

## Article

# Hindu Nationalism Online: Twitter as Discourse and Interface

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**Abstract:** In this article, I use Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis (CTDA) to examine the productive associations between Twitter as a technological artifact and the quotidian discourse on Hindu nationalism online. The analysis explores the interplay between (1) Twitter as a technical artifact—examining the interface for its affordances and protocols; (2) Twitter as practice—unpacking the quotidian discourse conventions and strategies used to articulate Hindu nationalism; and (3) Twitter as ideology—examining how Hindutva ideology co-opts the platform’s affordances to promote anti-minority discrimination. My analysis highlights how the online discourse of Hindu nationalism is a constitutive force informing discussions and decisions concerning several vital issues related to governance, policies, citizenship, COVID-19, and other topics. The discourse of Hindu nationalism online has the potential to percolate into the lived realities of people and has material implications for the workings of the state.

**Keywords:** Hindu nationalism; technological affordance; discourse analysis; Twitter



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## 1. Introduction

This article examines the interlinkages between Twitter’s technical affordances and quotidian discourse conventions and strategies to promote Hindu nationalism online. I demonstrate that Twitter’s features and functionality are conducive to fostering anti-minority Hindu nationalism in cyberspace. I problematize the productive associations between the pro-Hindutva, anti-minority Indian government and the quotidian, majoritarian discourse on Twitter to reflect on the (de)evolving definitions of nationalism in India. A novel contribution of this article is that it situates the analysis of user-generated content in conversation with the macro forces of power, such as the state and news media. This article’s central argument is that Twitter’s technological affordances enable a communication environment conducive to articulating Hindu nationalism online. Though the state plays an undeniable role in promoting Hindutva nationalism, this article also highlights the potential of quotidian online practices and user-generated content in the online proliferation of Hindu nationalism. In exploring user-generated content, my analysis reveals that virtual enactments of the discriminatory ideology of Hindu nationalism have the potential to translate into corporeal violence against the religious Other.

The discourse around nationalism in India is often intentionally conflated with religious identities and used as a force field to promote the idea of a ‘Hindu-first’ India (Mohan 2015). Many right-wing groups and political actors have used Twitter to imagine India as a monolithic Hindu nation adhering to the dictates of the Hindutva ideology. Hindutva is a majoritarian political ideology that projects the Hindu self as the peaceful and rightful heir to the country. At the same time, the religious, caste, and gendered minorities are demonized as threats to the nation. These groups and political actors emphasize that only those Hindus who support the discriminatory Hindutva ideology qualify as ideal citizens of the country. Accordingly, several religious, caste, class, and gender minorities are categorized as outsiders who must be disciplined and constantly surveilled<sup>1</sup>.

Although there is substantial research on Hindu nationalism online, including cyber-Hindutva, few studies (Rao 2018; Therwath 2012; Udupa 2019) have explored the shifting discursive forms of Hindu nationalism as a meta-narrative and its connections with social

media platform affordances. This article uses a critical qualitative methodology to analyze Twitter data and emphasizes that quotidian discursive practices inform the dominant political and religious rationality in India. Online discourses influence people's understanding of concepts, such as dissent and public participation/deliberation. It is critical to examine how quotidian user-generated discourse, enabled by the platform's affordances, reifies politics of exclusion and the suppression of marginalized voices. First, it helps scholars examine the pervasiveness of Hindu nationalism and its implications for democracy. Second, it helps evaluate the potential of new media platforms, majoritarian and right-wing governments, and user-generated content to suppress voices of dissent through discursive intimidation (online abuse, harassment, and hate speech), legal sanctions, such as the abrogation of article 370 or the enactment of Citizenship Amendment Act in 2019 (Bhatia and Gajjala 2020; Basu 2018), and corporeal violence evident in instances in which caste and religious minorities are lynched (Khan and Lutful 2021).

In this article, I use Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis (Brock 2018) to examine the interplay between Twitter as a technological artifact and the online discourse of Hindu nationalism. This analysis focuses on exploring the discourse of nationalism (content as text) on Twitter and analyzing the role of the artifact (technology as text) in the creation and circulation of the content. I study Twitter-as-interface mediating the discourse of Hindu nationalism and the identity of far-right Hindus. I demonstrate how discourse on Hindu nationalism is enabled by Twitter's technical features and user-generated protocols. Using CTDA allows me to unpack how Twitter's affordances help mediate Hindu nationalism online. As Brock explains (p. 1025), "a CTDA discourse analysis, then, is critical not only of the content that people deploy as they use ICTs to write themselves into being but also of the ways that the medium 'hails' them into being as users."

Based on the analysis of 5786 tweets, this study highlights how Twitter's technocultural features, such as brevity, repeatability, and protocols for establishing authenticity, among others, are in concert with the discursive strategies used to perform Hindu nationalism online.

Scholars have examined how social media's affordances enable hate speech, disinformation, and fascist ideologies (Caiani and Borri 2014; Daniels 2009). Bossetta (2018) explains how several features of Twitter's digital architecture enable, constrain, or shape user behavior online. For instance, Twitter uses several algorithms based on the logic of popularity, networks, and payment structures to promote online products (accounts, tweets, and retweets). According to Mihailidis and Viotty (2017), the Twitter infrastructure is critical in generating and sustaining online environments conducive to creating disinformation and hate. Similarly, Bratslavsky et al. (2019) and Ott (2017) have argued that Twitter's digital architecture promotes incivility and encourages users to deploy hatred and bully dissenters. I endorse these arguments and provide empirical evidence to demonstrate how Twitter's platform affordances enable user-generated content designed to promote a discriminatory and exclusive understanding of nationalism in India.

A novel contribution of this article is that it demonstrates that Twitter enables discursive strategies that generate falsehood and discrimination. The media logic of Twitter supports online practices that are conducive to the large-scale circulation of Islamophobia, often translating into corporeal violence against Muslims in India. Findings in this article highlight how some technologies are designed in ways that reinforce and amplify existing biases. The article also argues that the ideology of Hindu nationalism simultaneously draws strength from and reifies discriminatory state laws and policies. Examining how macrostructures of power dovetail into everyday digital practices is critical to considering how quotidian online discourse has the potential to sustain regimes of corporeal and legal violence against the categorical Other.

Finally, my analysis reveals that online discourse on nationalism in India centers on hate speech to produce and sustain the Hindutva ideology that marginalizes minorities, especially Muslims. This article encourages scholars to examine how the dynamic nexus

between state–technology–users offers generative possibilities for analyzing the workings of majoritarian regimes of governance.

