

# EXEMPLAR

THE JOURNAL OF SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES

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**SPECIAL ISSUE:  
THE MEANING OF MODI**



**South Asian Studies Association**

Understanding South Asia's Cultures, Histories, Issues, and Opportunities

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# EXEMPLAR

## THE JOURNAL OF SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES

South Asian Studies Association  
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*Exemplar* is a peer-reviewed journal dedicated to the field of South Asian Studies. We publish discipline-specific, interdisciplinary and cross-cultural articles, interviews, and creative writings on the literatures, the histories, the politics, and the arts whose focus, locales, or subjects involve South Asia.

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## DHANYAVAD

“Workers know workers.” I’ve said that many times to our Director of Publications and President, Bill Vanderbok. What I have meant by that is that those who work for another’s good, or for the success of a project, do not usually (in my limited experience) do so for the praise or recognition that may or may not come with that work. In fact, most of the nitty-gritty work, at least in an academic setting, goes unnoticed by those who benefit from the work being done. But “workers know workers”: those who do the heavy lifting recognize the amount of such unrecognized work in any project, and respect those who have done that work. Bill lifts heavy things; he’s a worker. Quietly, sometimes surreptitiously, he does the yeoman’s share of work. SASA remains viable as a continuing organization because of his work. SASA’s online presence is robust because of him. SASA Books exists as an avenue for scholars to publish their significant work because of him. *Exemplar* exists because of him. This is especially true of this issue, where Bill stepped in to assume an even greater workload, as he shouldered the editorial responsibilities for this number. I know you, Bill Vanderbok. And I am humbled by your work.

Joe Pellegrino  
Managing Editor



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## Modi-Era Nationalism and the Rise of Cyber-Activism

Juli L. Gittinger

In early 2014, a new book by University of Chicago professor Wendy Doniger was recalled in India, with demands for existing copies to be destroyed. The book, titled *The Hindus: An Alternative History*, was criticized as being unflattering and inaccurate by hardliners among the Sangh Parivar and, as a result of this pressure, Penguin Books agreed to withdraw all published copies from India. The recall was a costly one, not only to Penguin, who subsequently pulped the remaining copies, but also to the idea of an unrestrained public sphere of discourse in India. The book is criticized on a number of points, ranging from the inaccuracy of several dates and maps to a misplaced application of Freudian psychoanalysis. The greatest criticism, however, seems to be her privileging of incidents and tales to “conveniently fit a narrative of an erotic, exotic, mythologically rife Hinduism whose portrayal is actually alien, and often insulting, to adherents of that tradition” (“Indian Censorship”).

Doniger’s broad-ranging scholarship on Hinduism covers many mythic and erotic themes. However, Doniger makes no claims to strict textual interpretations or comprehensive historical surveys, or that her book is *the* authoritative text on Hinduism. To the contrary, the title alone indicates that she offers an *alternate* history, one which anticipates controversy in its core engagement with the issue of “authenticity.” The furor surrounding this book, swirling around the public presentation of Hinduism, was in part fueled by the ability to so quickly and widely disseminate information across new media.

Several social and media critics have expressed a fear that this incident reflects a growing intolerance of opinions or scholarship that may present a challenging, even contrary, understanding of Hinduism. Doniger has not been the only academic affected; Dr. Penny Vera-Sanso, a British scholar of gender relations in urban and rural India, was refused entry at the Hyderabad airport in June 2014, and in July 2014 Dr. Mridu Rai, author of *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Rights and the History of Kashmir*, had her lecture cancelled at a Srinagar hotel by local police invoking Section 144 (unlawful assembly). Whether or not the Modi era heralds a particular intolerance is not yet evident, but these incidents reflect growing ten-

sions around the definitions of “Hindu” and “Hinduism” in media, and a very conscious effort to mitigate negative or contrary discourse in a very public arena.

This article addresses Hindu nationalist idealizations of “Hindu” and “Hinduism” as encountered online, and the rise of cyber activism among BJP followers in an effort to “manage” the production and presentation of these terms in the electronic public sphere. These activists are scattered across India as well as the diasporic populations, but come together to rally around a singular banner: the charismatic figure of Narendra Modi.

