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Minority representation in ‘The Digital’: Narratives from Christian Communities in Delhi

Abstract

Technology has become ubiquitous in modern life, propagating digital media as a means to social equity and empowerment. Digital culture is believed to provide opportunities for religious communities to reshape their identity based on virtual group interactions.¹

The digital universe has provided a platform for Christian minorities to re-represent themselves beyond the mainstream media’s projection of them as a community that uses education, health and other benevolent social services for religious conversion. Such representation has left the Christian community in Delhi victimised by a series of attacks that has taken place since the arrival of the new political regime.

Media houses perceive the attack to be a consequence of ‘Hindutva’ Hindu Nationalist ideology. The communal propaganda of ‘Hindutva’ imposes a parochial notion of purity and a drive for a majoritarian theocratic state, which puts minority religious communities at high risk.

This paper presents the findings of a study conducted with the Christian communities in Delhi. This study represents nine Christian denominations and seeks to understand their digital religious representation. The embodiment of the digital² has assisted in empowering as well as oppressing these Christian communities. The

¹ Sherry Turkle, *Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other*, (New York: Basic Books) (2011), p. 2.

² When speaking of ‘the digital’, I am using it as an adjective because in its usage one can never consider it as exclusively digital. Here the experience of the digital is mediated through an individual’s physical expression through touching the screen, looking at the content displayed, and so on. The reason behind using the digital as digital space is that the experience of reality in this technical age is also a part of the metaspaces. This article is dealing with this metaspaces. Hence, ‘digital’ must be read as the digital space.

new efficacies of digital religious participation have empowered the Christian community to exercise digitally their Constitutional rights of freedom of religion. On the other hand, it has heightened anxiety and fear for digitally active members through online threats and abuses.

Key Words: representation, digital disability, surveillance, anxiety, hindutva, digital bodies, empowerment, christian

Introduction

The Churches in India are facing a new materiality, bringing alterations to their communication strategies. This digital materiality is a consequence of the growing usage of the smartphone in people's daily affairs. The materiality here is the objects used for digital life such as, smartphones, laptops, and tablets. The materiality is also applied to move away from the binaries that have emerged between old media and new media. These digital materialities have performance capabilities that have consequences for the embedded reality of its users. The ubiquity of the digital is an embodiment of the same consequences.

The growing use of the Internet by Churches in Delhi has brought new ways to connect with both individuals and groups of Churchgoers that are transcending physical boundaries. The digital Church, brought about by the inclusion of the digital in the functioning of the church, is changing patterns and practices in the physical Church. This digital church reflects the extension of practices from physical to digital format. This movement has emerged with the influx of smartphones in the church that has facilitated increased use of religious applications like Bible apps, commentaries on sacred texts, faith memes, faith videos, and so on. Similarly, social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook etc. have also aided in the formation of digital religious communities.

However, the digital is also representing the Churches in its larger socio-political environment. This is also a consequence of growing Internet and smartphone penetration in Indian markets. This growth is most visible in urban spaces, which contain 152 million of India's active Internet users.³ In urban spaces, the growing use of social media on smartphones is developing technological perceptions about the medium. These perceptions of managing agency, self-efficacy, and privacy in the ubiquitous digital landscape are proving to be a rich platform for religious institutions to utilise apps for their mandate.

Moreover, the growing access to digital technologies in India has not aided in creating a pluralistic space for religious expression. The preamble to the constitution proclaims India a 'secular state'. Here 'secular' signifies the state's assistance and

³ FICCI-KPMG, p. 99.

participation in all religions equally; unlike the western concept of secularism that separates the religion from the state.

Digital freedom in India is a negotiation between religious and political concerns. Religious freedom is represented in the constitutional rights as “Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion”.⁴ Technology as a medium has played a crucial role in the freedom to propagate one’s own religion. However, the potential of the medium to both stir communal riots by hurting religious sentiment and become an instrument of worship through Holy Scriptural apps and Daily devotional content makes the medium an authority in the religious space.

