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

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Introduction

While populist right-wing Hindutva nationalism had been gaining ascendancy in India since the early 1970s, from 1980s onwards the ideology firmly cemented itself in the national political consciousness through events such as Ram Janmabhoomi agitation and the Babri Masjid Demolition, marshalled by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and other bodies of the Sangh Parivar. However, the BJP's landslide victory in the 2014 general election marked a turning point in post- Independent Indian history, not only due to the instatement of a right -wing populist government in the nation for the first time, but also due to its 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 settled in different parts of the globe. The salience of social media to the party's election campaigning, public image-making as well as the dissemination of its Hindu nationalist ideologies and projects is attested by the existence of a dedicated 'IT cell' comprising both paid and voluntary workers from all across India

who form vital "digital assets" to the party (Udupa 2018, 455-456). Such a phenomenon has led to a convoluted digital ecosystem where various media consumers, irrespective of formal connections to any political party or involvement in partisan politics, contribute to and reap dividends from the circulation of Hindu nationalist ideology. Another remarkable aspect of the 2014 electoral process and outcome was the extensive employment of masculinist rhetoric as an electoral strategy wherein the "forceful" masculinity of the party's Prime Ministerial candidate was posited in sharp contrast to the supposedly ineffectual, "impotent" and "effeminate" predecessors (Srivastava 2015, 334). In close alliance with the Hindu nationalist ethos that it champions, the BJP's "muscular nationalism" (Banerjee 2012, 2) has repeatedly called for the retrieval and reclamation of a martial Hindu manhood in order to combat internal enemies and cement India's status as one of the world's economic and military superpowers. As a deeply masculinist ideology that projects religious minorities as the enemy Others who must be subdued in order to reclaim the glories of the nation's imagined past, right-wing Hindu nationalism espouses and lays down certain normative ideals of hegemonic masculinity that are distributed among the general population through digital and social media. The rapid strides in technological advancement and proliferation of new media technologies such as smartphones in the second decade of the new millennium have engendered a complex and potent mediascape where the Hindu nationalist imaginary and its attendant masculine ideals get expressed, disseminated, supported and challenged.

Prayaag Akbar, widely acclaimed for his dystopian novel *Leila* (2017) that has been adapted into a Netflix web series by the same title depicting a 2040s India renamed as Aryavarta reeling under a totalitarian Hindutva regime, turns his incisive gaze to the political scenario in contemporary India in his latest novel *Mother India* (2024). Akbar's Mother India offers a gripping exploration of the intersecting themes of right-wing Hindu nationalism, the changing contours of masculinity among India's youth and the role of social media in the discursive formation and propagation of the two aforementioned entities of

contemporary India. Centred on two young characters hailing from contemporary Indian middle class namely Mayank Tyagi and Nisha Bisht, the former employed by a fervent right-wing YouTube content creator and the latter working as a salesperson in an upscale globally recognised Japanese chocolate outlet located in a mall in Delhi, the novel carefully delineates the lives of these two individuals caught in the cross currents of the injudicious use of digital technologies and the virulent hyper nationalistic atmosphere pervading the nation. This paper 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.

By examining Mayank's character in relation to certain other male characters in the novel, each of whom attempts to embody hegemonic masculine ideals in their own ways, the paper also seeks to explore Mayank's masculinity as an ongoing process that involves a continuous and fraught negotiation with various realities of his existence such as childhood trauma, ontological insecurity, unstable livelihood and thwarted aspirations. By probing into Mayank's insider's perspective on the operations of the social media realm, 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.