## 2. Hindutva Nationalism: Politics of Fear and Hate

The Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) is a right-wing Hindu nationalist political party that expanded from two parliamentary seats in 1980 to win two consecutive landslide national elections in 2014 and 2019. Since its inception, BJP has been embedded within the broader Hindu nationalist movement led by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). This RSS-led movement defines nationhood on a religious basis. It has developed an extensive network of grassroots organizations and workers to promote the Hindutva ideology among Hindus across the country. Though Hindu nationalism originates from the work and ideology of RSS, the BJP succeeded in mobilizing the electorate using the discourse on nationalism (Chidambaram 2020).

BJP's victory during India's general elections in 2014 also set a new phase in India's politics because BJP was the first political party to use social media extensively for political campaigns. Since then, the right-wing Hindu nationalist party has created an information technology cell—it uses social media and digital technologies to promote BJP as a pro-Hindu nationalist party and increase its voter base. The IT cell recruits tech-savvy volunteers to populate cyberspace with a pro-Narendra Modi discourse<sup>2</sup>. The primary technique adopted by the information technology cell of the party is to increase its volunteer base and use the volunteers' online labor to augment support for the party's pro-Hindutva and anti-minority (especially anti-Muslim) policies and practices<sup>3</sup>.

Social media users' participation in Hindu nationalism requires creating and cir content on Twitter (and other social media platforms) designed to evoke the fear that Muslims will take over the country. The online discourse on Hindu nationalism promotes the fear of cultural appropriation and loss of Hindu identity to mobilize support for the BJP. Deviance from this Hindutva ideology is disciplined, and offenders are punished through online practices such as trolling, abusing, reporting, stalking, and offline harassment (Bhatia 2021b; Udupa 2018).

The state forces are increasingly using digital media to normalize the politics of fear and a culture of silence in the country. For example, activists are arrested if they share online content that questions and challenges the government. The BJP also initiated the Cyber Crime Patrol program to encourage citizens and Internet users to register as cyber volunteers and report accounts of people perceived to be involved in unlawful and anti-national activities online<sup>4</sup>. This website describes illegal content as "content against the country's sovereignty, India's defenses, internal and international security, public order, and harmony." Far-right groups and Internet users in India often group all these categories under the label anti-national.

Interestingly, the term anti-national effectively roots the definition of nationalism in discourses of exclusion. The discursive intentionality of this term is to prevent people from practicing or articulating different versions of nationalism. The term anti-national is used to center the majoritarian Hindutva identity and deny other identities their right to identify with the Indian state. The majoritarian forces in India often use systems of corporeal punishments, such as incarceration, mob violence against minorities, and laws and policies to oppress and marginalize the religious Other. For instance, the police, at the government's behest, have pressed criminal charges against many activists for posting material considered anti-national, especially when the online content is designed to criticize the government's wrongdoings<sup>5</sup>. Any activity challenging the BJP is labeled anti-national because the governing political party with a pro-Hindutva ideology is projected as representing the Hindu nation. The nation is accessed through discursive strategies which equate nationalism to the Hindutva ideology, thus identifying the minorities as hostile outsiders (Fuchs 2016).

I argue that Hindu nationalism is not a predetermined reality and emerges as a subject position curated and adopted by people as they participate in and navigate cyberspace. This

constitutes examining “the practices and discourses that people engage in and embody” (Holland and Skinner 1997) to amplify the imagined ‘Hindu-first India’ ideology, practices, and policies. Such uses of everyday discourses to create “a collection of ideological habits” manifest as “unimaginative repetition” (Billig 1995, p. 35) of prejudice, biases, and violence and reproduce the Hindutva nation-state in the popular imagination. The state machinery in the form of the BJP and quotidian online practices of millions of Internet users constitute the politics of Hindu nationalism in urban India.

Additionally, the global conditions of migration reinforce the Hindu nationalism narrative. Hindu nationalism online is influenced by international events, such as post-9/11 politics, the discourse of the war on terror, and the anxiety experienced in a highly connected, ever-changing world (Rajagopal 2016). Hindu nationalism can be examined as a response to the effects of globalization in which people experience “ontological insecurities and existential anxieties” (Annavarapu 2013) as previously held local identities are threatened by transnational and transcultural forces. Though scholars (Beck 2002; Habermas 2001) have argued that the non-place accessible through media technologies will weaken political identities and loyalties tied to the nation-state, I argue that the concept of nationalism—tied to the physical territory of the nation-state, is only amplified by its expansion into the cyberspace, where it is conflated with more locally situated conceptualizations of identities, such as religion, caste, and gender. This produces exclusionary forms of nationalism.

Studies argue that these recent articulations of exclusionary nationalism rely on digital networks and platforms’ technical and discursive possibilities. Based on a comparative study examining populism in India, the United States, China, and Sweden, Schroeder argued that “digital media have been a necessary precondition for the success of right-wing populist movements, as they allowed circumventing traditional media gatekeepers” (Schroeder 2018). This is evident in the forms of abuses and online vitriol used by Hindutva nationalists in India to threaten and silence the dissent against the ruling party and reinforce Hindutva ideology in the country. Examining how nations and nationalism exist in cyberspace of global connections is crucial.

### 3. Methodology: Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis

The CTDA approach encourages scholars to adopt a multimodal analytical technique to understand how users ascribe meaning and function to technologies from within the felt contours of cultural beliefs and aspirations. In this article, the focus is to identify the distinct possibilities for the articulation of Hindu nationalism online. On several occasions, the BJP-led government has introduced and implemented policies to exert more control over the content published on Twitter. The GOI introduced the Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Code in February 2021 to regulate social media companies, online streaming platforms, and digital news organizations. These guidelines were introduced weeks after Twitter refused to comply with the government orders to take down tweets supporting and amplifying the farmers’ protest in India. During this phase, the Delhi police took orders from the central government, i.e., the BJP raided the Twitter office in Delhi. The government has continued to intimidate Twitter to comply with its demands to take down posts by journalists, political parties, and activists critical of the BJP. In July 2022, Twitter filed a lawsuit against the government alleging it had abused its power when it ordered Twitter to take down tweets from its platform disproportionately. Despite the company’s efforts to counter the government’s discriminatory policies, Twitter continues to support and often amplify far-right discourses and disinformation against minorities, especially Muslims (Bhatia and Arora 2022). Therefore, examining Twitter as a technological and cultural phenomenon with implications outside its text is critical.

