedas for the discoveries of aircraft, plastic surgery, the Internet, and others. Ancient Brahmins were scientists who discovered state-of-the-art technologies. According to them, the constitution is not a correct document, secularism is a pseudo-idea, Nehru was empty, and the Ram temple existed in the disputed structure at Ayodhya. Upper caste and the practice of untouchability were good things. They claim to have scientific explanations for the practice of untouchability. Ironically, one can discover that hundreds of profiles like this subscribed to a conspiracy theory called "Neo-Brahmanism".

Caste Psychology

How this caste mindset works on the Internet is a curious question. Malathy PK, for instance, is an undergraduate student in a government college in India. All official documents cite her name, including her Higher Secondary Certificate and Secondary School Leaving Certificate. However, social media platforms gave her a new social identity, to present herself with her '*gotra*' or caste. She frequents social media as Malathy Varrier— Varrier being an upper-caste community in India's *Varna* fold, where she finds a new form of caste identity assertion. Harikrishnan has become Harikrishnan Pillai- Pillai is upper caste; Shalini CK has become Shalini Nambiar- Nambiar is an upper caste in India.

Findings

The analysis furnished in the result section draws on a few cases of social media *weaponization* in India's conflict zones. The above cases prove the growing use of social media for racist and casteist discrimination. It hints at how social media expresses caste identity, where people engage in activities that uphold caste pride and call attention to the *gotra* and *kula*, which otherwise remain impossible to transact in the social world.

On Internet based political communication surveyed, words like migrants, nation, and Muslims figure out the first. Partisans and populists have deployed these words frequently. Metaphors for the Indian nation were great; India had a glorious past, Muslims were enemies who overpopulated India, and Muslim rulers discriminated against Hindus during the medieval age. They are partisan narratives to divide society into "us" and "them", creating huge social visibility for hate-filled populist politics. Thus they create a specific mentality that we are good and they are wrong. The immediate effect of this is the deterioration of civic discourses. However, the long-term debacle is pernicious. It will destroy the cognitive capabilities of the audience of such information. Social media is partly responsible.

Unlike other organized militia activities that use the Internet, there is specific sociology to rightwing activism on cyberspace. It is the new face of populist politics in India. In part, god world is the fuel that propagates it. Powered by the Indian myth of Ram, the disputed structure of Ayodhya, Indian god Krishna, problematizing several religious structures and *gaumata* and united by anti-Muslim narratives, the hate trolls operate distinctly, often appearing as news to a greedy audience. This sort of hate escapes law and libel just because it happens in the name of a glorified culture which gets popular support. Hate is the operational mechanism of this troll world. There is a point of convergence, a way of emotional appeal and what better than the hydra-headed hashtags, Facebook timelines and online publishing platforms, hate speakers spread messages. Hate trolls give cues to a militia polity. The root of this polity is fiction narrated as history. It is a feel-good narrative, and its

proponents have little time for tedious qualifications such as Babri Masjid, communal riots, and caste violence — all eloquent testimony to the persistence of Indian unreason.

Nevertheless, for anyone who wants to valorize the long and notionally successful march of reforms and freedom struggle, an uncomfortable truth presents itself in the state of India today. Indian politics is hijacked by the intermingling of irrational arguments spread over the computers and digital technologies of connection. The proofs are enough on the fake news narratives shared widely on social media and reviewed across various tables used.

There is no room for debate; one can expect an organized online attack if the comments are against their version. They are hardcore defenders of a mythological society. These profiles are hard-line. Online vigilantism is too high on the part of these defenders of feudal social systems. Fake profiles can quickly troll, vilify and attack if one uses the democratic right to freedom of expression and the right to think logically, which seems to be against the ideology they align.