Hindutva, Masculinity and Social Media: Theorising the Three Intersecting Paradigms

The term 'Hindutva' had been first coined by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, the chief architect of the ideology of Hindu nationalism who deployed the word to convey the idea of "Hinduness" (Savarkar 1969, 4) or the quality of being a Hindu, an identity that encapsulates the notion of a "a nation [and] a race" and a "common Sanskriti (Civilization), tied to a "common fatherland" through the sharing of "common blood" (ibid, 92). Savarkar goes to great lengths to expressly exclude "Mohameddans" and "Christians" from Hindutva's purview,

even though these people may be living on the soil of what he refers to as Hindustan (ibid, 91). 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 identities, most notably the Muslims. Hindutva carved a space in the official political imaginary of the nation through the establishment of the Hindu Mahasabha in 1915 and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in 1925 that promulgated the idea of India as a Hindu Rashtra (Jaffrelot 2007, 14). The formation of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh in 1951, and later the BJP, paved the way for the mobilisation of Hindutva ideology in Indian politics. The Ram Janmabhoomi agitation organized under the aegis of the Sangh Parivar and spearheaded by the BJP from 1989 onwards was dubbed as "a break and rupture in the politics of modern India" (Hansen 1999, 174) that sought to rouse the "dormant, hitherto silent Hindu majority" out of the "old humiliating order" into a "new, strong, developmental and competitive Indian state, respected by the rest of the world" (ibid., 174). Exploiting the widespread public disgruntlement with the previous regime's persistent corruption and the failure of the Nehruvian economic model, the Ram Janmabhoomi movement deployed a rhetoric of "lack" wherein the Babri Masjid was projected as a "traumatic wound" on the nation's fabric that required healing through the demolition of the said monument and construction of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya (ibid., 174). The movement culminated in the 1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid, a flagrant "articulation of mass communalism" that indicated that Hindu nationalist discourse "had filtered down and connected with a more common-sense skepticism vis-à-vis politics and politicians" (ibid., 186). The BJP led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) went on to win the majority in the 1998 and 1999 general elections and subsequently lost it, only to reinvent itself and achieve an unprecedented clean sweep at the 2014 general election under the leadership of Narendra Modi. Modi's ingenuity lay in crafting his image through an amalgamation of Hindutva and neoliberalist impulses, that is evidenced by his "fearless" treatment of minorities and "technocratic and pro-big business" stance during his

tenure as Gujarat's Chief Minister (Kaul 2017, 526). His 2014 general election campaign projected him as a harbinger of "Rising India" committed to "*being* Hindutva and *doing* Development", departing from BJP's earlier public image as a merely Hindutva communal party.

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 campaign's usage of various epithets such as 'Vikash Purush' or 'Development Man', and 'Vishwa Guru' or 'world leader' and allusion to a '56-inch chest' in emphasising Modi's vigour and competence aligns with the masculinist vision of nation that Hindutva espouses. Hindutva upholds a dynamic masculinized vision of a nation represented by the figures of the Hindu soldier and the warrior-monk embodying the qualities of physical strength, martial ability, purity and a readiness for militant action. Such notions are reflected in the BJP's refashioning of the iconography of Lord Ram from "androgynous and unmuscled" (Banerjee 2005, 96) to "an apocalyptic leader… radiating a mood of elemental anger" (Basu et al. 1993, 62), representing the "strident militarism of a hyper hegemonic masculinity" (Banerjee 2005, 96). These hyper-masculine discourses have found favour with a large majority of Indian men who have been disillusioned by widespread unemployment, inequality, negligible scope for social mobility and rampant corruption and as a result, have been swayed by Modi's proclamation of a "rhetoric of meritocracy" and his "lusty assaults on hereditary privilege" (Mishra 2019, n.p.). The Hindu youth's anger and frustration has been channelised into hatred, both real-life and virtual, against figures such as minorities, leftist intellectuals, refugees, non-conforming women and LGBTQ+ individuals who have been conceived as enemies of the Hindutva identity and hence, pernicious to the nation's overall progress. Social media has been extensively instrumentalized by a section of the Hindu population in