Following this observation, I draw on Brock’s CTDA approach and examine Twitter as “an assemblage of artifacts, practices, and cultural beliefs” (Brock 2018, p. 1014). I unpack technology-as-text to read into the features of Twitter that allow for such enactments of identity and ideology to manifest. I use the CTDA to analyze:

1. Twitter as a technical artifact: Examine the interface's affordances and protocols;
2. Twitter as practice: Examine the commonly used discourse conventions and strategies used to articulate the Hindutva identity and Hindu nationalism;
3. Twitter as ideology: Examine the pervasiveness of the Hindutva ideology manifest as co-opting of the platform's affordances to stifle dissent.

### 3.1. Data Collection

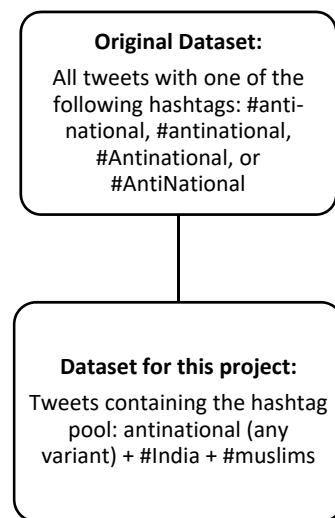
I used a python script and the Tweepy API to collect tweets (December 2019 to May 2020) that included the different variants of #anti-national as the search query ( $n = 30,470,555$ ). The term anti-national is primarily popularized by the BJP and right-leaning mainstream media channels to suggest acts of sedition. In Indian politics and mediascape, this term is widely used to describe citizens who protest anti-minority policies and practices, question the government, or challenge the neo-liberal and capitalist state policies. This term is used to base the definition of Indian nationalism on the logic of discrimination and exclusion. Accordingly, the dominant discourse on nationalism privileges the Hindutva ideology—the BJP and its supporters are established as true nationalists. Even when constitutionally valid and legally permissible, any action challenging their authority is delegitimized as an attack on the nation. I define the term anti-national as the interpretive limits imposed on the dominant understanding of nationalism in India, reinforcing the argument that nationalism and the Hindu religion are co-constitutive. Thus emerges the Hindu-first nation conceptualization of India.

The data collection process spanned over six months, starting in December 2019 and concluding in May 2020. This period witnessed two critical episodes demonstrating how the term anti-national was used to articulate the discourse of nationalism online. The first critical episode emerged in December 2019 when the BJP passed the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), granting citizenship on a religious basis. This led to several anti-CAA protests across the nation, with people, especially the discriminated Muslim community, demanding that the CAA be revoked as it was unconstitutional and discriminatory. The second critical episode following the anti-CAA protests was the spread of COVID-19 in India. Again, the Muslim community was falsely accused of spreading COVID-19 as a form of #coronajihad to attack Hindus (Bhatia and Arora 2022). During these critical episodes, Muslims were targeted as outsiders, discourses on nationalism revolved around politics of exclusion, and Twitter users deployed several disinformation strategies to articulate Hindu nationalism.

What can be observed in the tweets from the six-month data collection phase is that the Hindu nationalism discourse on Twitter was stretched and changed to accommodate discussions on the latest political issues and debates, especially those concerned with the anti-CAA/NRC protests and the spread of COVID-19.

I developed an automated extraction process in Python 3.7 to search the Twitter stream and extract data for the term anti-national, including the text of the tweet, who sent the tweet, and the date the tweet was sent. I removed the retweets to exclude duplicate content from the sample. To collect the larger data set of 20,370,555 tweets containing #anti-national, #antination, #Antination, and #AntiNational, I ran an extraction process once every week during the data collection period. The program was scripted to store this data as a JSON file. I concluded data collection in May because my output was saturated. This article is based on a smaller sample ( $n = 5786$ ) drawn from the larger data set, created to conduct an in-depth critical analysis of Hindu nationalism online. While the original data set included all the tweets with any variant of the term anti-national as a hashtag, for this project, I only selected tweets that contained all the three hashtags: India, anti-national (any variant), and Muslim. Figure 1 provides an illustrative representation of the data collection process.





**Figure 1.** Illustrative representation of the data collection process.

I used these three terms to create a hashtag pool as my search query because I witnessed the co-occurrence of these three terms across tweets within the larger data corpus. The content of tweets containing all the three hashtags explicitly established semantic interlinkages between the Tablighi Jamaat incident, anti-CAA protests, nationalism, and perceptions about Muslims in India and worldwide. The cleaned data corpus consisted of 5786 unique tweets. Figure 2 is a word cloud generated to highlight the most common words across the sample of 5786 tweets.



**Figure 2.** Word-cloud generated from the 5786 tweets.

### 3.2. Data Analysis

I used CTDA to analyze the sampled tweets. Brock defines ethnic groups (here, Hindus and Muslims) as a shared agreement between the in-group and out-group on what the in-group members say, believe, practice, and perform (2018). The focus on shared agreement plays a vital role in critically examining the nuances in how the Hindu and Muslim identities are enacted to articulate the discourse on Hindu nationalism. This is because such a conceptualization of shared agreement is fluid and defined in association with the dynamic nature of digital technologies. The agreed-upon characteristics and practices constantly change, thus decentering any fixed notions of Hindus and Muslims in relation to the articulation and performance of Hindu nationalism online. In other words, this concept allows me to explore how the identity and practices of each religious group change to speak to the different political events, contexts, and situations in the country. For

instance, the caste minorities are marginalized as the Other in a few cases. Conveniently, the caste minorities are called upon to practice solidarity with the Hindu community in their efforts to violate and abuse Muslims. Though there is a broader framework defining the categorical Other in the context of this majoritarian political milieu, the characteristics, and practices of the Other are dynamic and constantly modified to speak to specific political events and situations.

Three themes emerged from this analysis. Each theme highlights how the technology of Twitter emerges as both a discourse and an interface, thus highlighting the productive associations between the interface features of Twitter and the discursive strategies and articulations these enable.

#### **4. Technology-as-Discourse: Manufacturing Truth; Technology-as-Interface: User-Generated Content**

My data reveals that users deployed Twitter's affordances to design content creation practices antithetical to the social media's assumed potential and goal of democratizing conversations. User-generated content was supposed to usher in horizontal communication networks and increase the users' participation in public discourse. My analysis, however, highlights how the users designed discursive strategies to optimize the use of Twitter's affordances for exclusionary intentionalities and Islamophobia.