India is witnessing a new form of religious intolerance. This competitiveness has become unsavoury when individuals have been abused, harassed, and killed for converting to another religion, despite the constitutional safeguard in Article 25, which states, “All persons are equally entitled to freedom of consciousness and the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion”.⁵

Christianity in contemporary times is closely tied with the digital. The online space has become a space for assimilation of religious groups; some of these online sites propagate mutually exclusive and fundamentalist viewpoints that have triggered violent communal tensions offline. The Christian community in Delhi is anxious as they are at the receiving end of physical violence from Hindutva forces. Hindutva is another name for Hindu nationalism; a term coined by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. One of the most pertinent events of Hindutva was the Ayodhya Ramjanmabhumi mobilisation. The belief of the Hindu extremists of Ayodhya, which is the birthplace of Lord Ram, led to the demolition of Babri Masjid in December 1992. During this event, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) rose to prominence as the electoral instrument of Hindutva. Since then, Hindutva has been juxtaposed with communalism on the basis of religion, race, and so on. There is a feeling that Hindutva groups are waging a large-scale campaign of hate against Christians and Muslim minority groups.⁶ These expressions are spilling over onto digital spaces, where Christian communities are seeking ways to exercise their civic rights through participatory actions.

Theoretical Framework

⁴ Government of India, The Constitution of India: Part III Fundamental Rights, https://india.gov.in/sites/upload_files/npi/files/coi_part_full.pdf, date accessed 26 January 2016.

⁵ Constitution Society, Fundamental Rights, <http://www.constitution.org/cons/india/p03025.html> date accessed on 1 April, 2016.

⁶ Vikas Pathak, Delhi Church Attacks: Reaction was Motivated says RSS Forum, *The Hindu*, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/delhi-church-attacks-reaction-was-motivated-says-rss-forum/article7874531.ece> date accessed 25 March 2016.

Digital Conceptions

Smartphones have achieved an intimacy with users that incorporates the self and the external world.⁷ The networked digital world blurs the boundaries between public and private spaces, depending on the way the apps represent the individual. As Mark Poster argues, “culture is increasingly simulational in the sense that the media often changes the things that it treats, transforming the identity of originals and referentialities”.⁸ Smartphones have become so intertwined into our day-to-day affairs that the way they represent content becomes our conception of reality.⁹ Smartphones have become part of the meaning making process; the cognition of meanings establishes the intensity of personal interactions on a device.¹⁰

The sheer pervasiveness of digital gadgets¹¹ is encouraging the clergy to use it to meet the Church’s evangelical mandates.¹² Smartphones have enabled a deeply personal and emotional form of social interaction. The unavailability of the device is the popular narrative about the inclusion of social media apps in the life of churches. The use of representational apps in the church has a similar functional capacity to projecting the self in a public sphere.

The mediation of faith as an extension of one’s body is reflected with smartphones.¹³ This is because the materiality of the smartphone extends to its functionality and this in turn is inclusive of relationships, cognitions, public representations, and emotional responses in social digital networks. The urban Church is an information-intensive environment that is driven by hyper-fast content creation and distribution. This pattern is a self-reinforcing system that is socially-technologically interweaving in nature. Digital materiality has formed ways of life by the “irreducible relation between technologies, embodiment, knowledge and perception”.¹⁴ This is evident among the youth, who are constantly engaged with digital devices that are a part of their existence. This exists as a socio-technical hybrid where the body and screen are constantly gazing at each other, acting like mirrors and windows into reality. The content one shares becomes a window for others to look into and likewise the representation is a mirror of the self. Thus, the Church, seeking to influence and guide people in their religious journey, wants to access these

⁷Sherry Turkle, *The second self: Computers and the human spirit*, (Cambridge: MIT Press) (2005), p. 25.

⁸ Mark Poster, *The second media age*, (Cambridge: Blackwell) (1995), p. 30.

⁹ Hana Gershon, *The Breakup 2.0: Disconnecting over new media*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press) (2010), p. 3.

¹⁰ Andreas Hepp, *Cultures of mediatization*, Translated by Keith Tribe, (Cambridge: Polity) (2013), p. 71.

¹¹ James Miller, p. 213.

¹² Steve Taylor, p. 25.

¹³ James Miller, p. 217.

¹⁴ Ingrid Richardson, “Touching the screen: A phenomenology of mobile gaming and the iPhone.” in *Studying mobile media: Cultural technologies, mobile communication and the iPhone*, ed. Larrisa Hjorth, Jean Burgess and Ingrid Richardson, (New York: Routledge) (2012), p. 135.

windows so that it can shape the core values of its congregation. Ideally, the church aspires to see its beliefs and values mirrored in peoples' virtual lives.

