

The *Sikh* religion while spreading the message of universal brotherhood, leading a life of high virtue, serving the society standing up for Truth and Justice has encouraged the use of the latest ICT for the preservation and spread of its message and culture.

HINDUISM AND INTERNET IN 2010-12

An Essay on Websites, Blogs, Social Media, Censorship and 'Internet Hindu'

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Introduction

Hinduism is the third largest religion in the world, next to Christianity and Islam. The word *Hindu* is derived from the Sanskrit word *Sindhu*, (Indus) river in the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent. (Oxford English Dictionary) The word finds first mention the Rig Veda, believed to have been composed between 1700 and 1100 BCE. (HYMN LXXV. The Rivers)

The word *Hindu* was borrowed into European languages from the Arabic term *al-Hind*, referring to the land of the people who live across the River Indus. In this instance, Hindu refers to all Indians. By the 13th century, *Hindustān* emerged as the name for the 'land of *Hindus*' that, for the rest of the world, came to be known as India. ¹

Travellers, monks, and scholars spread awareness about the philosophy, traditions, and culture of Hindus particularly during the last two centuries, outside India through books, articles, and speeches. Debates over superiority of Hinduism over other religions, especially Christianity and Islam, have continued over the period through books and other publications. The Internet offered a new, inexpensive, fast,

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and effective platform for dissemination of information and discussion about Hinduism since 1995 when the World Wide Web was available to anyone with a computer and net connectivity. Web 2.0, the second generation of the World Wide Web, which brought in blogs, wikis, social networking, and a broad range of new web applications, has further reinforced the platform in cyber space for explosion of information and engagement of debates on religious matters. The information about a topic of the Hinduism over the net may seem to be unending, or it could be brief and to-the-point as can be seen in this passage:

Hinduism, also known as Sanatana Dharma, is the religious tradition indigenous to the Indian subcontinent with about 950 million followers worldwide, making it the third largest religious system in the world. Hinduism differs from most religions in that there is no particular theological belief or set of doctrines that unites all its adherents. The goal of the Hindu path is moksha (literally, 'release'), understood to be liberation from samsara (repeated cycle of birth and death), and this is achieved by piercing the veil of maya (illusion). Some widespread Hindu philosophical concepts and practices are karma (cycle of cause and effect), dharma (religious duty or obligation), reincarnation and yoga. There is no one book that is considered sacred by all Hindus, but the Vedas, Upanishads, and the Bhagavad Gita are revered by most Hindus. (Humanitiesmch/Unit-4-asia)

The Hindus have been described in different ways: orthodox, fundamentalist, chauvinist, extremist, militant, die-hard, radical, leftist, right-wing, rational, secular, liberal, conservative, progressive, tolerant, believer, non-believer, atheist, agnostic and so on. Added to these descriptions is a new one: 'Internet Hindu.'

This essay briefly documents Hinduism on Internet, censorship of social media in India, and the new term 'Internet Hindu during the first two years of this decade of 21st century.

Hinduism and Internet

The cyber world has a substantial presence of Hinduism for the religious activity. Such presence should not be a surprise because Hinduism has, as stated above, an estimated 950 million adherents worldwide. This is about 14 per cent of the world population. (Religion by adherents) (Hinduism5) The Hindu population is, thus, third largest, after Christianity and Islam.

Websites on Hindus, Hinduism, and related topics were hosted since mid-1990s. Several attempts appear to have been made to compile directories of such websites. One such exercise was undertaken by a team of Vedic students of an institute on the foothills of the Himalayas who worked for few weeks to compile the sites hosted by institutions, organization and individuals. The list has 651 entries. (Hindu websites around the world)

Text and audio-visual contents of the majority websites include information about Hinduism, its sects of the creators of the sites, spiritual masters, their preaching, temples, rituals, festivals, online *poojas* (procedure for the worship of deities), songs, prayers, Yoga, philanthropic activities of the organisations, and so on.