The user-generated content promoting anti-Muslim discourse in the sampled tweets followed two discursive strategies: (1) Construct the Hindu self as a tolerant, harmless entity under attack from the Islamic forces; and (2) Manufacture panic among Hindu people about the status, rights, and presence of Muslims in the country. Both these strategies and the ensuing discourses embed the fantasy of expanding the imagined Hindu Rashtra through expelling Muslims and other dissenting voices from the country. Let us examine each strategy with examples:

##### *4.1. Construct the Hindu-Self as Tolerant*

Twitter's emphasis on brevity allows users to create content based on the principles of dramatic narration. Such quick and easy-to-consume content is designed to escape questions about the data's authenticity and enables spectacles of disinformation vilifying Muslims. Discourses are forcefully simplified, and identities are essentialized. For instance, discourse on Hindu nationalism broadly represents the Hindus as tolerant while the Muslim Other is categorized as an #invader, #intruder, #fanatic, and #violent. To evade explanation and elaboration, the core features of authentic arguments, politically relevant and abusive hashtags, are generated to start trends on the platform. These include identity labels to limit and erase the variations and differences in the definitions and practices of Hindu and Muslim identities.

For instance, in India's Twitterscape, the Other is a conspiratorial alliance between secularists, socialists, communists, Muslims, dissenting caste minorities, and intellectuals, including critical scholars, teachers/professors, researchers, and students. For example, a user tweeted, "It would be in National Interest for #India to ban and #disband the @JNU, #AMU, @JMI, #JadavpurUniv which only churns out #Anti-national students and #Muslims (eating on Taxpayer's contribution) and who try to break India but don't add to India's development and #GDPGrowth." The Jawaharlal National University, Aligarh Muslim University, Jamia Milia Islamia, and Jadavpur University are the few educational spaces where students are encouraged to practice critical thinking, challenge, and question the government. Students from these universities were the first to protest the CAA and BJP. Since the Delhi police violently stormed two Muslim-dominated and state-funded universities, namely the Aligarh Muslim University in Uttar Pradesh and Jamia Milia Islamia, there was an upsurge in wide-scale student-led opposition movements challenging the Government of India's Hindu majoritarianism. It is important to note that the label #anti-national is the most frequently used word in the discourse on Hindu nationalism designed to exclude all forms of non-rightwing-Hindu identities. Accordingly, the discursive category

of the #anti-national has three core characteristics: they do not support the Hindutva ideology, challenge the government on its far-right pro-Hindutva approach, and promote secular ideas and practices.

#### 4.2. Manufacture Panic

Using hashtags to label sections of the population in India as antinational is effective in manufacturing panic about the repercussions of allowing minorities and other anti-establishment leaders, activists, and intellectuals to thrive in the country. Once the antinational accounts are identified and tagged with hashtags, pro-Hindutva users online generate a discourse highlighting the need to cancel, subdue, and discipline the dissenting voices. In a networked culture, hashtags allow Hindutva supporters to report accounts of people who question the government and silence them.

The #tukdetukdegang, for example, emerged as an effective label that limits the interpretability of nationalism to Hindu identity online. This hashtag was used in 29 percent of the sampled tweets. *Tukde* is a Hindi word and means “pieces.” The phrase *tukde tukde* refers to a group of people accused of trying to break India into small pieces because these dissenters refuse to accept that India is one big Hindu nation. The hashtag *tukdetukdegang* is imposed on people who critique the exclusionary politics of the BJP and challenge the idea of #Hinduunity and #Hindunation. Swara Bhaskar, for example, is an Indian actress who has been abused and bullied online for criticizing the BJP. Let us look at a tweet a user wrote referring to her: “Boycott her till @ReallySwara retires in some asylum or arrested along with other members of #TukdeTukdeGang for sedition #SwaraBhaskarGoBack #IndiaSupportsCAA #CAA2019 #Hindus #BJP #Anti-national #ShaheenBaghKaSach, #muslims, #india”. Like Swara, activists, protestors, educators, and anti-establishment critics are considered a threat to the nation. The right-leaning media and internet users have popularized that this group will break India into pieces, i.e., *tukde tukde*, with their secular principles and policies.

Twitter discourse on Hindu nationalism is an epistemological practice in brevity and unaccountability through which negative perceptions about the Other are normalized, and panic about the existence of the Other is manufactured. According to a Twitter user, anyone questioning the BJP government should be stripped of their voting rights, imprisoned, and beaten to death. Many such tweets contained personal details of people labeled as anti-national and anti-Hindu, often accompanied by requests to arrest, punish, and reprimand them. This is a discursive strategy of co-opting the infrastructure’s assumed intentionality of promoting transparency to marginalize the Other by issuing online threats, posting their personal information online, and encouraging others to violate these users in physical spaces. As is evident, Twitter’s infrastructural affordance of forging networks and using hashtags to influence public discourse is co-opted to discursively violate and threaten voices of dissent, thus limiting the interpretation of nationalism and reinforcing the authority of Hindutva politics in India.

### 5. Technology-as-Discourse: Reimagining History; Technology-as-Interface: User Protocols and Conventions

Twitter allows users to generate content using a wide range of semantic features. From using symbols to creating shared conversational protocols, users enact authority in the process of meaning-making and interactions. The construction of ideological truths on Twitter is based on the practices of repeatability and circulation (Ott and Dickinson 2019). In other words, the frequency with which a statement is (re)tweeted determines its scope and acceptability. The discursive strategy of co-opting the affordances for promoting exclusionary narratives manifests as the process of harnessing extreme right-wing networks on Twitter with the help of customized hashtags. These hashtags are sometimes introduced by BJP’s political leaders and mainstream media channels with a pro-Hindutva agenda and gain momentum when circulated across the pro-Hindutva networks. Additionally, the



users design discursive strategies to appropriate history and decontextualize the content as a way of reifying an exclusionary understanding of nationalism.

A case-in-point directs us towards examining the constant and repeated referencing of the history of the Indo-Pakistan partition on religious grounds to delegitimize the presence of Muslims in India. In many tweets, Pakistan was invoked as both an enemy state of India and the home country for Muslims. Most threats to the Other involved asking Muslims to leave India and go to Pakistan. The historicity of India–Pakistan relations are used to label all Muslims in India as anti-India, thus justifying discrimination against them. Let us look at the following tweets,

- Let's do it this way in India ... First, capture Pakistan ... Then move all anti-national #liberal #leftovers (LEFT WING), Muslims, ShaheenBagh, Protesters, Gandhi (SG, RG, PGW) ...
- F off all left journalists!! You are being paid by #china or Pakistan. You lot would sell your mothers to make Money! Being #ANTI-NATIONAL Is Being Cool To You. Your bastards eat here shit here n f\*\*\* your maa here too ...
- #Anti-nationals, how dare you question against @BJPLive @PiyushGoyal? Pakistan jaana h tereko [do you want to go to Pakistan]? @girirajsinghbjp I request @narendramodi @AmitShah and concerned officials to please charge him with sedition. Save my #nation.