Methodology

This study is grounded in the premise that access to reality can be gained through socially constructed means of communication that are shared through language.¹⁵ This research applies the narrative paradigm. Narratives are defined as interpretations of an individual's experience that have contextual focus.¹⁶ These narratives are guided by the affective lens in representing transcendent encounters and mobilisations. I conducted 70 in-depth interviews across churches in Delhi to understand the new digital culture that is driving minority community participation in the public sphere. The in-depth interview was chosen as the basic mode of inquiry because it can portray affective traces when the individual recounts narratives that consequently lead to their participation.

Analysis

Public Sphere and Participatory Action

The public sphere carries the possibility of large congregations of crowds that provide visibility to certain groups and their issues. This idea of the public sphere as argued by Habermas is a consequence of the rise of democracy, which provides space for congregating and passing collective judgement on issues.¹⁷ Visibility lies at the core of being public, which is unobstructed visibility.¹⁸ To gain such visibility, protests and mobilisation have traditionally been used to represent the concerns and voices of the marginalised in society.

The history of protest and mobilisation has not prominently featured the Indian Christian community. During the struggle for Independence, Gandhi's criticism of the Christian community was grounded in the effect of fragmentation it had on lower caste communities. This, according to Gandhi, "undermined unity and

¹⁵ Michael D. Myers, *Qualitative Research in Business & Management*, (London: Sage) (2009), p. 80.

¹⁶ Anne Jo Ollerenshaw, John W. Creswell, "Narrative Research: A Comparison of Two Restorying Data Analysis Approaches", *Qualitative Inquiry* 8:3: (2002), p. 330; Cazarniawska Barbara, *Narratives in Social Science Research*, (London: Sage) (2004), p. 8.

¹⁷ Jürgen Habermas [1962], "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society," Translated by Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence, (Cambridge: Polity) (1989), p. 26.

¹⁸ Jürgen Habermas, p. 4.

mobilisation among these depressed classes in the nationalist movement".¹⁹ However, small groups such as the Presbyterian mission schools in Punjab protested actively against the British government through demonstrations and strikes against the Rowlatt Bill of 1919.²⁰ This active political participation by the Presbyterian community was the exception, as they did not participate in the subsequent Satyagraha movement. In Lahore, the Presbyterian community is known to have sided with the British government as the British were seen as a Christian government that had protected the interests of the missionaries from the start.²¹

Nonetheless, the Christian missions were attributed with changing social status and allowing mobility among certain repressed groups in colonial times. The Nadar' women, who were not allowed to cover their breasts, found support from the Christian missionaries who used the language of Christian modesty and womanly decency to uphold the Nadar's protests.²² Another instance of Christian intervention was through the Jesuits, who supported the low caste 'Shanars' in opposition to the high caste 'Vellalars', who wanted a barrier built in the Church to segregate them from the 'Shanars'.²³ These are the only documented cases of Christian groups standing up for the underprivileged in the public sphere during Colonial rule.²⁴

The post-Colonial phase has seen the influence of liberation theologians from Latin America. They influenced participation in the public sphere through the fish worker movement in Kerala and the Dalit Christian movement. This movement can be traced from 1977, when the Latin Catholic Fisherman's Federation wrote a memorandum to the Chief Minister of Kerala, to 1993, when the Supreme Court announced the decision to ban monsoon-trawling operations.²⁵

Delhi has also witnessed Christian movements in the public sphere. One such movement took place on 18th November 1995, when the Christian community congregated at Sacred Heart Cathedral to demonstrate against the biased treatment of Dalit Christians.²⁶ The protest was in the form of a prayer meeting, which was attended by Mother Teresa and a large number of Bishops and Priests who were protesting for the inclusion of Dalit Christians as Schedule Caste.²⁷ This protest was complemented by Christian Schools across the country, which remained closed for

¹⁹ Gunnell Cederöf, "Anticipating Independent India: The Idea of the Lutheran Christian Nation and Indian Nationalism", in *India and the Indianness of Christianity: Essays on Understanding- Historical, Theological, and Bibliographical in Honour of Robert Eric Frykenberg*, ed. Richard Fox Young (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co) (2009), p. 211.

²⁰ Gunnell Cederöf, p. 206.

²¹ Gunnell Cederöf, p. 206.

²² Rowena Robinson, *Christians of India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications) (2013), p. 90.

²³ Rowena Robinson, p. 77.

²⁴ Rowena Robinson, p. 173.