consolidating and propagating Hindutva masculine ideals through a "masculinisation of the Hindu culture" and by fomenting violent discourses against perceived enemies (Chakraborty 2024, 5). Such an instrumentalization is a part of a wider practice of "enterprise Hindutva", which denotes "a mediatized form of Hindu nationalism shaped largely by the affordances of social media and the cultural practices surrounding them in urban India" (Udupa 2018, 453). Enterprise Hindutva made its entry into Indian politics with the BJP's extensive utilisation of social media as a strategic tool for election campaigning and a platform for disseminating political propaganda during the 2014 general election. The party's Information Technology (IT) cell comprising both paid and voluntary workers from all over the country has been salient to the party and its leader's image-making process and the propagation of Hindutva vision, even in the aftermath of the election victory. However, Enterprise Hindutva, in today's day and age, is not just limited to the IT cell or the direct workers of the BJP but has rather assumed a more diffused form wherein the increased access to digital technology has led to an upsurge of popular participation in political discussion, resulting in the emergence of a "distinct middle class debate culture" (ibid, 456) on social networking sites such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter (now X) and YouTube. Enterprise Hindutva crystalizes and caters to an "imagined community of Hindus" (Dutta 2025, 22) and is propelled by "online volunteers of Hindutva [who] are largely urban educated youth from the upper caste and intermediary caste groups" comprising participants from the entire gamut of middle class society, including "students and owners of petty retail business to tech entrepreneurs…and those working for multinational companies; with reasonable tech savviness…and fluent enough in English to compose the posts, or adept at using regional language scripts by enabling platform specific features" (Udupa 2018, 456). Enterprise Hindutva is therefore a "techno-culture",

where "viral forms of interaction between images, words, music, platforms and users" reinforce aspects of Hindutva ideology and its masculinist ideas and engender a discourse of hatred against secular, liberal and minority and gender rights (Baishya 2022, 296).

Hindu Nationalism and Social Media: Mediatized Hindutva in *Mother India*

Prayaag Akbar's *Mother India* offers a peek into the intricate workings of Enterprise Hindutva in contemporary India through the focal point of Mayank Tyagi, a young Hindu man from New Delhi in his early twenties, working as a digital and research assistant to a right-wing YouTube content creator Vikram Kashyap, and Nisha Bisht, a young saleswoman employed in an upscale shopping complex in Delhi, whose life is thrown into chaotic disarray when an AI- manipulated image of her is circulated online without her consent. The central conflict of the novel emerges when a shoddily made video created by melding an image taken from Nisha's social media profile with existing portraits of Bharat Mata, goes viral. The video, crafted by Mayank at his boss's behest to create a modern-day rendition of the Bharat Mata to be used in an incendiary video, unleashes a chain of events that has multifarious repercussions on the lives of various characters in the novel. The Bharat Mata image becomes one of the crucial tropes in the novel in relation to which ideas of Hindutva masculinity and gender roles are expressed and the machinations of mediatized Hindutva are laid bare. Mayank's selection of Nisha as the face of modern-day Bharat Mata is partially motivated by pictures of Nisha with a "dupatta demure around her head" (Akbar 2024, 3) in front of various Hindu temples which relay to Mayank a sense of religious devotion, youthful innocence and traditional Hindu femininity.

The pictorial trope of the Bharat Mata that emerged during India's anticolonial struggle served to metonymize the relationship between the nation and the *bhadramahila* identity. The representation of the nation as

mother goddess recast women as reproducers of the private spheres, serving the nation and the anticolonial struggle in their capacities as obedient daughters, wives and self-sacrificing mothers (Chatterjee 1997, 238; Ray 2019, 1). Abanindranath Tagore's 1905 painting of Bharat Mata, one that Mayank uses as his source imagery, imagines the nation as a woman donning "bridal sindoor" (Akbar 2024, 11) and the "outfit of a religious mendicant" (ibid, 12) embodying aspects of fertility and chaste Hindu womanhood and material renunciation respectively. The Bharat Mata is cast as a Hindu deity bearing symbolic objects namely "*vastra* (clothing), *siksha* (secular learning), *diksha* (spiritual knowledge) and *anna* (food)" in her four hands, signifying a "culturally and economically self-sufficient nation" (Dey and Tripathi 2023, 143). The saffron-clad iconography of Bharat Mata alludes to both Goddess Lakshmi and Saraswati, symbolising the combined virtues of sacrifice and power required to overthrow European imperialism. This feminine iconography of the nation that served as a rallying cry during the Indian freedom struggle has been reinvoked in the contemporary Indian context to serve Hindutva ideology.