These tweets illustrate that the Hindu–Muslim relations and Hindu nationalism in India are informed by the process of reimagining history towards determinate ideological ends. Twitter allows users to decontextualize information available on the Internet. These strategies often use parts of a news event and frame it to create a false narrative. They also produce doctored audio-video reports and present these as objective news sources to reify their ideological propaganda.

Reimagining history through inauthentic and false user-generated content involves the process of memorialization—calling attention to the maleficent Muslim presence in India by digitally labeling mosques and Muslim neighborhoods as enclaves for terrorism and antisocial activities. In many tweets criticizing the anti-CAA protests in Delhi, Jamia Ismailia, a national university with many Muslim students and professors, was called a terrorist den. In one such tweet, the user wrote, “Listened to the speech of #SharjeelImam. It's full of hate, and talking about cutting off the northeast from the rest of the country is #Sedition. The sooner he is arrested, the better it is. #JNU is really a #terroristden of Islamist #Anti-national elements.” Sharjeel Imam, a JNU student, gave a radical speech at the Aligarh Muslim University, highlighting the oppression of Muslims and violence against them in India. In this speech, he suggests that Muslims in Assam should call for a *chakka jam* (road blockade) on the highway to Assam to highlight the atrocities against Muslims in Assam and the construction of a detention center to hold those who fail to provide documentation of their citizenship status. Though his speech was controversial, it was not representative of the ethos and values of the anti-CAA protests at Jamia, Shaheen Bagh, JNU, and other protest sites in Delhi. Sharjeel Imam was denied a stage at Shaheen Bagh. He also expressed grievances with the secular credentials of the anti-CAA protests. However, many Twitter users emphasized that his speech represented the Muslim community. They used practices of digital labeling and excessive repetition through the large-scale circulation of anti-Muslim narratives to frame anti-CAA protests as anti-national, leaving little scope for alternative explanations to emerge.

Content circulated on Twitter used principles of storytelling to establish concocted narratives as facts. Users often deployed creative liberties enabled by Twitter, especially the process of creating memes, and circulated these as evidence. This allowed the users to create “truth effects” by appropriating the authority to preside over knowledge production and circulation. The Twitter interface supports sensational and brief content to grab users' attention while scrolling. Discursive strategies to promote falsehood, lies, and fake news through techniques of satire and sarcasm were thus used extensively to ascribe criminality to the Muslim Other and reify the dehumanization of the minority.

The systemic demonization and depersonalization of the Other to reify the myth of the tolerant Hindu self is an essential vocabulary in the everyday online discourse around Hindu nationalism. As is evident in the tweet, “We do not hate Muslims ... But look at the man #sharjeelusmani ... Living in India and still speaking against India ... People like him are a shame for our country ... Make him famous guys ...”. Many similar tweets discursively situated the Muslim Other on the margins of a Hindu center and deployed radical fringe voices from the Muslim community to accuse them of destabilizing the righteous Hindu center. They reinforced the center–margin binary, the self–other opposition, and the Hindu–Muslim animosity as historical and irrevocable.

Examining these discursive strategies of digital co-opting, reimagining history, and demonizing and depersonalizing the Other allows us to explore the online quotidian practices used to justify discrimination. The content in these tweets used references to history and ancient Hindu culture to claim that the Muslim agenda of spreading Islam in India is the truth that secular and modern forces have buried. The central claim was that Hindus could help uncover this truth by referring to the glorious Hindu past.

The language and intentionality of these tweets are a part of what is called the “jargon of authenticity” (Adorno 2002), i.e., deploying the discourse of return and rediscovery to claim authenticity for the Hindutva discourse—its exclusionary politics and the consequent online violence against Muslims. Violence against Muslims is framed as a strategy of self-preservation, as a disciplinary technique, and never as an ideological bias and prejudice of Hindutva. Reinforcing Manichean binaries of Hindu (natives)–Muslim (invaders) through online quotidian practices is instrumental in generating a discourse of nationalism wherein discrimination against Muslims is identified as a “valid reaction” to years of oppression the Hindus have suffered.

The history and manufactured narratives of the past are portrayed as irrefutable truths that remain incomprehensible to the modern and secular people and political parties. The discursive intentionality is to re-create conflict and recall past inter-community violence and loss. Based on my analysis, I argue for a need to problematize our understanding of the influence of modernity and technological advancements on the subtle forms of nationalistic articulations online. The infrastructure of Twitter weakens the distinction between authorized and non-authorized speakers in processes of meaning-making, as Twitter’s media logic emphasizes practices of informality, privileges speed over accuracy and validation, and sustains ephemerality of data and possibilities of cloaking authorship (Daniels 2009). This severely limits how authenticity is established and increases the scope for discriminatory discourse and hate speech to emerge and flourish on Twitter.

The quotidian discourse of Hindu nationalism on Twitter attempts to rewrite history to generate an interpretive field based on the articulation of Manichean binaries. To do this, already available historical accounts are decontextualized to promote a false, pro-Hindutva narrative.

## **6. Technology-as-Discourse: Culture of Abuse; Technology-as-Interface: Anonymity and Deniability**

The Twitter infrastructure allows for decontextualized-textual collages to be used as evidence. Also, Twitter allows trolling, harassing, and threatening others online because it offers anonymization as a technical possibility. Fifty-nine percent of the Twitter profiles analyzed in this study that promoted the anti-Muslim discourse as enacting nationalism online were registered anonymously.

Given the infrastructural possibilities of enacting Hindu nationalism anonymously and through bots, deploying threats against the #anti-nationals and creating hysteria about the security of Hindus in India is easy to accomplish. According to the dominant discourses on security, insecurities are unavoidable facts to protect from which a security system is created. Anand (2016), however, draws from the field of critical international relations to suggest that security is a productive discourse and “it produces insecurities to be operated upon.” In other words, it attends to the process through which an entity, individual, or

community is discursively produced as a threat/insecurity against which the Self needs to be protected (see also Campbell 1998; Krause and Williams 1997; Lipschutz 1995; Weldes et al. 1999). Thus, discourses on threats and securities are co-constitutive and generate a culture of online abuse. Table 1 provides a list of tweets exemplifying how concepts of (in)security and threat emerged in the sampled tweets.