²⁵ Rohan D. Mathews, Fish workers Movement in Kerala, India. *Dialogues, proposals, stories for global citizenship*, <http://base.d-p-h.info/en/fiches/dph/fiche-dph-8852.html> date accessed 16 March 2016.

²⁶ Rowena Robinson, p. 189.

²⁷ Rowena Robinson, p. 189.

the day. September 26th 2008 saw another instance of public protests to show solidarity towards a Christian community that faced the brunt of communal violence in Orissa.²⁸ This seven-day protest and prayer meeting at Jantar Mantar was well represented by people of different faiths and political parties.²⁹ However, these mobilisations have done little to ease the threats and anxieties felt by the minority community. The past two decades have been replete with narratives of growing violence against the Christian community. There has been a marked increase in instances of burning of Churches and Bibles, attacks on Priests, raping of Nuns, forcible reconversions to Hinduism, and aggressive anti-Christian propaganda by Hindutva groups.³⁰

For any community facing atrocities, urban spaces have become the epicentre for democratic expression. The urban site draws attention to the cause and provides space—especially to minority groups—to become visible in the public sphere. Delhi—as the capital of India—has historically been an urban centre where the politics of nation state have been enacted. Due to its status as the capital of the nation, Delhi is represented as a site of imagination, desire and imaging. The public sphere of Delhi is an idea where hope for genuine democracy and social justice dwells alongside a space that shapes the potential future of the nation. This public sphere has rarely witnessed the participation of Christian communities at the sites of protest, where popular political deliberations often play themselves out. The public sphere in Delhi primarily encompasses spaces near the Parliament House, which is also close to major news agencies. Proximity to the site of protest gives the new agencies ease of access to issues they would like to cover. This space has seen people from across India converge to voice their grievances. This space saw the massive mobilisation of Christians on 2nd December 2014 and 5th February 2015 that were made possible by the 'Whatsapp' application. When queried about the mobilization, the youth leader responded, "Whatsapp has made it easy for us to get people together, especially for protests, as it's about our democratic right and people want to participate for such causes when they feel the Church is under attack"³¹. This mobilisation was a result of continued attacks on Churches in Delhi. The Christian community perceived these attacks to be orchestrated by Hindutva forces. India, in the last two decades, has witnessed the electorally beneficial strategy of communal violence and polarisation on the part of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The advocates of Hindutva harbour differences against three groups. They perceive Christians, Muslims and Communists groups as a subversion of national integration as these groups are loyal to foreign forces (Rome, Mecca and Moscow).³²

²⁸ Augustine Kanjamalai, *The Future of Christian Mission in India: Towards a New Paradigm For the Third Millennium*, (New Delhi: Pickwick Publications) (2014), p. 108.

²⁹ Augustine Kanjamalai.

³⁰ Augustine Kanjamalai, p. 114.

³¹ Catholic Informant. Interview by author. Transcript 4, New Delhi. October 8, 2015.

³² Arun Barua, *Debating 'Conversion' in Hinduism and Christianity*, (New York: Routledge) (2015), p. 15.

Under the current Government, there has been growing spate of attacks against anything Christian as it symbolizes a different culture and ideology from that of Hindutva. With BJP—a strong Hindutva proponent assuming governing control—most communal tensions are seen to be a result of distinct interests and pursuing of divergent aims.

The Christian mobilisation on 5th February received countrywide mainstream media coverage. The mobilization was a consequence of growing instances of violence against the Christian community in the three months prior to 5th February 2015. In these three months, there were 45 documented incidents of violence against the Christian community, where the perpetrators were identified as members of Hindutva groups.³³

The large-scale media coverage of these protests was a consequence of the government forcefully overthrowing protestors from the public sphere. The use of brutal force by the police drew media criticism and attention to the plight of the Christian community. The police were criticised for using violence on elderly people, priests, and nuns on the site of protest. The police detained 350 people at the site.³⁴ The violence against the Christian community also made visible Hindutva's privileged impunity under the current government. This feeling of impunity is primarily due to police bias and unwillingness to adequately investigate and arrest the perpetrators of communal violence.³⁵ This inaction was evident once again with the crackdown on Christian protesters.