Mayank's doubt about the relevance of the Bharat Mata iconography to the young generation of contemporary India is asserted in his thought, ""...how a new rendition of this tired old painting could inspire a fervour of patriotism amongst today's young people. Would they have to style her differently?" (Akbar 2024, 12). His boss Kashyap's investment in the contemporary Hindutva vision of a nation beleaguered by internal enemies is clear in his instruction to reconstruct Bharat Mata as a figure who "should be under attack" (ibid, 19). Unlike the original rendition of Bharat Mata who was under threat from British forces of colonialism, the threat to present-day Bharat Mata in Hindutva imaginary, as articulated by Kashyap, is instantiated by the figures of "PhD-waale. Jihadis. Khalistanis. Maoists and Missionaries" (ibid, 13), Muslims boys with "white prayer caps on both their heads and rocks in their right hands" (ibid,19) and "the head of the student union at Jawaharlal Nehru University" (ibid, 14) who refuses to chant 'Bharat Mata ki Jai' or 'Glory to the Mother Nation'. This Bharat Mata, battered

and flinching, requires protection from her valiant Hindu sons, most potently embodied in the figure of the Prime Minister of the nation. Kashyap's visual prompt regarding the Prime Minister's positioning in the animated video vis-à-vis the Bharat Mata is telling- "The Prime Minister would bow his head and fold his hands before Nation and Mother… the Prime Minister has to be much bigger. Not the same size as Bharat Mata, but close… Almost equal' (ibid, 26). Such a visual cue hinting at a nearly synonymous association between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Nation draws upon the BJP's accordance to him the status of "*maryada purushottam*", likening him to Lord Rama, a Hindu God who serves as a major signifier in the Hindutva repertory (*The Telegraph Online* 2024).

The novel crucially highlights the role of Enterprise Hindutva as a "digital infrastructure of hate" that functions through "the circulation of disinformation" against various adversary figures, effectively dehumanizing them (Dutta 2025, 20). Disinformation refers to false information and distortion of factual knowledge "intentionally created and circulated to mobilize people, with an underlying agenda", inciting hatred against targeted groups and threatening communal harmony (ibid, 20). Enterprise Hindutva's deployment of disinformation for the accomplishment of its agenda is succinctly relayed in Kashyap's eschewal of logic in favour of sensationalist reporting. When Mayank points out the fallacies in his boss's line of argumentation, Kashyap retorts-

> It doesn't matter what he [JNU student leader] is saying… or trying to say. It matters how we interpret it… What we make of his words so our followers click on the video… To make an impact on the internet you don't need ideas, you need enemies. (Akbar 2024, 36)

Such a strategy indicates the role of mediatized Hindutva in the Hindutva project's wider politics of "emotional governance" (Kinvall 2019, 286) where complex issues are oversimplified by directing the

public's anger towards certain scapegoat figures ideologically opposed to Hindutva. The real-life ramification of virtual hate-mongering comes to the fore when the JNU student leader is arrested soon after Kashyap's video disparaging him is released online, garnering a considerable number of views. Kashyap's video where he "roast[s] that bearded bastard… and all his Commie buddies" (Akbar 2024, 14), presents a supreme instance of hate speech. Such an incident coupled with the stray mentions of mob-lynching in the novel highlight the unholy nexus between "viral articulations of hatred and disgust" and their precipitation into real-life violent acts (Baishya 2022, 292). Such Pro-Hindutva media artefacts rely upon a "transmission of affect" so that violence is not just committed by one who carries out the physical act but is "normalized through absorption and propagation by users/ viewers who spectate and re-circulate messages and objects of violent hatred" (ibid., 292).