**Table 1.** Tweets related to (in)security and threat.

Tweet	Analysis
All those who roar that #safoorazargar should be released should REMEMBER that SHE was NOT A FREEDOM FIGHTER. She was an ANTI #India activist. You, too, are being #Anti-national by supporting people like her.	Safoora Zargar is a student activist who participated in organizing and mobilizing for the anti-CAA protests in India. She was falsely charged with instigating riots in Delhi following the demonstrations. People like her are constructed as threats to the security of the imagined Hindu Rashtra because they actively question and challenge the rise of exclusionary religious nationalism in India. They are called pests—they are accused of hollowing out the Hindu fabric of Indian society. People justified Safoora’s arrest. They argued that if she was not disciplined, she might encourage others to continue their dissent against the far-right Hindutva groups.
The need for awareness at a much higher level is required by those sitting at #Shaheenbaghprotest and will continue on #JantaCurfewMarch22 too. Now they have proved that they are #Anti-national #AntiHuman and #AntiHumanity. These shameless creeps are not less than terrorists now.	Producing the Other as a threat requires creating falsehood and spreading rumors. In this tweet, the user insisted that people protesting the CAA and NRC at Shaheen Bagh continued their sit-in protest in a clear violation of the COVID-19-related curfew guidelines imposed by the government to control the spread of the virus. In reality, the protestors at Shaheen Bagh had left a pair of shoes at the protest site to mark their presence and followed the curfew guidelines diligently. Repeated lies and falsehoods have the potential to create affiliative truths. People on the same end of the ideological spectrum often ascribe to these affiliative truths to validate their ideas and for various other political reasons. This can also generate both action and affiliation.
The minute I put up a tag, all these <i>mulles</i> [religious slur for Muslims] gather to attack. They have a problem in saying #vandematram, they have an issue in singing #janganman, they have a problem if we say #pakistan murdabad but will shout #anti-national slogan, and then they say #stoptargetingmuslim my dick. This is exactly what we will do here #Dawoodibrahim #safoorazargar.)	It is critical to note how users create links between Muslim protestors, here Safoora Zargar, and notorious Muslim gangsters like Dawood Ibrahim. This allows them to villainize Muslim protestors’ democratic right to dissent as activities designed to threaten the country’s security.

“The acts of #RadicalIslamists in #India in the fight against #Covid19 has been nothing less than #Anti-national... They are hellbent on defying @narendramodi repeated requests... For them, this is #Jihad against all others in #India”. This tweet best exemplifies how the Muslim community is produced as a threat in India by an anonymous user.

This tweet is about the #Tablighijamaat case in which an FIR was registered against Tablighi Jamaat Maulana for leading a congregation in the Nizamuddin West area of Delhi, allegedly in violation of the Delhi government’s orders prohibiting religious gatherings due to the Coronavirus threat. On Twitter, however, this case was used to demonize

the entire community as a threat to the well-being of a peace-loving Hindu majority. Several anonymous Twitter profiles repeatedly retweeted hateful messages on this issue and ensured that the Tablighi Jamaat case was trending on India's Twitterscape. Many pro-Hindutva news channels, such as Zee News, Sudharshan TV, Republic TV, ABP news, and others, reinforced this trend and started anti-Muslim propaganda during the Covid situation. They accused the Muslim community of being super spreaders, practicing Corona Jihad, and infecting as many Hindus as possible. The use of hyperlinks to news snippets and articles published by these news channels to support hateful tweets sustained the online trend of abusing Muslims. Streams of tweets projecting Muslims as anti-national were intertwined with the discourse on insecurity and representations of danger. A Twitter user wrote, "It's a clear anti-national anti-Indian behavior; these people are not obeying law and order of the country. Instead of trying the usual jihadi tactics of blaming administration & government. #CoronaJihad #antiindian #anti-national behavior. They want fatwa and Sharia here?".

Discourse on Hindu nationalism on Twitter can be examined as a set of discursive strategies of abuse to reinforce three critical insecurities: (1) The spread of Islam and the rise of Muslims in India; (2) The death of Hindus and the Hindu culture at the hands of Islamic laws and traditions; and (3) The removal of Narendra Modi (the protector of Hindus) from his position as the Prime Minister of the country. These insecurities manifest in how the discourse on nationalism is curated to delegitimize everyone who questions the Hindutva ideology and the BJP.

The definition of who is anti-national has roots in strategies to curb dissent based on the argument that questioning or challenging the government and administration implies disrespecting the nation and threatening its security. The Twitter interface allows online mobs, including users and bots, to identify voices of dissent online. These users are then abused and harassed by online mobs, and their Twitter accounts are reported incessantly. This is an effective strategy for disbanding marginal and dissenting voices from the platform and silencing them. Let us look at the following tweets:

- Aren't they sloganeering for breaking up India? Bloody bastards, these are how #naxalities & #jihadis are born . . . let us report this account and ban them from Twitter.
- #delhipolice, #governmentofindia, #BJP arrest this anti-nationals, these #tablighijamaatis. You know who they are and what they are saying. Use #uapa to arrest them and never let them get bail. Let these rats rot in prison.

In the sampled tweets, the representation of Muslims as a threat to the Hindu majority is often accompanied by discursive practices of dehumanization and depersonalization of the Other. In the tweets, Muslims were often referred to as vermin, pests, insects, and termites to express that they were infesting, eating away, ruining, and destroying the Hindu nation. In one such tweet, a user expresses disgust towards the Muslim community and writes, "Yes #Modiji stopped illegal pig production in #india and demographic changing factories including inherent terror factories which #anti-national #UrbanNaxals<sup>6</sup> gang filled with vermin built over seven decades. To rebuild, you may need more than two decades for sure. I pray Muslims head for extinction". Representing Muslims as a threat to the Hindu majority normalizes the process of regulating, monitoring, surveilling, and punishing Muslims. Also, using a Roman script to write abusive Hindi words is an effective strategy to evade hate speech monitoring systems.

Proponents of Hindu nationalism employ discursive strategies of threat to create insecurities among the Hindu masses, thus legitimizing the continued oppression of Muslims. For instance, a Twitter user insisted, "#India needs a Massacre... not many just some #anti-national will do... @narendramodi @PMOIndia". Many such tweets in the data corpus requested @BJPforIndia, the @PMO, @HMO, and other governing/political authorities of India to arrest, shoot, kill, and exterminate Muslims. For instance, one Twitter user tweeted, "@BJP4India are bloody slow. They should shoot more and more #ANTI-NATIONAL and #IslamicTerrorist. We must counter this explosive #muslimpopulation (in a literal sense)".