On one hand, the growing prevalence of smartphones in Churches enabled quick circulation of instances of violence against the community. On the other hand, it led to more anxiety and fear within the community. This two-fold consequence is a by-product of the growing access to information related to the growing atrocities faced by the community. However, there is also evidence of direct participatory action by the community in the face of such adversity. Individuals have taken to social media to express their discord as members of the Christian community who have been denied their fundamental rights. These digital participatory measures have also faced backlash from supporters of Hindutva in social media pages. Therefore, the public sphere is a mixed reality of digital and physical suppression of voices from the Christian community.

³³ Arun Barua.

³⁴ Antonio Anup Gonsalves, For these Christians in India, peaceful protests led to jail time. *Catholic News Agency* <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/for-these-christians-in-india-peaceful-protests-led-to-jail-time-33566/> date accessed 20 March 2016.

³⁵ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. Retrieved from <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%202015%20%282%29.pdf> date accessed March 10, 2016.

Minority and Digital Participatory Action

The digital conceptions of self are manufactured with a sense of immediacy, proximity and urgency. This digital conception of self is shaping the imagination of the urban minority youth. The digital was seen by Christian youth as a promise of individual freedom, a kernel for seeking social justice and a space for peaceful democratic participation.

However, WhatsApp inspired mobilisation and the subsequent digital harassment against the community has exposed the limitations of the digital promise. The standard of nationalism and ownership of public space is disproportionately held by the majoritarian religious body. The majority controls the mainstream media and has greater representation as well as greater cultural control of the public sphere. The attempts by Christian minority communities to gain visibility in the public space has come at the cost of facing more instances of violence by the state in order to gain visibility from mainstream media. The Churches felt this lack of representation in the mainstream and turned to digital media spaces such as Facebook to gain visibility for their grievances. For instance, one of the respondents stated,

Recently, when church attacks happened, it was WhatsApp that helped us. The media did not show anything. So, the next day, when there was a protest, people came because of WhatsApp, which is why there were many people to support us. The use of Facebook is mostly for publicising the church and to present it in a good light. We have recently used Facebook to draw attention to the incident of Church burning and the violence we face as Christians etc. We do a lot of events in church, so we use it primarily for publicity.³⁶

The scope of publicity through Facebook has seen limited mutual dialogue among religious communities. However, according to a Catholic priest, for the Christian community as a whole, the Facebook space has educated people and brought about support for their minority existence. He stated,

Like when we had Churches burnt in Dilshad garden, I had addressed the people for a public gathering and that was through Facebook and that inspired people to join the protest group next day. So through constructive criticism and planning, the public gathering took place and it all happened on social media. On 1st December, after the Dilshad Garden Church was burnt down we had a wonderful agitation in Delhi just by the involvement of people through social networking before the

³⁶ Catholic Informant. Interview by author. Transcript 26, New Delhi. October 26, 2015.

public gathering on 2nd December. Likewise, on 5th of February, Whatsapp helped us in getting people together.³⁷

The possibility of organising dissent quickly around common feelings of victimhood made it simpler to gather people for collective action with the aid of social media. Social media platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook aided authority figures of the Church to make their networks understand the struggles of the Christian minority. It also provides a space for narratives of hope to fight against the injustices and take a united political stand in the public sphere. While discussing the role of the digital, another Priest highlighted how sometimes minority communities trust their WhatsApp more than mainstream media. They feel that mainstream media has ignored their plight. Therefore, when there is a call to action on WhatsApp, people respond in large numbers. WhatsApp has a trust factor and these mobilisations are a testament to this reality.

When it came to attacks and protests, we used only WhatsApp. People turned out in 3,000s and 4,000s and just one day before. Like the church was burnt in Dilshad Garden on 1st and the protest was on 2nd and due to WhatsApp we had a huge turnout.³⁸

Thus, the possibility of mobilising in the public sphere and asking for equality under the law is the reality of social media empowerment within the Christian community in Delhi.

However, members of the Christian minority that have taken to social media to condemn the continuation of violence and harassment at the hand of extremist organisations are facing threats to their lives and that of their loved ones. One of the church leaders explains his experience of voicing his opinion online against church attacks.

When I posted about a famous Malayalam author, I get 1,000 likes, but when I post on the current government and its draconian ruling with criticism, I receive just six likes. However, I do get people calling me and telling me how great an article it was. Then my question is, “why did you not like it on Facebook, let alone comment?” This is because I have been identified by the Hindutva forces as someone who spews venom about Hindus and forcefully converts people. Abuses and violent acts towards me I can tolerate but when they go after my daughter, my wife, my friend who is the head of the parish, even his wife and so on who are closely related to me, I am terrified and they all are constantly threatened because of this. Moreover even liking my comments puts people on the blacklist of Hindutva.³⁹

³⁷ Catholic Informant. Interview by author. Transcript 11, New Delhi. September 15, 2015.