Mayank's own attitude to the workings of Enterprise Hindutva is deeply ambivalent and points to a complex and conflicted subscription to the tenets of Hindutva. His own foray into the world of mediatized Hindutva has less to do with serving the ideology and more with switching to a better job than this previous one as a food delivery executive. However, his Hindu nationalist leanings are made manifest in his digital identity through his attachment of "three tricolour and one temple emoji" (Akbar 2024, 3) to his Twitter bio, meant to assert to his social media interlocutors that "it was his nation he loved first" (ibid, 3). Such an online exhibition of one's nationalist stance is reflective of the wider biopolitics of the social media realm where an individual's online credibility is judged on the basis of their ability to assert their stance on any significant issue in terms of the binary oppositions of for and against. Mayank feels a surge of emotions while animating Bharat Mata's video -

> … [his] chest began to tighten. His breath felt shorter. These two Muslim boys. Throwing rocks like they did at our soldiers in Kashmir… Daring to raise their hand and voice against

> country. Against mother. Against all our mothers… He added an inspired flourish, a tiny flinch from Bharat Mata as a rock crashed into her cheek. (ibid, 19-20)

Despite his own passive participation in animating such potentially inflammatory videos, his stance towards circulation of online hatred is conscientious. While his colleagues exult at videos of mob violence against minorities, Mayank feels "a little bit thrown out of balance" (ibid,15). He experiences palpable discomfort and sympathy for the mob-violence victim's "trembling cheeks, pleading implanted in his eyes", leading him to conclude that such violence is a blatant display of bullying rather than an attempt at securing "justice for his people" (ibid, 15). Simultaneously, his use of "his" to designate his Hindu brethren signifies his distancing of fellow citizens from the Muslim community from his sphere of association.

Exploration of Different Shades of Masculinities in Hindutva: A Study of *Mother India*

The novel provides an interesting terrain for an exploration of the specific ideals of hegemonic masculinity that are normalised and reinforced within the context of right-wing Hindutva nationalism in India and how each male character in the novel strives to reach these ideals in their own unique ways.

It has been well established by now that nationalism is predicated upon a gendered discourse and the construction of nationalism and national identities is a masculine project involving masculine activities, processes and institutions (Connell 1995, xvi). Locating the source of nationalism in "masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope", Cynthia Enloe opines that within a nationalist matrix, "the real actors are men who are defending their freedom, their honour, their homeland and their women" while women are consigned to symbolic roles "as icons of nationhood, to be elevated or defended or… spoils of war, to be denigrated and disgraced" (1990, 45). However, Koen

Slootmaeckers has crucially identified that the gendered discourse of nationalism is not only constructed through the enactment of division between men and women but is also formed by "(internal) Othering processes of hegemonic masculinity that regulate and maintain the hierarchical relations among men and masculinities" (2019, 245). Hegemonic masculinity encompasses a set of normative ideals containing a "prescriptive notion that occupies a structural position of power and embodies the currently most respected/honoured way of what it means to be a man" (ibid, 246). Hegemonic masculinity exists in a perennial state of conflict with respect to other forms of subordinate and marginalised masculinities in opposition to which it must define itself in order to retain legitimacy and power. Hindutva nationalist thought proposes the salvaging of a lost virile Aryan Hindu masculinity trampled under centuries of Muslim and British colonial rule, a masculinity that in the present context is best embodied by the Savarna caste Hindu man. This version of hegemonic masculinity forms part of a global trend where the resurgence of right-wing populism around the world has witnessed renewed efforts at masculinizing the nation-state through the idealisation of traditional masculine roles and a negation of egalitarian gender and queer rights (Chakraborty 2024, 7).

However, despite hegemonic masculinity's privileged position at the top of the gender hierarchy, its ideals are inaccessible to the majority of men in the society. Masculinity itself denotes a "relational process" and "state of insecurity" in which men are required to perform their masculinity and get their performance evaluated by fellow men (Slootmaecker 2019, 247). The sustenance of hegemonic masculinity in any given society is impossible without a careful building of solidarity and complicity (Messerschmidt 2018, 29). Complicit masculinities, as inferior versions of the hegemonic ideal, refer to those masculine performances that constantly attempt to conform to the hegemonic norms in hopes of reaping its attendant dividends, despite being aware of the impossibility of ever actually inhabiting the said hegemonic ideals (ibid, 29). This paper uses the lens of complicit masculinity to explore the varying masculine traits embodied by the novel's male characters Mayank and

Vikram Kashyap situated within the milieu of Hindutva nationalism in contemporary India.