### Modi, the BJP, and Technology

One look at Narendra Modi’s website reveals several observations: first, that Modi does not underestimate the power or utilitarian value of new media, and second, that Modi has a skilled team of techs at his disposal. The slick navigation and aesthetic presentations of the website aside, Modi’s website—and his general presence online—usher in a new era for the BJP in which they are actively engaged in the presentation, promotion, and management of *Hindutva* ideology online.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, “Indian People’s Party”) is no stranger to technology, and has a history of utilizing media deftly and effectively. In 1992, BJP leader L.K. Advani undertook a *Ram Rath Yatra*, or chariot procession, across India to stir up support for the building of a Ram temple at the parahistorical site of his birth in Ayodhya—a campaign that drew from the well of “Ram fever” that Sagar’s *Ramayan* television serial had stirred up a few years earlier. The quasi-religious gestures of Advani posed with bow drawn perched atop his Toyota “chariot” were images that evoked Ram and were seen widely across media. It was Advani who drafted the 2009 IT Vision Document for the BJP,<sup>1</sup> which is the undergirding framework for much of the rhetoric promoting technological improvements found in their current manifestos. Modi, however, is arguably the most tech-savvy leader that India has ever had. Whether using Twitter, blogging in his own name, or having his every move and word reported by a legion of devoted followers, Narendra Modi is a politician for the Internet age.<sup>2</sup>

One byproduct of the nexus of Hindu nationalism and a growing Web literacy is the rise in online activism. In November 2013, an *India Today* article discussed the rise of the “cyber Hindu,” a group of web denizens described as “pro-Hindu, pro-BJP, pro-Narendra Modi, right-wing Internet community that dominates every social media discussion and every online forum” (Pradhan and Sriram). The BJP reportedly have an IT and social media management team<sup>3</sup> of one hundred members who are,

an organic, uncontrollable, multi-faceted entity made up of people all around us. They could be in the next cubicle in your workplace or on the next desk in your classroom. They are in constant contact with each other, scouring the Internet on their smartphones, connected through an intangible network that draws people from a range of backgrounds. They feel their voices are finally being heard, and amplified, by like-minded political activists who operate on social media. (Pradhan and Sriram)

This should not be surprising, as the BJP has aggressively pursued the use of new media since the 1990s, first registering their domain name (bjp.org) in 1995. The BJP’s *IT Vision Document: Transforming Bharat* (2009) highlights the party’s vision for utilizing new technology across a number of sectors: commerce, identification, language promotion, job creation, education, telecom networks, and so forth, with the goal

to “equal China in every IT parameter in five years.” This is may be a very realistic goal, as India in 2014 surpassed the U.S. in number of Internet users (China has the most Internet users).<sup>4</sup> Increased investment in telecommunications infrastructure, the popularity of mobile phones, and a general projected population increase makes the BJP’s goal a distinct possibility. The plan also aspired to provide Internet access to every town and village for less than 200 Rs per month, 10 million students to get laptops for 10,000 Rs each (or through interest-free loans), free mobile phones for families living below poverty line (BPL), and other accessibility goals.

More recently, Modi has continued the plans sketched out in the earlier BJP treatise. But this is only part of the activity given to new media, in its official capacity. Less discussed, but visibly apparent, is the rather motivated movement of political Hinduism, whose members actively and aggressively voice their positions online or counter those who even hint at something unfavorable in Hindu history.

### The “Internet Hindus”

The term “Internet Hindus” (sometimes also referred to as “cyber Hindus”) was coined by journalist Sagarika Ghose, and refers to the bloggers and Twitter users who scour the Internet for hot-button issues in order to “pounce” on any opinion with which they virulently disagree. Ghose, who is deputy editor of



The header images on The Internet Hindus Facebook page, in March 2015.