These authors carried out a quick survey of the Hinduism-related blogs and social media sites in October 2012. Following is the summary of their findings:

- Hindu and Hinduism find mention in blogs numbering from 6,900,000 to 56,700,000, and more, depending how on chooses search words.
- Search for 'Hinduism' on October 5, 2012 returned 315,000,000 (as compared to 29,800,000 for Christianity, and 104,000,000 for 'Islam.'
- A search on 'Hinduism Twitter,' on October 5, 2012 gave us 14,700,000 results. This included <http://twitter.com/Hinduism>.

Today part of a website of an 'international journal affirming the Sanatana Dharma and recording the history of a billion strong global religion in renaissance.' It displayed 3217 tweets, 12 following, and 5847 followers

- The website of Huffington Post (www.huffingtonpost.com) has a section on Hinduism-on-twitter that promises 'As part of our ongoing series featuring some of the great religious voices on Twitter, here is a list of some of the most interesting Hindu organizations and individuals who are using the micro-blogging platform to take their message online.' (Hinduism on twitter)

YouTube offered 14,800,000 clips on Hinduism. Similarly, Google search on 'Hinduism and Facebook' returned 16,600,000 results. These statistics are obviously not exhaustive and complete. Besides, the results for the searches will vary depending on search words. Yet, the figures are presented above to indicate how Hinduism has occupied the cyber space.

'Internet Hindus'

Al Jazeera English, the Doha-headquartered news channel, was launched across India on November 17, 2011. Among its early programmes was a panel discussion on 'Who are the Internet Hindus? Why do they oppose a secular India?' on July 9, 2012. The three-member panel had Sagarika Ghose, the Deputy Editor and a prime time anchor of India's leading news network CNN-IBN. She was there on the panel probably because she is credited with coining the term, Internet Hindus. She has been using the term through her tweets and has generated heated debate on the attitude of Hindu netizens to express themselves. The other panelist was Dr Subramanian Swamy, National President, Janata Party (People's Party) and former Central Minister, who has affinity towards the cause of Hinduism.

Mr. Sadanand Dhume, the third panelist, is an Indian writer, journalist, and broadcaster based in New York and Delhi.

Ms. Sagarika has critics among the television news channel viewers. She was among those who derided the Internet users who prided themselves for being Hindus. The left-of-centre journalists describe them as 'loonies', 'fanatics', 'irrational', and 'Hindu Taliban.' It appears that Ms Sagarika was so enraged by the arguments of the netizens that she would call them 'gutter snipes' (Children who spend most of their time in the streets, especially in a slum area, or persons regarded as having the behavior, morals, etc., of one brought up in squalor.)

Senior scribe Kanchan Gupta says much of the criticism came from left-of-centre journalists who believe they have unfettered monopoly over media as their inalienable birthright. "These journalists .. are given to contemptuously brushing aside 'Internet Hindus' as being irrelevant and describing their views as inconsequential" (Don't Block Internet Hindus). Gupta and likes of him came out in defence of the Internet Hindus in their blogs and macro-blogging sites. Gupta in particular hit back saying these netizens are bright, well-educated, and not burdened with regional and caste biases. They are well-informed on national issues and world affairs and are rooted in Indian culture. They hold the Congress,² the Left and regional parties in contempt, as they do journalists who cravenly ingratiate themselves with the establishment.

They are cornering public opinion online. They argue that the Left-liberal intelligentsia monopolise opinion on television and newspapers, no TV anchor calls people who speak up for Hindus or Hinduism. (Meet the Internet Hindus) Jaideep Prabhu says, like most political phenomena, Internet Hinduism (IH) contains the entire spectrum, from elitists to the lumpen saffronists. While we are led to believe that the IH refers only to abusive, Right-wing netizens, no one has explicitly said so. For all purposes, we may assume that anyone who speaks in favour of Hinduism online is an IH. (The Making of an Internet Hindu) He ridicules the belief among some critics that the Internet Hindus are all organised in a global secret conspiracy against 'secularism', Islam, and socialism.