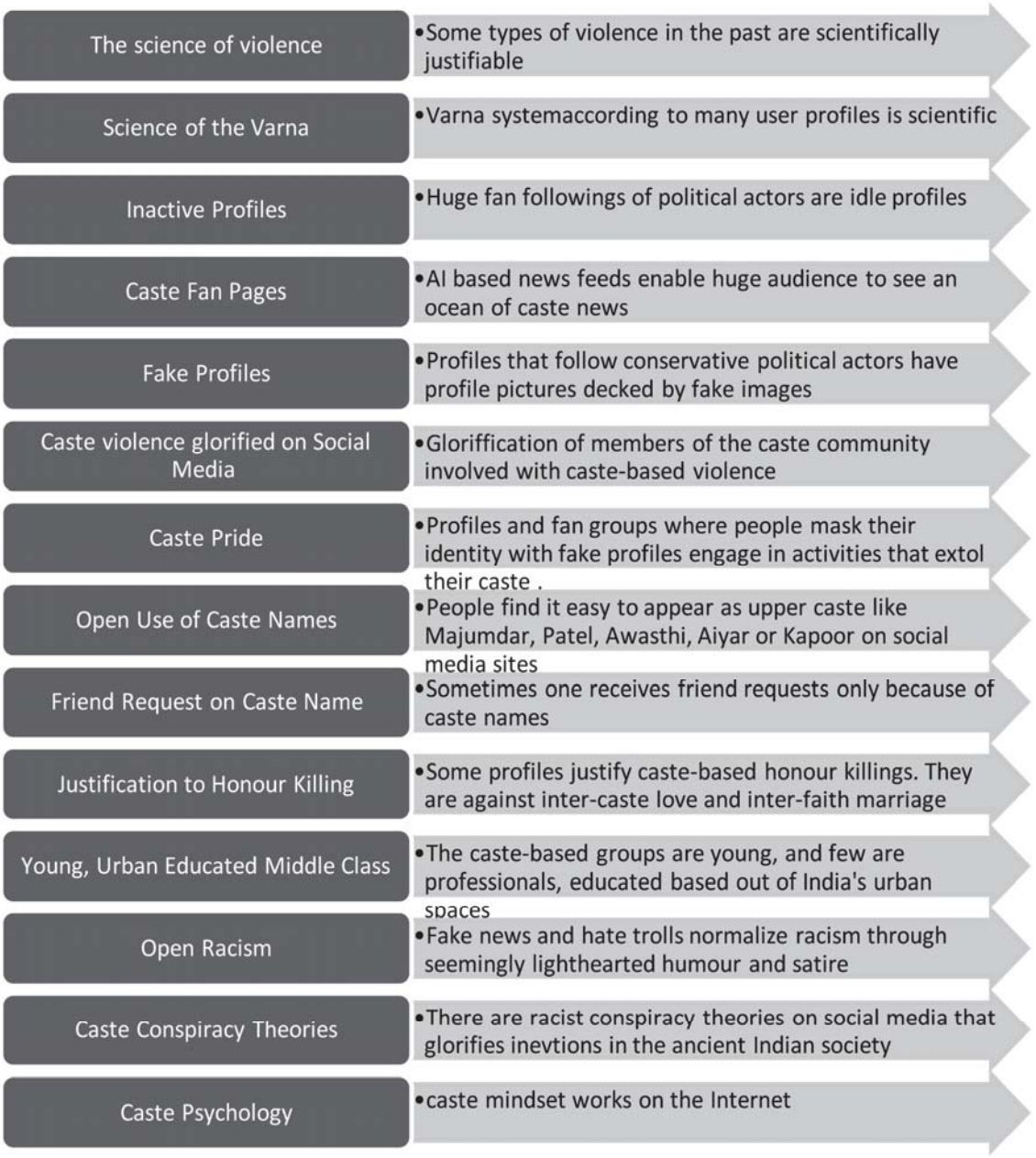
Not only are fan following being increased on these types of feudal social media profile pages, but intolerance of fans also seems to have reached the peak. Discussions turn hostile with the foulest of language. One can propagate extremist ideas like Naxalism, shame enemies and tarnish the image of the perceived enemies. But laws will quickly book one under relevant sections of the Information Technology Act (IT Act). Here comes the significance of fake news and its complicity with feudal ideologies on the Internet. They appeal to a critical audience. Their advantage is that a cultural capital operates in favour of them, unlike extremist ideas such as Naxalism, which law enforces track and punish under the law if found guilty.

