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Digitizing—The New Sanskritizing

Chandrabhanu Pattanayak

ABSTRACT

Through an exploratory study, this paper proposes to focus on the extent to which the digital is fast penetrating the nooks and the corners of rural India and the ways in which rural and tribal communities are not only accessing the “digital” but being affected by it.

All Asian countries are at different stages of development in their attempts to build epistemic societies, bridge the digital gap and improve access to services delivered through the internet. This paper will explore how Religion is using the internet in developing a complex system of social communication in communities which are already steeped in conservative and religious values. Since most Asian countries, especially India, are multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual, it is normally assumed that the “digital,” in fact, is a great tool to maintain and nurture this plurality. This paper will, however, explore how the digital technologies actually help to homogenize societies especially in the religious space, rather than nurture heterogeneity, thus leading to the growth of religious fundamentalism and right-wing ideologies.

A few days ago I received a Whatsapp message which read something like this:

Eight years ago, when I went to the temple, it was written “mobile phones prohibited.”

Two years ago, it was changed to: “Keep your mobiles switched off.”

Last year it was changed again. It asked you to keep your mobile in silent mode.

Yesterday, when I went, it was changed again.

“If you wish to take a selfie with Lord/idol, please pay Rs.50.00 at the counter” it said.

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This was meant to be a joke, but it is also something to think about. Even if one is sceptical of the timeline, it is important to look at the direction of change and how this change is helping change the mind-sets of people in India today.

The title of my paper has the term ‘sanskritization’ in it. This is a term coined by the famous Indian sociologist M.N. Srinivas. He uses the term in a technical manner to explain a social process at a particular time. It stands for the upward mobility of people within the caste system. According to him, there are two dimensions to Sanskritization, one, cultural and the other structural. The first results in the mobile group introducing changes in its customs, ritual, ideology and lifestyle, while the second leads to a gradual entry into the Hindu fold in the case of outside or marginal groups, and to their upward mobility in the local caste hierarchy in the case of groups already within the Hindu fold.

I would like to argue here, that this process of sanskritization, which used to be organic and in a sense aspirational is now being engineered externally, using digital technologies by certain groups for specific purposes. I would also like to point out here, that digital technologies lend themselves to certain ideological groups using them to homogenize thoughts.

In an earlier paper, I have argued that the Internet and digital technologies are a democratizing process and that they have helped in promoting orality.¹ The mixed blessings of literacy are apparent in the development of the academic community. Kaufer and Carley² (drawing on the work of Charles Bazerman) explain that while print has facilitated distant communication, allowing individuals separated by geography to get to form knowledge communities despite being unable to meet face-to-face, it has also helped separate and isolate participants. Participation in academic discourse, for example, requires that authors “compose a text satisfying the requirements of both immediate comprehension and relative similarity for an anonymous and widely dispersed readership.” The lack of visual or conversational cues in print communication make informal discussions difficult. Thus, while print revolutionized the distribution of professionals, allowing the creation of a virtual community in which geographically dispersed readers could meet each other within texts, print also helped isolate members within that community.

¹ Pattanayak, C., Pattanayak, S. & Bayer, J. (ed), (2016), Media(Ted) Orality, chapter in *Multilingualism & Multiculturalism: Perceptions Practice and Policy*. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 91-100.

² Kaufer, D. S., & Carley, K. M. (1993). *Communication at a Distance: The Influence of Print on Sociocultural Organization and Change*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Today, more than two millennia after Plato’s Phaedrus, electronic media is often hailed as Western culture’s salvation from print. Lanham (1993) argues that the humanities’ narrow focus on the printed text deprives literacy education of a critical understanding of electronic media, which in turn works to make literacy education irrelevant to modern life. Lanham sees a renewed appreciation of media among humanists as essential to insuring that humanistic values continue to inform education. In particular, Lanham argues that digital media will revitalize the study of literature:³