Kanchan Gupta quotes findings of an ongoing, online survey in 2010 in an attempt to present a generic profile of 'Internet Hindus'.³ Of those who have responded, 89 per cent have identified themselves as 'Internet Hindus', indicating they attach no shame to the term though their critics would want them to feel ashamed. Of the respondents, four per cent are aged 20 years and below; 55 per cent are aged 30 and below; 31 per cent are 40 and below; and, only 10 per cent are aged above 40. In brief, 90 per cent of them are young Indians.

The educational profile of the respondents was as follows: 43 per cent are graduates (most of them from engineering, science, and medical colleges); 46 per cent are post-graduates (a large number of them have MBA degrees from the best Business schools); and, 11 per cent have PhDs. Of the 83 per cent who are employed, 3 per cent earn up to Rs 2 lakh a year; 18.4 per cent earn up to Rs 6 lakh a year; 34.7 per cent earn up to Rs 12 lakh a year; and, 26.5 per cent earn more than Rs 24 lakh a year. (Lakh is Indian Rupees 100,000= USD 1,893.32 at the exchange rate as on October 13, 2012)

Nearly 60 per cent of them frequently travel abroad on work and holiday. Some 11 per cent have travelled abroad at least once. (Dont Block Internet Hindus)

Censorship on Social Media

The Indian Union government in August and September 2012 took certain decisions that invited a barrage of criticism from Net users, print and electronic media, and freedom of expression activists, social media companies, and Internet service providers. It blocked certain Twitter, Facebook, Internet sites, and SMS.

The government was anxious to deal with the law and order problems in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Assam and in cities like Mumbai and Pune. It blocked 309 specific items including URLs, Twitter accounts, IMG tags, blog posts, blogs, some websites and Twitter accounts, some belonging to journalists.

The resort to ban bulk SMS and MMS from August 17 to August 30 2012 to prevent spread of rumours that created panic among students of northeastern states studying in cities of western and southern parts of the country. According to the rumours, some groups belonging to Muslim community had allegedly threatened North East people to leave cities or else they would face dire consequences. Panic-stricken college and university students in Pune, Bangalore, Chennai, and Mysore began leaving these cities en masse, as the rumours were circulated through SMS, and social media sites earlier that month.

The Prime Minister, Dr Man Mohan Singh, expressed concern over the misuse of the Internet by unscrupulous elements. He said India's vulnerability to cyber crime was escalating as economy and critical infrastructure became increasingly reliant on interdependent computer networks and the Internet. Sandeep Joshi of the daily *The Hindu* quoted the Prime Minister as saying "Large-scale computer attacks on our critical infrastructure and economy can have potentially devastating results. The government is working on a robust cyber security structure that addresses threat management and mitigation, assurance and certification, specially building capacity and enhancing research. (Use of social media to aggravate communal situation). Shalini Singh of the same newspaper reported that eventually, "the government thought of involving all the stakeholders, such as the Telecom Ministry, ISPs, social media companies and the print and electronic media, to combat all forms of abuse. .. This unprecedented move in the spirit of collaboration is an attempt at the highest levels of government to review the existing policies, procedures and even legislation involving censorship of the Internet and social media, according to a senior official of the Telecom Department. A key outcome of this dialogue was the suggestion that the government should use the Internet and social media to counter hate speech." (PM's call triggers policy review)

Gupta posed a question in his blog, 'Why do they infuriate pseudo-secularists⁴ in media?', and offered three possible explanations. First, the Net is beyond the control of those who control newspapers and

news channels. While the print and audiovisual media have for long excluded contrarian opinion and denied space to those who disagree with absurd notions of 'secularism' or question the quality of reportage, the Net has provided space to the 'other' voice. Real time blog posts now record the 'other side' of the day's story. ..Twitter affords instant micro-blogging even as prime time news is being telecast, and YouTube allows unedited amateur videos of events to be uploaded, giving the lie to edited and doctored versions shown by news channels.