Feudal-minded profiles use the Internet to spread hate messages, attack their perceived enemies and diffuse retrogressive ideas. Using abusive language against opponents, minorities and people who uphold secular and liberal ideas, propagators of fake news are reinventing a social order similar to those imagined in the scriptures by Ancient Hindu society. The hate troll is a project. There are unknown people behind it. Nonetheless, 'othering' the minorities and lower castes and validating a graded society are its functional mode. There is a history department and a current affairs desk behind the propagators of this troll nation. Their operations are corporatist, Twitter-'ized', Facebook-'ized', weapon-'ized', and WhatsApp-'ized'.

A graphical account can be drawn which blends rightwing, social structure, fake news and cyberspace on certain identifiers of techno militia according to this research findings. See, Illustration I.

Illustration I

Techno Militia: Rightwing+Social Structure+ Fake News + Cyberspace



Conclusion

This study about the interplay between social media and fake news in cyberspace tries to understand the transformation of the Internet as an ideological apparatus that popularizes and legitimizes social norms favourable for conservative forces in India. The study systematically studied scientifically selected profiles of politicians and political parties on the Website, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, randomly selected fake profiles and hashtags on Facebook and Twitter, blogs and Facebook perpetuating a conservative audience, populist Twitter profiles and profiles tagged with conservative political themes. According to the data collected and analyzed, the study consistently revealed the greater vulnerability of fake news from conservative and right-wing forces.

Overall our study found that fake news deployed by unidentified and anonymous forces operationalizes a collective and organized but anonymous and well-recruited entity which this study calls techno militia. The study consistently exposes the organized force's basic traits through a systematic review of the contents created by the profiles observed and presents a series of characteristics associated with the force. The contents created in the techno militia can be upper caste men. The entity's men seem to have blind faith, irrational arguments and a poor sense of history. This militia is an organized group committed to propagating disinformation and misinformation to serve the interest of a conservative audience. The content review postulated that hidden forces distort history and arguably present fiction as evidence for factual questions raised by men with logic in the opposite camp.

The paper corroborates that the tables where profiles are systematically content reviewed represent a microcosm of the techno militia on the rise in cyberspace, which is just the tip of the iceberg. Further studies can dissect it, thereby understanding the linkages between fake news and right-wing in the digital media landscape. The forces behind it remain unknown, but certain character traits can identify them, which opens further scope for future studies. This study identifies them as follows:

- Forces behind the group justify violence for the sake of a mythical culture.
- There are fake profiles following conservative actors.
- Several contents studied irrationally justify a four-fold ancient Hindu social structure.
- Several profiles are inactive, having no followers or likes or no activity.
- Several profiles studied are caste fan pages.
- Contents that justify honour killing in the name of family embedded in the purity of an imagined homogenous national community are enormous.

These markers of a fictional nation seen on the profiles surveyed hint at the organized nature of a much larger techno militia on the Internet. Indeed, they stand on the right of the political spectrum for the kind of cultural politics they articulate. The sociology of the force behind

this organized polity must be systematically studied further to understand its effect on democratic dialogues and political communication.