The computer’s oscillation between reader and writer reintroduces the oscillation between literate and oral coordinates that stands at the center of classical Western literature. The electronic word will allow us to teach the classical canon with more understanding and zest than ever before.⁴

and takes this advocacy of electronic media a step further than Lanham and Welch (or anyone else), arguing that computer-mediated communication represents not only an improved medium for scholarly communication, but the fourth revolution in human cognition. The first revolution, the advent of speech, allowed communication at a speed approximating that of human thought. Writing, the second revolution, is slower than speech, but is powerful nonetheless for its ability to make speech dependent upon the speaker or the memory of the hearers. The third revolution came with the widespread use of moveable type, which brought about a revolution not in the way people communicate, but rather in the way they conceive the world. Now, at the end of the millennium, we have what Harnad calls “electronic skywriting”—the “fourth cognitive revolution.” In this revolution, writing will allow us to communicate with speeds approaching that of speech, which is much closer to the speed of thought than other communication media. This revolution will be most profound in the scholarly community.

Certainly, communication technologies such as television, films, videos, sound recordings, computer games, are far more popular than the reading of novels, plays, or poetry. The popularity of the Kindle or the tab today and

³ Lanham, R. A. (1983). *Literacy and the Survival of Humanism*. New Haven: Yale University Press

⁴ Harnad, S. (1991). Post-Gutenberg Galaxy: The Fourth Revolution in the Means of Production of Knowledge. *The Public-Access Computer Systems Review*, 2(1), 39-53.

the fact that most publishers are venturing in a big way into e-publishing proves my point. We are entering a new era when the oral is more valued than literacy.⁵ In such a circumstance it seems to me quite foolish to posit the oral against the literate and place a value on either. Literacy, then, looked at from the stand point of orality is a very effective tool of oppression. From the point of view of someone coming from India, parameters and reports of the UN and other international agencies that point out how the only salvation of oral cultures is in becoming literate ultimately to become oral again which they were in the first place, seem quite intriguing to say the least.

While it is true that technologies that give credence to the written word is oppressive, when they reach small languages and small communities, they also exert pressure for getting rid of multiple channels for creation and transmission of knowledge and emphasize simple solutions of dominant mono-lingualism and mono-culturalism. Languages and cultures survive and are sustained through usage. Language use for creation and transmission of knowledge is language use for development and development of this kind would lead to a robust and vibrant culture of knowledge. When technology is viewed as a marketable, returns-based commodity, then technology development and culture development will take divergent paths. Language development is bound to take a back step and spoken (unwritten) languages are bound to lose on both counts.

The debate between 'Orality' and 'Literacy' is a very old one. However, it would be prudent to point out certain positions that maybe useful in this paper. One of the fundamental arguments has been that Orality has been equated with poverty, malnutrition, lack of education and healthcare, while literacy has been linked with growth of productivity, childcare and advance of civilization. While there is very little evidence to suggest that literacy has civilized mankind, and as Stubbs has pointed out, "we know precious little about the social functions of literacy"⁶ these positions continue to be held steadfastly. Olson has suggested that categories of analysis between the oral and the written traditions often overlap and involve a series of linguistic, cognitive and social changes.

⁵ Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1980, 259.

⁶ Stubbs, M. (1980). *Language and literacy: The Sociolinguistics of Reading and Writing*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Pattanayak,⁷ in his book, *Language and Cultural Diversity* talks about how

the vedic tradition in India, the Oral historians of Africa, the oral interpreters of epics in Europe and Asia, who maintained the oral traditions developed the metalanguage to talk about texts and propagated the tradition through 'schools' that would exemplify the categories postulated for orality.

If, as Donne wrote, letters as much as conversations can 'mingle souls', then to attribute to letters all the consequences of modernity is an act of oppression. As Helen Gardner⁸ put it,

Compared with the fruitful enlargement with the capacity to see, and think and know and feel, that the experience of reading gives to those who will make the imaginative and intellectual effort to attempt to apprehend the work as its author made it, the sport of 'making texts' and 'importing meanings' is a perverse and barren exercise in ingenuity, a *reductio ad absurdum* of the emphasis which the old New Criticism gave to the importance of readers' response.