A close analysis of Mayank's character demonstrates that his complicit masculine performance is an outcome of an intersection of experiences of ontological insecurity, childhood trauma, thwarted aspirations and profound feelings of inadequacy and shame, "experiences… that had for better or worse made him" (Akbar 2024, 122). Mayank's greatest ontological insecurity stems from the loss of his father to an accident at the tender age of nine. The abrupt removal of a masculine figurehead from his life just when he is on the cusp of adolescence leaves him alone and unguided during the formative years of his masculinity. Without a father-figure to guide him through the rudimentary regimes of performative masculinity such as the act of shaving, Mayank is ridiculed by his classmates for failing to "negotiate the groove underneath his nose" (ibid, 9). His intense feeling of pride felt on watching his father "comb his hair back… tuck his shirt tight into the waistband of his trousers" (ibid, 8) as he got ready to leave for his government job is contrasted to Mayank's sense of inadequacy in failing to follow his father's footsteps, remaining stuck at temporary low-paying informal jobs. Such an inadequacy is imbricated in the disparity between the Modi-led governing regime's projection of itself as a merger of "Hindu pride with the paraphernalia of techno-financial growth" that promised "millions of jobs in the New Economy" (Basu 2020, 176) and its actual delivery on that promise. His shame in being employed as a food delivery executive is made manifest in his being "overcome by clammy mortification, sweat beading down his back when he had to shoulder the insulated cube into his own neighborhood" (Akbar 2024, 8).

Another crucial source of Mayank's ontological insecurity is his eroded "sense of place" in a rapidly transforming world that indicates a "psychological tie between the biography of the individual and the locales that are the settings of the time-space paths through which that individual moves" (Giddens 1984, 367). His sense of place undergoes

destabilization when he witnesses the transmogrification of his ancestral village and childhood home Mahipalpur by forces of urbanization. The Mahipalpur of his fond boyhood memories, where he has procured "sweets and Pepsi on credit from the storekeepers along the main road" has given way to a host of developmental projects, where the "next transformation was already underway" in the form of the building of the "country's widest tunnel" (Akbar 2024, 101). Ontological security involves finding a "safe(imagined) haven… in narrative terms" (Kinvall 2019, 285), a haven that is provided to Mayank by the Hindutva ideology's narrative of a consolidated collective identity based on "collective emotions such as love for the nation or hate, fear or disgust against the stranger other" (ibid, 286). Such a narrative engenders a nativist ideology that argues that "states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ('the nation') and that non-native elements are fundamentally threatening to the nation-state" (Mudde 2007, 22). Such a nativist tendency is displayed by Mayank when he engages in a sting operation of sorts in order to expose the "Jai Hind Camp of probable infiltrates" (Akbar 2024, 82), an informal settlement of Bangladeshi immigrants "coming to our country for a better life" (ibid, 82). Mayank asserts his own complicit masculinity vis-à-vis the marginalised masculinity of the Jai Hind Camp dweller whom he intimidates verbally and through physical gestures- '"Yeah, who are you calling a boy?'... and took a threatening step forward" (ibid, 84).

Apart from his father's death early in his life, Mayank's ontological insecurity is informed by the powerful pangs of shame that "[sits] right beneath the surface of his skin, waiting like blood for the smallest opening to ooze out into the world, to show itself" (ibid, 122). This shame that leaves a profound imprint on his psyche- a "wound [that] had defined him" - is caused by his mother's sexual exploitation at the hands of a government official after his father's death, to which he has been a first-hand witness, and the subsequent circulation of a video of that sexual act (ibid, 122). His inability to protect his mother from such an intensely debasing experience causes him to view himself as a failed masculine figure. His meticulous attention to perfecting the video of

Bharat Mata being assaulted by the two Muslim boys can be interpreted as him trying to somewhat redress his earlier inaction when his own mother was being preyed upon by a fellow countryman. Mayank's own injured masculinity seeks recourse in the Hindutva project of safeguarding Bharat Mata from internal enemies. Mayank's performance of a complicit Hindutva masculinity is therefore a multi-layered and complex phenomenon rather than a wholesale support of Hindutva ideology.