Reference

- Adhikari, Gautam. 2011. *The Intolerant Indian*. Noida: Harper Collins India, pp. 21-2
- Agarwal, Devika. July 15, 2017. "Casteist remarks on social media now punishable: What fighting online hate speech in India entails". https://www.sa-hr.org/single-post/2017/07/15/Casteist-remarks-on-social-media-now-punishable-What-fighting-online-hate-speech-in-India-entails
- Andersen, Walter and Shridhar Damle. 2018. RSS: A View to the Inside. New Delhi: Penguin.
- Chaturvedi, Swati. 2016. *I Am A Troll: Inside the Secret World of the BJP's Digital Army*. New Delhi, Juggernaut
- Chatterjee, Partha. 1986. *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* Zed Books, London.
- Chopra, Rohit. 2019. *The Virtual Hindu Rashtra: Saffron Nationalism and New Media*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Dasgupta, Swapan. 2019. *Awakening Bharat Mata: The Political Beliefs of the Indian Right*. New Delhi: Penguin.
- Express News Service. 7 April 2019. "Wayanad UPSC winner Sreedhanya Suresh abused on social media". https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/2019/apr/07/wayanad-upsc-winner-sreedhanya-suresh-abused-on-social-media-1961184.html
- Ganguly, Anirban and Dwivedi, Shiwanand. 2019. *Amit Shah and the March of BJP*. New Delhi: Bloomsbury India
- Golwalkar, M S. 1966. A *Bunch of Thoughts*. Bangalore: Vikramprakashan
- Golwalkar, M S. 1939. *We, or Our Nationhood Defined*. Nagpur: Bharat Publications.
- Guha, Ramachandra. 2013. *Patriots and Partisans*. New Delhi: Penguin, p.69.
- Hansen, Thomas Blom. 1999. *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press
- Jaffrelot, Christophe.,Blom,T. and A. P. Chatterji. 2019. *Majoritarian State: How Hindu Nationalism Is Changing India.* New York: Harper Collins.
- Jaffrelot, Christophe. (ed.) 2007. *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader*, Permanent Black, New Delhi.
- Jaffrelot, Christophe. (ed.) 2005. *The Sangh Parivar: A Reader*, Oxford University Press, Delhi.
- Jha, Prashant. 2019. *How the BJP Wins: inside India's Greatest Election Machine*. New Delhi: Juggernaut
- Laul, Revati. 2018. *The Anatomy of Hate*. New Delhi: Context
- Golwalkar, M. S. 1939. *Our nationhood Defined*. Nagpur: Bharat Publications.
- Mukhopadhyay, Nilanjan. 2019. *The RSS: Icons of the Indian Right.* Chennair: Tranquebar. Organization, Penguin Adult.
- Noorani, A G. 2019. The RSS. New Delhi: LeftWord Book
- Overdorf, Jason . June 18, 2012. India: Meet the 'Internet Hindus'. *pri.org*. <https://www.pri.org/stories/2012-06-18/india-meet-internet-hindus>.
- Rushdie, Salman. 2013, February 1. 'A Cultural Emergency'. *Outlook*. Accessed on 27 February 2018. <http://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/a-cultural-emergency/283771>
- Savarkar, V D. 1925. *A Review of the Hindu Empire of Maharashtra*. B. G Paul & Co. Madras. NP.
- Savarkar, Vinayak Damodar. 1928. *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* Nagpur, 1928.
- Savarkar, Vinayak Damodar. 1949. Hindu RashtraDarshan: A Collection of Presidential Speeches Delivered from the Hindu Mahasabha Platform. Bombay: Khare,
- Savarkar, Vinayak Damodar. 1949/1984. My Transportation for Life. Trans. V. N. Naik. Bombay: Veer Savarkar Prakashan.
- Savarkar, Vinayak Damodar. 1985. Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History. Trans. and ed. S. T. Godbole. Bombay: Veer SavarkarPrakashan.
- Savarkar, V D. 1909. *The Indian War of Independence of 1857.* N P.
- Savarkar, Vinayak Damodar. 1970/1908. *The Indian War of Independence, 1857.* New Delhi: Rajdhani Granthnagar.
- Sharma, Jyotirmaya. 2019. *Hindutva: Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism*. New Delhi: Context

- sulekha.com. Varnas .. the Science behind it .. Part 4. Discussion. http://creative.sulekha.com/varnas-the-science-behind-it-part-4_434166_blog
- Ullekh, N. P. 2015. *War Room: The people, Tactics and Technology Behind Narendra Modi's 2014 Win*. New Delhi: Roli books
- Upadhyaya, Deendayal. 1958. *The Two Plans—Promises, Performances, Prospects.* Lucknow: Rashtradharma Prakashan.
- Upadhyaya, Deendayal. 1965. *Integral Humanism.* New Delhi: Bharatiya Jana Sangh.
- Upadhyaya, Deendayal. 1968. *Political Diary.* Bombay: Jaico Publishing House.
- Upadhyaya, Deendayal. 1960. The Problems of National Life'.
- Upadhyaya, Deendayal. 1965. Integral Humanism. (New Delhi: Bharatiya Jana Sangh, 1965).
- Upadhyaya, Deendayal. 1971. The Direction of National Life.

Bio Profile of the Authors

[1] Assistant Professor and H o D, Department of Political Science, Government Brennen College, Thalassery, Kannur, Kerala. Email-bijugayu@gmail.com

[2] Associate Professor and H o D, Department of Political Science, Government College Madappally, Vadakara, Calicut, Kerala, Email-gayubijuspeak@gmail.com