CNN-IBN, has been particularly targeted, and likens them to “swarms of bees” (Overdorf). Since Ghose’s initial branding of the group, they have claimed the term for their own and, if anything, have become more popular and more organized. Estimated to be a group of approximately 20,000 people, they have gained the attention of several media outlets and have found themselves in the middle of India’s censorship debate

India’s Information Technology Act of 2000 was updated in 2011, with the requirement that websites remove content that authorities deemed objectionable within 36 hours of being told to do so. This has particular ramifications for social media sites like Facebook, where users frequently vent or opine controversial viewpoints; there have been numerous cases already in which this has been executed (Seiglebaum 2013).<sup>5</sup> The rules for posting on the Internet Hindus’ Facebook page are clear:

Firstly, secular pigs are strictly prohibited. And if you are a Hindu but enchanted by the leftist slogan “Hindu faith is no different than any other faith,” don’t come here. 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. You see the thing is, Hindus are normally very peaceful people and would not mind, but with that mentality we were turned into slaves for a 1000 years, not anymore. Pseudo-secularists/Sickularists and “humanists” do not try to create any equivalency between Sanatana Dharma and other religions. You must be perverse to do so. On Internet pages, on the outside these other religions display high words of tolerance and multiculturalism (ignoring questions on their contradictory behaviour in countries of their dominance), but on the inside, Muslims and Christians are not at all apologetic in thinking of us as kafirs going to hell, why should we be apologetic in supporting the Hindu cause? It’s something that has never caused tyranny in the world. (Facebook)<sup>6</sup>

Why do such individuals feel challenged by more universalist, tolerant presentations of Hinduism? Are these truly alternate points of view? As many members of the Hindu diaspora turn to news sites and social media for information about and contact with their native culture, it seems incumbent upon those who identify as Internet Hindus to promote a version of Hindu-

ism most amenable to the nationalist project. While the attempt to tighten the reins of public discourse is strongly political, there are always religious and cultural implications when Hindu nationalist parties try to shape public opinion. Foremost is the issue of religious tolerance, with the Muslim (and to a lesser extent, the Christian) population as the potential target of restrictions or hostilities. Some of the religious political issues include reservations (an “affirmative action” type of legislation which would guarantee government positions for religious minorities) and anti-conversion laws. More subtle is the issue of the ongoing project to define “Hindu,” which also includes a contestation over the definition of “secularism” in India.<sup>7</sup>

From the point of view of those who proudly call themselves Internet Hindus, they are voices which have long gone unheard. A very popular website, Haindava Keralam, noted for its blogs by author and “political philosopher” Dr. Vijaya Rajiva, ran a story about the Internet Hindus in 2010. It portrays mainstream Indian media outlets as catering exclusively to the English-educated elite, and rejecting letters and stories from “the common, average, educated Indian” who, according to the author, cannot match the linguistic skills to fight the “malicious campaign” of the anti-Hindu agenda (Rairikar):

Rejected by the arrogance of [the] elitist creed, the internet comes with a fresh breath of air, providing a breaking space to the common man choking with indignation. With the advent of blogging, web groups, chat forums, free websites and social networking sites he gets an opportunity to express himself, gives vent to his thoughts which had been deliberately suppressed all these years. *The voice that had been muted for so long is now vociferous.* (Rairikar, np, emphasis in original)

Here the argument is that the Internet has provided the formerly silent with a voice—not a voice marginalized by so-called “digital divides,” but rather through a previously-existing deliberate bias against the common Hindu. This is an interesting accusation, considering that the article paints the Internet Hindus as too unskilled to enter the conversation through other media; other articles report that the Internet Hindus are highly educated, members of the middle class, and politically savvy, which would contradict the image of the underdog narrated by this article.

Rairikar also posits that, “with the growing number of Hindus on the internet, it is becoming evident that majority Indians do not endorse the pseudo-secularism and minorityism that is being imposed upon them” (Rairikar 2010, np). The Internet Hindus, now labelled as activists, are quick to comment on news stories, blogs, Twitter feeds, and other forms of CMC to counter what they see as anti-Hindu reporting and sentiment (Indian journalists Ashok Malik and Sagari-ka Ghose are frequent targets of their hostilities). Their presence on the Internet has had a real effect: even the Congress Party set up a 35-member team to counter the propaganda against them cultivated in social media, making efforts to “rope in twitterati like Shashi Tharoor, eminent personalities like Shah Rukh Khan and Shabana Azmi, other techno savvy leaders, and eminent personalities to spread its message” (Singh 2013, np).