The novel also looks at another character namely Vikram Kashyap (Mayank's boss) whose performance of masculinity stands in sharp contrast to that of Mayank. Mayank's complex masculine performance is juxtaposed against Kashyap's loud pronouncements of aggression, symbolically displayed through the "set of black Indian clubs arrayed along the wall" (ibid, 10). Kashyap attempts to embody the edicts of Hindutva hegemonic masculinity in a much closer sense than Mayank does, both in terms of his physical appearance and his social media image. His "waxy handlebar moustache" (ibid, 5) and his online persona cultivated on "charmingly implosive turns of anger" (ibid, 5), confrontational attitude and vociferous promotion of right-wing views closely align with the Hindutva masculine traits. Kashyap attempts to foreground his claim to hegemonic masculinity through a deliberate undermining of the masculinity of the JNU student leader, when he instructs Mayank to photoshop "Alia's body with this fucker's face" (ibid, 32). Such an attempt to dominate the opponent by casting them in feminine terms constitutes a masculine technology of Othering (Slootmaeckers 2019, 247) that "functions by denying the masculinity of the Other- through projecting despised non-masculine aspects onto the Other- in order to emphasise the masculinity of the Self" (ibid, 248).

The discourse of hegemonic masculinity is also crucially constructed and sustained through linguistic behaviour such that the use of swear words forms a vital component of men's language, aiding in the assertion of manhood. Kashyap's use of abusive language with reference to his opponents' mother and sister (Akbar 14) is a tool of

masculine domination, where the assertion of virility and sexual prowess at the expense of the womenfolk of the Other helps claim victory over them. The use of such misogynistic language, when juxtaposed with Kashyap's effusive plea for the preservation of Bharat Mata's dignity exposes a deep-seated hypocrisy that also characterises Hindutva's outlook towards women. Kashyap couches his refusal to apologise to Nisha Bisht for using her image without her consent in masculinist terms. He shoots down Mayank's righteous desire to take accountability for the action by taking a derogatory dig at the latter's masculinity- "...what kind of limpdick cares about a girl who doesn't even know his name?" (ibid, 121). To Kashyap, an admission of his mistake to a woman constitutes "...a challenge to both masculinity and intelligence" (ibid, 121). In contrast, Mayank's pressing need to make amends for his mistake "drew from the tumult and shame that had once engulfed him and his mother" (ibid, 122). By issuing a heartfelt apology to Nisha for his wrongdoing, Mayank engages in conscientious behaviour, refusing to be co-opted into regimes of hegemonic masculinity.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to make an opportune and nuanced attempt at teasing out some of the most prominent discourses affecting contemporary India. Fiction sheds light on the complex network of emotions, intentions and circumstances underlying any major discursive formation, through the narration of individual stories. By considering the novel in discussion as a portrayal of contemporary Indian society, this paper has examined the phenomenon of mediatized Hindutva whereby social media has acted as both a tool of and a formative factor behind Hindutva's divisive agendas and enforcement of hegemonic masculine ideals. The central conflict of using the image of Nisha's face as Bharat Mata has placed Mayank as an ambivalent figure in the dominant discourse of Hindu nationalism, while, Kashyap remains a bigoted individual furthering the discourse of hatred and disgust against any non-Hindutva conforming individual or group. Through the employment of the lens of complicit masculinity, the paper has

established that Mayank's masculine performance is not a blind and unthinking adherence to hegemonic Hindutva masculinity but rather involves a continuous negotiation with his personal experiences, internal conflicts and nationalist narratives, at times supporting hegemonic ideals and at others subverting them. Hence, this paper has attempted to delve into certain facets of youth subjectivity positioned at the complex intersection of forces of digital technology, aggressive masculinity and Hindu nationalism, charting the contemporary youth's use of social media platforms in fostering and appropriating particular norms of masculine and Hindutva discourse.

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