³⁸ Catholic Informant. Interview by author. Transcript 12, New Delhi. September 10, 2015.

³⁹ Catholic Informant. Interview by author. Transcript 13, New Delhi. September 12, 2015.

This visibility in the digital public sphere is also disempowering as it provides access to some majoritarian force to repress an individual digitally. The mobilisation led to leaders of the Christian community meeting the Home minister of India. The picture that was tweeted by the Home minister received numerous comments targeting the same Informant who was made visible in the interview picture shared (Fig 1.1, Fig 1.2, Fig 1.3).

Fig 1.1

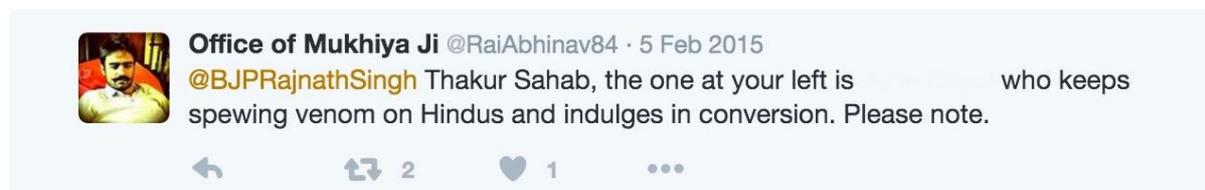
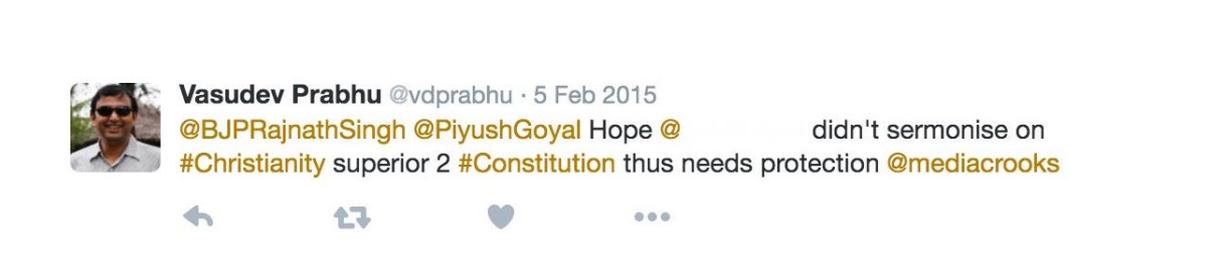


Fig 1.2



Fig 1.3



These images of comments show the ease of recognition that certain Christian figures enjoy in the digital sphere. Majoritarian supporters of Hindutva are constantly silencing the voices of the minority in social media. This is done through the sheer number of comments and content which makes the digital media content skewed towards their ideology. Effectively, the overbearing narrative of the tech-empowered, hate-mongering Hindutva supporter supersedes the right of the Christian minority to be represented with dignity and equality. These members of the Christian community feel vilified and harassed online when they present their opinions digitally. A growing culture of group defamation that minority communities face in their digital encounters.

This has led to the proliferation of WhatsApp as the dominant social media tool as it is embedded in closed groups and inter-personal conversations. All the Christian communities in Delhi are active and expressing themselves on the WhatsApp network instead of Facebook and Twitter. This is an escapist approach

in the digital public sphere as growing narratives of prejudices and discrimination online are disempowering the minority.

Nonetheless, there is also a positive take on the growing oppressive environment. Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, which has a long tradition of intervening in the political domain, India has no such tradition. This is because there is no consensual centralised Christian authority that could claim to speak on behalf of the entire Christian population. This perceived lack of unity between the Christian groups has seen leadership positively approach the new instances of violence.

I think so far—whatever has happened—I am damn happy it has happened. I think it is a call from above. We need to wake up, we need to get united, we need to realise what we are Christians and forget the segregations. There is no way that this government can put us down or shut us down. Now with social media we are more connected, therefore it is easier for us to come together as a united community. Well, there is a greater majority of people who are not too positive and they probably feel threatened. But I think they need to be more optimistic and I think there is enough strength in our belief to not just carry us forward, to make us sail forward and grow.⁴⁰

The digital divide in urban spaces is closing down and the Christian community can be optimistic and realistic about the progress it can achieve as a united community. There is recognition of growing fear and anxiety in the community with the increased instances of violence. However, social media is being understood as a dialogical tool that can bring together the dispersed community for political participation.