According to the online discourse on Hindutva nationalism, the Muslim Other and those who challenge the government are targeted as threats to the imagined Hindu nation. This discursive strategy of dehumanizing the Muslim Other online justifies the macro politics of hate promoted by the BJP and the Hindutva followers against Muslims and other dissenting minorities. The politics of hate manifests in the offline and lived experiences of Muslims in various ways when: lynching Muslim cow traders is justified as a measure to prevent them from killing an animal considered sacred according to the Hindu traditions (Banaji 2018); academicians, activists, and protestors are arrested based on the allegations that their online posts and tweets are anti-national; unsuspecting Muslim men are combed from their homes because they were seen protesting against government policies or decisions (Bhatia 2021a).

The discursive strategy to produce insecurities through online engagement reveals how Hindu nationalism on Twitter legitimizes and reinforces the use of violence against minorities, pushing them further to the margins to protect the Hindu-nation-in-making. According to this majoritarian discourse on Twitter, Muslims must be silenced to allow the Hindus to build an undisputable collective identity.

### 7. Technology-as-Discourse: Silencing; Technology-as-Interface: Networks and Visibility

“How to deal with rioters & their sympathizers? Shut down the Internet! Shut down the Media! Send military & teach them a lesson. Make a documentary about these rioters & show the true face of these so-called innocent ...”. Tweets like these are illustrative of two discursive strategies practiced using Twitter’s technical affordances. There are two ways in which the technological affordances of Twitter were used to circulate anti-Muslim discourse online. The first strategy involved calling for sanctions to regulate and discipline those users who created and promoted anti-BJP discourse on Twitter. Sanctions imposed on speaking, verbalizing, and being heard are techniques of controlling and regulating the conduct of the masses. Within this theoretical framework, online discourse on Hindu nationalism can be conceived as the practice of silencing. Discursive silence is a violent and powerful strategy used to delegitimize the Other and dismiss their experiences of oppression. It is anchored on prohibitions that deny the silenced Other the opportunities to practice their identity and politics. Two commonly used techniques to discursively silence the Other in the sampled tweets are self-victimization and online vitriol.

Self-victimization refers to the process of creating tweets and narratives which allow far-right Hindu nationalists to operationalize the Hindu community as a persecuted majority in India. Twitter users executed an imagined Hindu nationalist identity destroyed by the invasive outsiders, especially the Mughals. This imagination and the Manichean boundary between the authentic Hindu Indian and the Muslim outsider are staged across the country through digital networks. Such a meta-narrative of us versus them subsumes various other forms of Hindutva ideology under a broad strategic stroke of Hindu nationalism.

A Twitter user wrote, “#Hinduism for a Hindu conversion means a change from brute level to the spiritual level. If conversion uproots cultural & national values and makes a man #anti-national & rebellious, no society can tolerate it. Poor Hindus have become a soft target of predators ...”. Some common themes within this strategy of discursive silencing include references to the ancient land of sages and gold, Hindu civilizational glory, the sacred cow, and making India a global power by restoring it to its former Hindu glory.

Let us look at the following tweets to understand how Hindus are represented as the persecuted majority and victims of secular ideology.

- #Anti-national #AnarchistLobby doesn’t know that Hinduism in #India is the oldest civilization that has always respected diversity, accepted all faiths, and respectfully tolerated dissent as our culture. They are breaking the Hindu nation. Hindus are killed every day; sages are murdered in broad daylight. Futile efforts in destabilizing the country by trying to create #Anarchy. Shame on you.



- #SoniaGandhi<sup>7</sup> will #not #condemn #Lynching of #Sadhus in #india is understood as she is #christianmissionaries, but #Silence of @narendramodi proves that he has #surrendered himself in front of #AntiHindu and #Anti-national powers.
- After #Ramayana, most of the ppl have started texting & having conversations in shuddh Hindi [pure Hindi], But some people are getting frustrated. Do you think they are #Anti-national?...

All these tweets promote the narrative of the Hindu victim who has suffered years of persecution at the hands of invading Islamic and Christian forces. The perennial and trending Hindutva discourse occupies and populates digital networks and spaces, thus severely limiting the possibilities for minorities to narrativize and generate discussions of their oppression. A critical observation from the sampled tweets revealed that none of the tweets attempted to analyze how violence, oppression, and discrimination are embedded in Hinduism—evident in its caste system, gender-based discrimination, and other forms of rituals and practices.

Discourse on Twitter operates within networked forms of communication in which the hashtag pools determine the popularity and significance of the topic. When Hindu nationalists in India use digital networks to identify as victims, they systematically dismiss and obscure the oppression of Muslims and other minorities. This process legitimizes Hindutva's claim to regain rights over India's political, discursive, social, and cultural milieu.

The second strategy to create discursive silence is to abuse the Other and engender politics of fear. Online abuse is a critical analytical category in examining Hindu nationalism discourse. On the one hand, the technical affordances of Twitter, such as connectivity and anonymity, embed distance and deniability. Here, deniability and distance refer to the continued protection of abusive individuals from regulatory actions or social sanctions that favor civil conversations. Twitter users who abuse others online are often protected from providing any accountability for their actions. People who are abused and threatened often suffer consequences. For instance, many Twitter users, especially from the minority communities or the dissenting voices, have been threatened with charges of sedition and arrested for what they say and write on Twitter, other social media platforms, and in public forums (Zargar 2022).

A tweet read, "@umarkhalidJNU is the mastermind behind Delhi riots. He is plotting against the country. He should be hanged under UAPA. #Hypocrites #Anti-national #kanhaiyakumar #india"<sup>8</sup>. Many such tweets named and threatened dissenting voices and accused them of organizing riots and violence against Hindus in India. The online discourse on Hindu nationalism creates fear among those who challenge the BJP (Bhatia 2021a) and results in offline, real-time arrests of student leaders, members of the opposition parties, and even ordinary people under the pretext that they are promoting an anti-national agenda.

Within this culture of silence, gender-based abuses are extended toward women who question or reject Hindu nationalism. For instance, many female journalists are referred to as 'presstitutes' (press + prostitutes) in the sampled tweets and shamed with moral debauchery and sexual promiscuity allegations. Many tweets related to the arrest of female student activist/leader Safoora connected with the anti-CAA protests and riots in Delhi revolved around her pregnancy. During her detention, Safoora was reported to be in her first trimester. Many Twitter users deployed a gendered trope to create a narrative for shaming Safoora, accusing her of having engaged in illicit sexual relations during the protests. They wrote that Shaheen Bagh, the site of these protests, was where minorities and students were openly involved in sexual activities. Many users asked for the name of Safoora's husband to shame her. For instance, a tweet read, "The nation wants to know Where is Safooras Husband? Many people are saying the pregnancy is 'Kudrati' [natural] one like the 'Kudrati' Biryani. So please ask him to come out and clear the doubt. Kaags k saat [with papers]. #safoorazargar #pregnant." The misogyny inherent in

Hindu nationalism discursively plays out on women's bodies as female users were verbally assaulted, given rape threats, and shamed on Twitter.