In India, there was a tradition of fixing texts orally and the written and the oral were mutually supportive. Between 800 BC and 200 AD, certain changes took place beginning with philosophers and religious leaders to thinkers from Greece to China who put in great efforts to create texts. However there was a creative tension between the oral and the literate texts which was based on the dual principles of reflection and technology. This is precisely the difference between what Illich distinguishes as scribal superiority of literacy over orality.⁹

Oral tradition on the Internet includes a variety of areas: language preservation, oral history, storytelling, poetry, and new media (digital radio and webcasts). Each of these includes archives of papers, databases, and events, and for each group there are associations which are using the Internet

⁷ Pattanayak D. P. (2014). *Literacy: An Instrument of Oppression, Language and Cultural Diversity*, Vol.2, Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 69-72.

⁸ Gardner, H. (1986). The Cognitive Consequences of Literacy. *Canadian Psychology*, 27 (2), 109-21.

⁹ Pattanayak, D. P. (2014). *Literacy: An Instrument of Oppression, Language and Cultural Diversity*, Vol.2, Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 69-72.

to grow and to keep members informed. Finally, there are new collaborations that involve groups that would have never met before the Internet became popular. Some of these are online and some are offline but only last as long as the duration of the project or event. For instance, this conference used the web to call for papers, and the organizers and speakers used email to work out the details, submit papers, and keep informed about the agenda. This ability to link up, to collaborate will lessen the isolation of people involved in oral history, storytelling, and poetry projects around the world.

The example of language is also true for other aspects of culture. If one expects that technologies inherently possess the possibility to nurture plurality, it is not so. It is how technologies are used and by who they are used that matter. It is my contention to suggest here that technologies, and especially digital technologies, while they have been used most effectively as a tool of freedom in the fight against oppressive regimes—the greatest recent examples being the use of twitter and the internet in what has come to be known as the Arab springs, has also been used by forces holding specific religious and political ideologies to create homogenizing movements. I would like to point out here, that in both instances it is bringing together, large numbers of people to engage and believe in a particular point of view. The difference is on which side of the spectrum one stands.

In the realm of religion, I would like to take some examples from India to show how digital technologies have worked to diffuse plurality, rather than emphasise it. Many scholars have spoken of standardization as being the central issue when one studies the impact of modern media on religious culture.

When the printing press was brought by the Portugese to Goa, it was used by missionaries to propagate the Christian faith. By the nineteenth century, printing technology became a major factor in the transmission of both Hindu and Muslim religious traditions. My concern here however, is with the new media. While printing technology created a certain kind of homogenization by printing pictures of Gods in one form, it was described and justified by the proponents of technology as the logical explanation of the Hindu concept of *darsana*. It was believed that because central to Hindu religious observance is *darsana*, the auspicious seeing of the divine being, the mechanical reproductions of pictures of deities was acceptable. However, what this did was that it created a “oneness” of vision which defeated the whole purpose underlying the concept of *darsana*.

Similarly with the comic book form. Frances Pritchett in a study of the Amar Chitra Katha comic book series recounts how he once overheard two high government officials settle an argument about some point in the Ramayana by referring to one of the comics. Whatever else one may make of this, it is surely apparent, that the comic book has become the referent, at least for some classes in the cities as far as religious acculturation is concerned. What is interesting is that Pritchett points out that the worldview presented in the series is largely the worldview of one individual, the world view of its creator, Mr. Anant Pai.¹⁰ And yet, this worldview has translated into becoming the world view of an entire generation of urban middle class India growing up at a particular period of time.

Then of course, came the audio recordings. This was one of the most popular form of digitization and possibly the one technology that lent itself best to the the Indian and the South Asian context. Since India is primarily an oral culture, the audio technology led to the proliferation and popularization of several forms of performances. This also allowed for many voices and many traditions to grow and flourish without contest.

The revolution of the moving picture brought with it great promise of variety and pluralism. However, this was not to be. The protagonists of the film industry in India were people who came from a certain strata of society and therefore put on celluloid a series of images that confirmed to a particular cultural and religious tradition. These films came on the heels of a series of films made by British and American film makers who depicted India and its religio-cultural traditions in a typically “orientalist” mode. As far as I know, there were at least a hundred and forty films made about India before India became independent. These were films which highly exoticised Indian culture and its many religions. Indian religions held the fascination of foreign filmmakers right from the silent era up until today. Shirley Temple has made a film on India in 1923 and the Rudyard Kipling poem, *Ganga Din*, was made into a popular film in the 1950s depicting the dark and mysterious ugly religions of the East. The end of that film became the beginning of the Peter Sellers hit film of 1976, *The Party*. It was as if a tradition continues. In this backdrop, the middle class Indian film maker, in order to remedy the Orientalist point of view sought to project a single unified vision of Indian religion and culture.