The religious digital space and its communities are recognising that through inhabitation of the machines, humans come to life. There is a religious element of perpetual contact, which is enabled by smartphones as a medium of communication. These mediums of communication—when affectively induced—begin to approximate a ‘pure communication’ where one mind is shared and connected with others in their digital community.⁴¹ The belief is to generate this oneness in the Christian community so that they can stand up together as a political force against oppressive regimes in power. The mobilisation on the 5th February is attributed to this connection of mind and awareness through digital devices about the Christian community as a whole coming under attack.

This connection of mind, according to Dong-Hoo Lee, is a consequence of ‘hyper-connection’ and ‘hyper-awareness’ of others in the digital religious

⁴⁰ Catholic Informant. Interview by author. Transcript 6, New Delhi. September 28, 2015.

⁴¹ James E. Katz, Mark A. Aakhus, “Conclusion: Making meaning of mobiles - A theory of apparatgeist”, in *Perpetual contact: Mobile communication, private talk, public performance*, ed. James Katz and Mark Aakhus, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) (2002), pp. 307–312.

community.⁴² This hyper-existence with digital-religious logic affectively alters an individual's engagement in the virtual. The smartphone engages the sensorimotor in a continuous manner, such as the engagement brought about by watching breaking news about violence against the Christian community. The installation of news channel apps is prevalent in the church communities; therefore, they are always connected to media narratives regarding atrocities committed by extremist groups.

This study also showed how narratives of church attacks and persecution led to an increased number of prayer requests across churches in Delhi. On average, the leaderships of the Churches were part of eight groups. Therefore, they were always able to narrate stories of persecution in Church meetings and share narratives of persecution on WhatsApp groups. Such narratives of being persecuted touches, moves and mobilises individuals in the digitally lived religion.

As shown above, these narratives of being persecuted also brought forth physical mobilisation in the networks of the larger community. The hyper-existence makes us affected by the content that we constantly turn to on our phones. The digital materiality interplays with our feelings and desires to generate bodily alterations to take us into participatory action in our technologically embodied life.

Conclusion

This study shows how the Christian communities in Delhi have been increasingly receiving forwarded messages in their WhatsApp groups that are more cautionary in nature. As congregation members explained, "A year back it was more positive but now it's more fearful. It's because of political reason".⁴³

This is due to the proliferation of smartphone and promulgated content that alarms the minority community. The WhatsApp influx has content circulating of the Hindutva war cry 'Pehle Kasi, Phir Isai' (first the butchers (Muslims), then the Christians). The sharing of such discourse of hatred towards the community has increased the levels of anxiety in the community. The digital space is also having a detrimental impact on the communities' ability to express itself in the public sphere. This phenomenon is visible on Facebook and Twitter as they are broadcasting media. Simultaneously, closed group options of Facebook and WhatsApp have empowered minority groups to assemble and demand their constitutional rights. The digital public sphere is embedded with disempowering traits for the minority groups.

⁴²Dong-Hoo Lee, "In bed with the iPhone: The iPhone and hypersociality in Korea", in *Studying mobile media: Cultural technologies, mobile communication and the iPhone*, ed. Larrisa Hjorth, Jean Burgess and Ingrid Richardson, (New York: Routledge) (2012), p. 68.

⁴³ Protestant Informant. Interview by author. Transcript 6, New Delhi. September 4, 2015.

However, the digital in the form of closed groups has worked to generate courage and support to stand up against the atrocities faced by the Christian community.

The Digital India initiative under Prime Minister Narendra Modi needs to protect digital minorities. The Magna Carta for Digital India is currently engaging with issues of net neutrality, quality of service, security and privacy. However, affording dignity and equality in terms of digital participation to minority groups is a constitutional mandate of which the current government has fallen short.

This systematic exclusion in the public sphere of minority groups will breed resentment. Therefore, there is a need to provide space for the minorities in a co-existing public sphere. Co-existence is accompanied by adoption, and this adoption is dependent on mutual dialogue that premises the understanding of another's vocabulary. Therefore, it is imperative to allow minorities to voice themselves and their concerns in the digital and physical public spaces.

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