The Internet Hindus have both a Facebook “community” of over 3000 members, and a Facebook “group” that boasts over 5000 members (They proclaim, “We are now among the largest established Internet Hindu communities in the world!”).<sup>8</sup> The page is within the public domain, thus anyone can see the conversation, which can be characterized as anti-Muslim and pro-BJP, while reiterating many of the ideologies which are consonant with the militant ethno-nationalism of Hindutva. Looking at just a handful of postings, one can quickly deduce the overall tone of the group and their politics, and identify tropes which are rampant across Hindu nationalist propaganda:

- the concept of India as an ancient civilization;
- the highlighting (and exaggeration) of aggression against Hindus;
- disdain for secularism;
- Hinduism presented as *sanātana dharma* (universal truth); and
- a general anti-Muslim stance.

Sagarika Ghose has reported several times over the years that she has been “trolled,” or harassed regularly, ranging from harmless but hostile tweets to veiled threats against her life or property. In what appears to be an effort to seriously engage the Internet Hindus who so vehemently hate her, Ghose wrote a piece discussing the crisis of Hinduism in India, saying “It’s time to liberate Hinduism from politics.” She asks a worthwhile question:

Does Hinduism today permit any complex interrogation by those born Hindu? Is simply an RSS-style assertion of “national identity” taking the place of a realistic appraisal of what Hinduism means, what it should mean, in the modern era? After all, traditions are best kept alive if revitalised anew for newer generations. Apart from the politics, at an individual level, it seems as if we are still in search of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Hindu. (Ghose)

Her argument, as her questions continue, is that the continued attacks on media, art, and literature which challenge the Hindutva brand of Hinduism may actually be preventing Hinduism from being popularized among newer, younger audiences. Reform is denounced as “anti-Hindu” while interfaith discussion and tolerance is denounced as “pseudo-secularism.”<sup>9</sup> Ghose pleads, “surely there is a need to evolve a charter of the modern Hindu, for whom pride in his faith and traditions can co-exist with the needs of a modern multi-faith democratic society” (Ghose).<sup>10</sup>

While the Internet Hindus may or may not be a community in the traditional sense of the word, they seem to identify as a community in the sense best illustrated by Benedict Anderson,<sup>11</sup> imagining themselves as sharing the same ideology and working together towards the same goal (election of Modi, in this case). The hashtag #InternetHindus is consistently used by Twitter users to refer to this political community (Twitter feed accessed May 2014):

Surbhit @surbhit10 May 16: #Results2014 #Elections2014 Dear fellow #InternetHindus we did it!!!!

Raman @being\_delhite May 16: Thank You @sagarikaghose for Uniting #InternetHindus

Sourav\_ghosh @souravg89 May 18: #YoSagarikaSoSecular that she invented a new caste #InternetHindus

Surbhit @surbhit10 May 16: Although Sagarika ghose has blocked me dis is a msg 2 her. #InternetHindus have won!!!

While the initial backlash against the term “Internet Hindus” vocalized a resentment at being lumped into one category (many argued at the time that just because one was a Hindu—or even nationalist—and used the Web, the community did not deserve the moniker), the formation of hashtags and groups on Twitter,



Facebook, and other social media proved that such a community could be generated simply by producing and capitalizing on opposition to another community. In this case, the “other” were pseudo-secularists, Muslims, and journalists or scholars who apparently sought to destroy or attack Hindu religion and culture.

To my knowledge, Modi has not addressed the so-called “Internet Hindus” directly, although they may very well be responsible for his victory. If identifying as “Hindu” (nationally, culturally, religiously) was the initial common denominator for the activist group, Modi was the banner around which the movement rallied.