¹⁰ Pritchett, F. W. (1997). The World of Amar Chitra Katha, in *Media and Transformation of Religion in South Asia*, ed. Lawrence A. Babb & Susan S. Wadley, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 76-106.

The television which developed in the west as a people's technology, reinforced the images of its predecessor. It is interesting to note that when Ramanand Sagar made the *Ramayan* on television, the country came to a standstill. When *Ramayan* was telecast, offices would shut down, public transport halted for the duration of the show and families stopped cooking to watch the show. This most popular show was largely based on a single vision of the *Ramayan*—the *Tulsi Ramayan*, which was up until then popularly only in certain pockets of North India. *Ramayan*, then became the staple, homogenized myth and epic of all India. At least two generations of youth in India learnt their *Ramayan* not from the story telling oral traditions of India but the singular version of Ramanand Sagar's and Tulsi Das's vision of *Ramayan*. It is not surprising, therefore, that when Delhi University introduced Prof. A. K. Ramanujan's brilliant essay on *Many Ramayans*, there was great uproar and resistance and that had to be deleted from the course of study.

In my reckoning, I believe that India had finally found a single text around which certain right-wing religious positions could rally. Thus far religious fundamentalism in India had difficulty in taking roots because there was not one rallying image or text. India had finally found one. It is interesting to note that scholars have identified 360 odd versions of the *Ramayan* prevalent in India. All of them are the same story and at the same time significantly different. In fact the *Valmiki Ramayan*, which most scholars consider as the root text, has been given epic status because of its richness and variety. All characters, even though deified, have human qualities and human follies. Here, in the version that was popularised by the media, those precise qualities were sanitised. The characters were made "ideal". We had an ideal Man, an ideal Husband, and ideal Wife, an ideal Brother, an ideal *Bhakt* or devotee, and even an ideal Foe. All of a sudden we were talking about India as the land of Rama the ideal nation, devoid of all plurality and where minority and the different needed to be *mainstreamed*.

This response is a kind of defensive attempt to redefine Hinduism as a 'proper' religion among Semitic lines and to make this redefined Hinduism the pillar of a second, nativised theory of modernization of mind and society in India. This form of modernization was squarely posited against the liberal-secular European model which was becoming more and more popular among the elite Indian. In this other form, "concepts such as nation-state, and technology continued to be important, but they were now to be pursued through a language that was Hindu in its new redefined sense. Simultaneously, the idea of nationalism was nativised in a form that was able to sanction the

attempts to convert the Hindus into a conventional, European-style nation."¹¹

Of late I have begun to realize that unlike the colonial encounter where the Other was being consciously Othered, we have begun to Other ourselves to achieve almost the same result. We have been some how caught up in a post-modern conundrum where in trying to exclude the other, we have excluded ourselves. We find ourselves caught up in the tussle between what we have learnt, which is the constant reinforcement of a "single moment" or the "modern moment", as defined for us by western education and the legacy of the enlightenment, and on the other hand, the knowledge of the fact that our past clings tenaciously to our present, traditional India thrives in contemporary locales. For us history is not a contiguous single entity but many histories operating within many nationalisms. This is our strength rather than our weakness and this is our Modernity.

This new Hinduism—the political ideology of which was to be later given the name *Hindutva*—had two important features. The first defensively rejected or devalued the little cultures of India as so many indicies of the county's backwardness and as prime candidates for integration within the Hindu/national mainstream. This Hinduism would be primarily classical, *Bramhnic*, *Vedantic* and therefore not an embarrassment to the 'modern' Indians in touch with the more 'civilized' parts of the world. It was this high culture that was projected as the basis of the new Hindu nation.