Second, unlike carefully selected 'Letters to the Editor' in newspapers and 'Feedback' posted on news channel websites, the reactions of 'Internet Hindus' cannot be thrown into the dustbin or deleted with a click of the mouse. English language media journalists, long used to fawning praise from readers and viewers, are horrified that someone can actually call them 'dumb' in public space and there's nothing they can do about it.

Third, the established elite, most of them middle-aged, are beginning to feel threatened. Here's a new breed of Indians who have used merit and not 'connections' to make a mark in professional excellence, young men and women who are educated and articulate, and are willing to challenge conventional wisdom as preached by media 'stars' who have rarely, if ever, been questioned. The elite who dominate newspapers and news channels are seen by 'Internet Hindus' as part of India's past, not future. (Don't Block Internet Hindus) There are arguments and counter arguments in favour of and against Internet Hindus.

A newspaper headline to Daipayan Halder's story, for example, says: A fast-growing tribe of fanatics who tweet, are e-friends of the BJP, or scuppies on a self-awareness drive. They are out to own the web. (Internet Hindus online anonimity) This one, as the title suggests, has an anti-Hindu bias.

Another article at http://centreright.in/2012/07/the-making-of-an-internet-hindu/#.UHvYrm_A9uI by Jaideep Prabhu justifies the stance

of the Internet Hindus. So does the piece on <http://www.mediacrooks.com/2012/07/al-jazeera-internet-hindus.html> that attacked Sagarika Ghose for her stance on the panel discussion on Al Jazeera referred to in this essay above.

A blog post title, 'Beware, Internet Hindus are multiplying like Virus on Social Media' <http://atrocitynews.com/2012/07/03/beware-internet-hindus-are-multiplying-like-virus-on-social-media/> accessed on October 15, 2012) indicates the vehemence of both the sides of the debate. This post says "Today there are perhaps as many as 20,000 so-called "Internet Hindus," many tweeting as often as 300 times a day, according to a rough estimate by one of the community's most active members. "You will find thousands with similar sounding IDs [to mine]," a Twitter user who goes by the handle @internet_hindus said in an anonymous chat interview. "Some [others] prefer to openly do it with their own personal IDs." This blogger's claim could not be verified. It, however, does make a point that the Internet Hindus are multiplying like virus on Social Media.

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ENDNOTES

1 Veteran Indian theologian Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan states that Hinduism cannot be defined, but 2 The Indian National Congress, currently heading the United Progressive Alliance of center-3 Kanchan Gupta has not provided sample size of the survey. However, the link to the online 4 ongoing on October 11, 2012. He did not respond till writing of this essay). Veteran Indian

REPORT

INTER MIRIFICA: VATICAN II DECREE ON SOCIAL COMMUNICATION 50 YEARS ORIGIN – RECEPTION - CHALLENGES

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Some 50 years ago the Roman Catholic Church celebrated an Ecumenical Council, a general Church assembly with some 2,600 bishops and Church leaders from all over the world. It was at this occasion that for the first time in history a document on Social Communication was published with directions and proposals for the future. The present article traces the origin and history as well as the challenges of this document.

The Origins

Nobody expected “Social Communication” to be part of the upcoming council when Pope John XXIII announced for the first time his plan to convoke an Ecumenical Council on January 25, 1959 at Basilica St Paul Outside-The -Walls in Rome. When in the course of preparations in the following year, bishops, general superiors of religious congregations and Catholic institutions of higher learning like universities were asked for themes to be proposed for discussion of the Church assembly. Out of some 2,150 replies only 18 mentioned the “mass media” (cf. Baragli 1969, 94).

Despite this, however, there was already with the pre-preparatory internal commissions organized by the Vatican in November 1959, a proposal for a commission (3a) on the “Modern Means of the Apostolate,” which referred especially to “new audio-visual techniques” like cinema, radio/TV, where also the press was added.