### Defending “Authentic” Hinduism

The Internet Hindus and other cyber-activists are defending a particular understanding of Hinduism that is considered to be “authentic” and is informed by a rhetoric of historical continuity, civilizational advancement, spiritual superiority, and serial imperialism. Clearly there is some idea that a particular ideation of “Hindu” or “Hinduism” is thought to be inviolable and authentic, and thus must be protected in the discursive sphere of the Internet. The question that arises is this: What is this “authentic” tradition and from where does it come? How is authority legitimated in speaking for Hindus?

As we can observe in the controversies with both Doniger and Ghose, one of the most persistent challenges in religious studies is the tension between insider/outsider knowledge, and ideas of objectivity, subjectivity, authority, and authenticity. The Internet complicates this further, as the identity of the author (or source) is often hard to determine. Thus, issues of positionality,<sup>12</sup> power, knowledge construction, and representation all present their own challenges. The insider/outsider distinction is one of the primary ways in which Hindu nationalists establish their right to speak on Hinduism’s behalf, and challenge or censor opposing views.

Nationalism relies on the concept of *public culture*. As Arjun Appadurai explains, public culture is not merely a rubric for thinking about the particular aspects of modern life in a collective sense, but something which seeks to co-opt and reinvent local or regional cultural forms. The popularity of religious or cultural elements is not only capitalized upon for commercial reasons, but is further promoted by Hindu

nationalist organizations to confirm that their Hinduism is the “real” Hinduism that everyone knows and loves.<sup>13</sup> Yet unlike public culture, Appadurai argues, national culture is itself a contested mode that is embattled with transnational cultural messages, while at the same time it endures indigenous critiques across differing sectors, threatening the “cultural hegemony of the nation-state” (6).

The activity of culture-making includes the attentive construction of national histories, the revitalization of various traditional identities, and the production of national folk symbols and rituals (Appadurai, 7). As a culture, “Hindu” is presented as ancient, technological/scientific, and heroic. As a religion, it is presented as benevolent, tolerant/accommodating, non-violent, and highly ritualized. Any narrative that is contrary to this—such as one that Hindu terrorism would introduce, for example—is quickly dismissed as inauthentic or false. Thus, not all efforts concerning the management and reinvention of traditions come from Western sources. Rather, such management is a process which occurs in India through the rhetoric of Hindu nationalist groups (see Jaffrelot, Lal, and Sen).

Nationalist discourse also relies on a false consciousness: “If there is any field about which nationalist thought establishes plausible but misleading narratives, it is about the society it tries to bring under its political control and its historical self-representation” (Kaviraj, 87). Control over the presentation of history is control over cultural presentation, and that control is predicated upon the assumption that history is stable, closed, contiguous, and—perhaps most importantly—that it manages to remain undistorted when viewed through the lens of the present. In digital space, history can be presented and repeated until tempered into something new.

This new Hindu history asserts itself against the long trajectory of colonial histories, the “pseudo-secular” agenda of the Indian state, the flagrance of Pakistan’s existence, the Western contempt for Hindu culture, and the perceived intellectual and moral cowardice of the Indian academy (Kaviraj, 152). If there is one consistency across Hindu nationalist websites, it is that they are replete with the grand narrative of India as “a great civilization,” “an ancient people” with a “rich cultural heritage” who “weathered the storms” or “suffered under repeated assaults” of invaders. Indian people are represented as skilled workers, intel-



Prime Minister Modi speaking at Delhi's Red Fort on India's Independence Day, 15 August 2014.

lectuals, artists, and pioneers of technology. The grand narrative is constantly rearticulated, reshaping, reinterpreting, and responding to contexts and events. The establishment of Hindu religion as eternal, and Hindu culture as noble and ancient, is a crucial element in the development of the Hindu nationalist community and their ideology, for the eternal nature of Hinduism is closely tied to the narrative of India and of Hindus as a people. The BJP has consistently played to this development for at least the past two decades, as can be seen in this excerpt from an 1999 archived version of the Party History section of the BJP's webpage:

History is the philosophy of nations. And the Sangh Parivar [family of Hindu nationalism] has a very clear and candid conception of Indian history. Here was a great civilization whose glory spread from Sri Lanka to Java and Japan and from Tibet and Mongolia to China and Siberia. While it weathered the storms of Huns and Shakas and Greeks it wilted before the Islamic storms of the Turks. However, a 1000-year resistance saw this country bloodied but unbowed. Its civilization

survived through the heroic efforts of the Vijayanagar Empire and of Shivaji, Rana Pratap and Guru Govind Singh and countless heroes and martyrs. ([bjp.org/history/history.html](http://bjp.org/history/history.html))

This rhetoric was fine-tuned and eventually became central to the party's manifestos. Note the language and imagery of the 2009 Manifesto:

**TO BUILD A PROSPEROUS, POWERFUL NATION, RECALL INDIA'S PAST**

Indian civilisation is perhaps the most ancient and continuing civilisation of the world. India has a long history and has been recognised by others as a land of great wealth and even greater wisdom. But India has also experienced continued foreign attacks and alien rule for centuries and this has resulted in a loss of pride in India and its remarkable achievements. Indians, particularly educated under the system of education imposed by the Britishers, have lost sight of not only the cultural and civilisational greatness of India, but also of its technological achievements and abounding natural resources.

In its introductory paragraph, the Manifesto instantly draws upon several tropes utilized by Hindu nationalism. First, the notion of Indian civilization is conceived as ancient, contiguous, and wise. Secondly, there is a history of repeated invasion which is blamed for a “loss in pride” and a lapse in memory regarding the nation’s great technological achievements.

The narrative of India as a scientifically, mathematically, and/or technologically advanced civilization is another theme that appears frequently in nationalist rhetoric. The litany of these achievements is frequently presented:

Indian advancements in astronomy, mathematics, chemistry, physics and biological sciences have been documented and recognised all over the world. Contributions in the field of medicine and surgery are also well known. Ayurveda and Yoga are the best gifts from India to the world in creating a healthy civilisation. India knew plastic surgery, practised it for centuries and, in fact, it has become the basis of modern plastic surgery. India also practised the system of inoculation against small pox centuries before the vaccination was discovered by Dr Edward Jenner.

It is seen as a source of Hindu pride, and is arguably a natural response to the colonial representations of Hindus as “backwards” or “uncivilized.” While expanding on the references to Ayurveda and Yoga here, the BJP site follows this with a discussion of a “well organized health care system” in India, along with a “functioning indigenous educational system” which includes an “impressive number of lower caste students, Muslims, and girls.”

Internet technology and other computer-mediated communication media are understood as natural consequences of such a history of advancements. It is perhaps this narrative of India that resonates most with Narendra Modi, for whom new media has been especially useful. He is, in this telling of the tale, the modern hero who returns India to her previous glory while at the same time ushering a new epoch of technology so that India can take her place on the global stage. His rhetoric of “e-governance” has produced a rather large list of new acronyms for various IT plans and ideologies of the digital age. Even the recent visit with President Obama was live-tweeted and updated regularly on social media, boosting the traffic on both Modi’s website and on his Facebook page.

But for cyber-activists such as the Internet Hindus, the rhetoric of history and invasion privileges the insiders who can speak on behalf of Hinduism in the electronic public sphere. Their voices carry authority in web-based forums and the comment sections of major news outlets, where they challenge the secular mainstream media outlets, which are seen as too Westernized or universalizing. The dominant discourse of India and Hindu tradition as presented by organizations such as the BJP—timeless, ancient, inviolable, tolerant, and ideologically contiguous—disallows the critical, provocative, or challenging discourses that Professor Doniger’s book might provide, or that Sagarika Ghose might report. Thus, Modi may strive to carry the banner of innovation and technology forward, but his followers will have to remember that Hindu identity, history, and traditions are not monolithic.

