

Hindu Nationalism, Social Media and Men: A Study of Mediatized Hindutva and Masculinities in Prayaag Akbar's *Mother India* (2024)

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Abstract

Hindutva as a modern political and nationalist ideology emerged during the colonial struggle of the twentieth century that sought to re-envision Indian history on the basis of an assertion of Hindu supremacy over other non-Hindu religious minorities. The Bharatiya Janata Party's landslide victory in the 2014 general elections marked a turning point in post-Independent Indian history, due to the instatement of a right-wing populist government in the nation for the first time and the deployment of a carefully curated social media campaign in order to augment its appeal among the masses within the country as well as among expatriate Indians. The 2014 election campaign also witnessed the use of the discourse of masculinity as a powerful campaigning strategy on a scale hitherto unseen in the Indian political landscape. The rapid strides in technological advancement and proliferation of new media technologies in the second decade of the new millennium have engendered a potent mediascape where the Hindu nationalist imaginary and its attendant masculine ideals get expressed, disseminated, supported and challenged. Prayaag Akbar's novel *Mother India* (2024) offers a gripping exploration of the intersecting themes of right-wing Hindu nationalism, the multi-faceted masculinities among India's youth and the role of social media in the discursive formation and propagation of the two aforementioned entities of contemporary India. By examining the inner workings of Enterprise Hindutva, as represented in the novel, this paper would investigate the use of misinformation and sensationalism in a post-truth India in order to polarise public opinion and undermine democratic principles of inclusivity, plurality and minority rights. By examining the various iterations of masculinity expressed in the novel, this paper also seeks to look at the ways in which social media platforms contribute to the reinforcement and normalization of specific ideals of masculine ideals in the context of right-wing Hindu nationalism.

Keywords: Hindutva, Hegemonic masculinity, Complicit masculinity, Social media, Mother India