Examples of tweets using gender-based abuse to practice Hindu nationalism:

1. Because prostitutes are paid for anti-national propaganda. Republic Bharat and India all should boycott. Burkha Dutt sleeps with anti-national people. Taking their d\*\*\* in her mouth with happiness. #bhadvi.
2. No one will touch used goods like Burkha Dutt and Swara Bhaskar. We should all boycott them. Save India.
3. Swara Bhaskar is getting funds from anti-national agencies and wants to become and big celebrity by spilling venomous lies against the Indian government. All she can do is finger herself. Do not let this feminazi finger with our country.
4. Feminism is anti-national, and this is a live example that they have a problem with Diwali. Sonam Kapoor, Kanika Kapoor, and Neha Dhupia are all cancer. Feminism is cancer.
5. It seems the tukdetukde gang has gathered against our country's constitution.. whenever I see Kamra's tweet, and then respected feminists like Swara and Barkha Dutt are waiting to lick his dick. India supports CAA. I am with the nation.

## 8. Conclusions: Hindu Nationalism on Twitter

My analysis has two significant implications: First, it unpacks the online discourse of nationalism performed through quotidian online practices. Thousands of tweets using the hashtag anti-national emerged during the data scraping process. Still, it is critical to acknowledge that many people continue to converse and use regional languages in India. The tweets in regional languages are beyond the scope of this study. Still, regional tweets are rich sites for understanding how people modify social media use based on their cultures and lived realities. Also, many tweets in this data set were written using the Hindi vocabulary and English script.

Second, my analysis highlights how the online discourse of Hindu nationalism is a constitutive force informing the larger political discourses around several vital issues related to the government, policies, citizenship, COVID-19, and other topics. The discourse of Hindu nationalism online often emerges from and percolates the lived realities of people and has material and corporeal implications for marginalized communities in the country.

The discourse of Hindu nationalism shapes people's collective imagination about political, social, and national identities through discursive engagement and everyday online practices. My analysis reflects how Hindu nationalism is not manufactured merely by people and organizations in power through a pre-planned and systematic media campaign. Hindu nationalism is practiced and articulated by people daily and supported by technological affordances, interface features, and protocols. Twitter is a powerful platform through which a bottom-up understanding of Hindu nationalism is generated, shaped, and reified by millions of users who tweet every day.

This study has limitations: First, it examines only one platform, Twitter, and the choice of keywords narrows its scope. Second, the sampled tweets collected using the search query "anti-national" include extremely discriminatory, far-right, and provocative discourse. This sample could eclipse the more moderate voices and discourses on nationalism in India. Also, only English keywords were used to create the database, excluding the Twitter discussion on nationalism with hashtags in other languages. Future research could examine the everyday online discourse on nationalism on other platforms, especially WhatsApp, which serve as enclosed private spaces and are difficult to access. Studies indicate that many people in India use WhatsApp to create discourses and narratives promoting a Hindu-first understanding of nationalism among online peer and family networks and circulating fake news discriminating against Muslims and other minorities. Comparative studies examining differences in affordances and interface designs across platforms and how these inform the discourse on nationalism can be a critical contribution in the field.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> At several places throughout the article, I acknowledge that several caste and gender minorities are identified and excluded as the Other within Hindutva. Also, the upper-caste Hindu heteronormative man continues to occupy a position of power and dominance. Though the BJP rhetorically supports the concept of a united Hindu community, upper-caste communities continue to discriminate against Dalits and Bahujans. There are many studies examining the digital practices of Dalits and Bahujans in India. In this article, however, the theoretical scope is limited to unpacking the power relations between Hindus and Muslims at both epistemological and ontological levels.
- <sup>2</sup> Narendra Modi is the Prime Minister of India, first elected in 2014 and serving his second consecutive term in this elected position. He is a member of the RSS and supports the Hindutva ideology. Under his governance, anti-minority policies and laws have been implemented or used indiscriminately. These include the Citizenship Amendment Act, Abrogation of Article 370, the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, 1967, and the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Prevention Act, 1987.
- <sup>3</sup> Chopra (2008) explains that according to online Hindu nationalists, using the Internet is essentially a convergence of enacting all three identities—Hindu, Indian, and Global. Hindu nationalists promote an online discourse of nationalism centered on the Hindu identity. According to Basu, Hindu nationalism is “... a normative informational ecology [where] ... the range of possibilities pertaining to narration, aesthetics, or ideology [are] already narrowed and committed to a majoritarian ontology of being ... there are increasingly limited ways of being nationalist” (Basu 2020, p. 201).
- <sup>4</sup> For more information, visit [https://cybervolunteer.mha.gov.in/webform/Volunteer\\_AuthoLogin.aspx](https://cybervolunteer.mha.gov.in/webform/Volunteer_AuthoLogin.aspx) (accessed on 12 December 2021).
- <sup>5</sup> For more information, read *The updated list of India's 'anti-nationals' (according to the Modi government)*. Available at <https://thewire.in/rights/india-modi-anti-national-protest-arrest-sedition-authoritarianism> (accessed on 13 June 2021).
- <sup>6</sup> The term urban Naxal was popularized by the right-wing and pro-BJP and pro-Hindutva filmmaker Vivek Agnihotri in an essay titled *Urban Naxalism: Strategy And Modus Operandi*. He defines urban Naxals as people who spread insurgency in the country and are under the police's radar. Agnihotri uses this term to criticize all the intellectuals, activists, and leaders who challenge the BJP government and its majoritarian politics. Student activists such as Safoora Zargar, Umar Khalid, and Aamir Aziz, academicians such as Indian historian Romila Thapar, activist-professor Nivedita Menon, and others are often labeled as insurgents and urban Naxals.
- <sup>7</sup> Sonia Gandhi is the president of the Indian National Congress, an opposition party in India.
- <sup>8</sup> Umar Khalid is an Indian activist and a former student of Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi. Kanhaiya Kumar is an Indian political activist who served as the president of the Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union and the All India Students Federation leader.

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