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### Notes

1. <[www.bjp.org/documents/vision-document](http://www.bjp.org/documents/vision-document)>. Accessed September 2014.
2. One of his more ambitious initiatives is his Digital India plan. The plan aims to provide broadband access for all of India, down to the smallest rural communities, in an effort to provide the opportunities and benefits of information technology. The initiative is a 1 lakh-crore (1 trillion) rupee hope that aims to be in place by 2019 and will provide jobs in IT and other related fields. A total of four billion people in the world do not have access to the Internet, and India has 25% of that number. Lower literacy rates, poverty, and poor infrastructure are obstacles that India will have to overcome in order to fulfill Modi’s dream. IBM, Google, and even Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg have all committed to assisting with this project.
3. Narendra Modi in particular has been often lauded for his Internet savvy, putting two of India’s most famous dotcom moguls on his technology team: Rajesh Jain (who sold IndiaWorld to Sify) and BG Mahesh (founder of IndiaInfo and OneIndia). Modi also has a large Twitter following of over 2.7 million, and regularly blogs on his website: <[www.narendramodi.in](http://www.narendramodi.in)>.

4. International Telecommunication Union reports the top three countries in numbers of Internet users: China — 604,000,000, India — 302,000,000, and the US — 254,000,000. *ICT Facts and Figures Report 2014*: <[www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/ICTFactsFigures2014-e.pdf](http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/ICTFactsFigures2014-e.pdf)>.

5. According to the *Times of India*, out of 358 requests that Google received to remove content, 255 of those requests gave “criticism of the government” as the reason for its censorship.

6. <[www.facebook.com/thesanatanadharmis](http://www.facebook.com/thesanatanadharmis)>.

7. Scholars such as Rajeev Bhargava, Shabnum Tejani, and Christophe Jaffrelot have argued that secularism has two faces in India: *dharm nirapekshata*, or “indifference” towards religions, and *sarva dharm sambhaava* or “equality” between religions. In the first instance—what is often called true secularism—secular society should not acknowledge or make allowances for different religions (as in the case of minority reservations). In the second definition, all religions must have equal say and opportunity, and therefore certain accommodations should be in place to ensure minority rights—this is also called “pseudo secularism” by groups such as the RSS. The rules for posting on the Internet Hindus webpage reflect these tensions.

8. The words “community” and “group,” are Facebook’s distinctions, not mine: the first designation is interactive in that it can be joined and, once approved, members can share items or post on the timeline as they see fit; the latter is a “page” (one-way information) in that it can be “liked” but not “joined.” In other words, in the functionality of Facebook, only the page moderator can post topics, updates, or articles, and anyone from the public can comment on or ‘like’ the items that are posted.

9. The definition of secularism is a fascinating but complicated discussion which is too elaborate to go into here. It is sufficient to say that there are tensions between a European definition which would keep religion out of the government, and the Indian definition which posits that Hinduism is inherently secular (read: pluralistic), and thus India should officially be a Hindu nation.

10. Judging from the 553 comments on the blog, her plea went unheard. Ghose is claiming authority by being a respected journalist in major news outlets for 20 years, and by being a Hindu-Indian. This should afford her respect both as an informed professional and as a cultural insider. But the fact that she has been a target for her criticism of right-wing politics (never more so than in the year leading up to Modi’s victory) reveals that there is a great effort to suppress what some see as “negative press” on India, Hinduism, or the BJP. The Indian media thus become adversaries, intellectually corrupt, and panderers to Western ideas of secularism.

11. Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* describes group formation in the context of ‘the nation’ as having the following characteristics: 1) it is not finite, but has flexible, permeable boundaries, 2) it is not sovereign [distinguishing it from nation-state formations], and 3) it is imagined, in the sense the members of the community recognize some commonality or shared “horizontal fraternity” that binds them together regardless of proximity.

12. Positionality is determined by where one stands in relation to the “Other.”

13. One of the most effective was the soap-drama serial of Sagar’s *Ramayan*. Although there are supposedly 300 versions of the tale, including regional variations, Sagar’s interpretation is arguably now the most popular and most trans-regional version of the epic. See Lutgendorf’s “Interpreting Ramraj: Reflections on the Ramayan, Bhakti, and Hindu Nationalism.”

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