Second, the redefined version of Hinduism allowed those who saw the new religion more as an instrument of political mobilization. This part of the redefinition of Hinduism derived strength from the fact that Indian culture was primarily organized around religion and it seemed natural to some Indians, sold to the new myth of nation-state, to use Hinduism as a national ideology rather than as a repertoire of religious, cultural and moral categories in politics. This possibility was to be later developed by M. K. Gandhi. These two strands of Hinduism could never be reconciled. And fifty years after his death, Gandhi's Hinduism continues to look to Hindu nationalists openly anti-statist, anti-*Bramhnic*, disaggregating, emasculating and hostile to modern science and technology. Even more dangerous, his Hinduism brings to politics a cultural-moral critique of *Hindutva* from the point of view of Hinduism as the living faith of a majority of Indians.

¹¹ Nandy, A., Trivedy, S., Mayaram, S., & Yagnik, A. (1995) *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of the Self*. Oxford: Oxford India Paperbacks, 57.

In the last half century most so-called modern developed societies have shifted from being a primarily textual culture to a hybrid culture that leans more toward orality and visual communication and are moving increasingly further from the intensive textuality of the first half of the twentieth century. This is what American social scientists are afraid of. This shift is evident not only in the new reliance on visual and aural sources of information (e.g. CNN, talk radio, YouTube, NPR) over textual ones, but even in the way in which these sources are packaged, edited, written, and recorded.

McLuhan states “today we seem to be receding from an abstract book culture towards a highly sensuous, plastic pictorial culture,”¹² and this plastic, pictorial culture can be seen not only in the visual fixation of the cable news networks, with their token, unreadable text crawls—or in talk radio where volume and emphasis on florid word pictures often substitutes for substance—but also in entertainment media. Rare is a modern director who believes in dialogue over action, the long shot over the quick cut, character building over the car chase. As an exercise in contrast it is helpful to study the programming of the BBC. The British, it seems, still have a desire for textual constructs in their visual and audio entertainment (perhaps owing to the long tradition of literacy there). BBC programming often contains single shots that last thirty seconds, and dialogue exchanges that last minutes. By contrast the average American television program will not contain a single shot that exceeds five seconds, and dialogue is neatly concluded in twenty seconds.

This shift is not, however, the fault of the producers of the product as much as it is the fault of the consumer (if it is anyone’s fault at all—it is more likely just a natural progression); we want the blurb, the sound bite, the outtake. We don’t want to have to read the whole story—just give us the “nut.” Watch the whole program? Preposterous; we’ll simply TiVo it and watch the highlights. Don’t break out of the easily digestible formula, as Ong says “in an oral culture, to think through something in non-formulaic, non-patterned, non-mnemonic terms...would be a waste of time.”¹³ We are fast becoming a culture that wants to distill, compress, and condense only the most exciting bits of anything and then access those bits at our leisure on YouTube.

In our current culture we are fast shifting back toward easily remembered slogans and images so that we can regurgitate them without thought;

¹² McLuhan, M. (1995). *Essential McLuhan*. 1st. Concord, ONT: Anasasi, 306.

¹³ Ong, W. (2003). Orality, Literacy, and Modern Media. In *Communication in History*. Ed. David Crowley. San Francisco: Pearson, 67.

homogenous diversity that is a false construct and an illusion of real, spontaneous diversity; an image fixated society that doesn’t want the boring examination, but rather the bulleted facts supplemented with visuals; a fast-food society that refuses to wait for the slow build, the extended resolution, the tension of text. We prefer the easily scanned, retained and transmitted ease of orality and imagery. What type of society will this neo-orality bring? Only time will tell...though I hope I don’t have to wait too long to find out.

Diversity is an often stated goal of the modern American culture and there can be little doubt that it is a noble goal, but one must wonder if what they are achieving is actual diversity. Politically correct, inoffensive, safe, non-threatening, sterile, and meaningless are all adjectives which (it could be fairly argued) describe not only modern speech, but modern thought in America as well. Marshall McLuhan states that preliterate societies are fixed and homogenous¹⁴, so we can state that post literate societies should see some shift back toward this fixed and homogenous status. We desire diversity, but only when it falls within the confines of the acceptable; we are open to alternative points of view, but only when they don’t seem to threaten the status quo. To paraphrase Ong, in this secondary orality we have decided to promote diversity not out of some spontaneous expression of difference, but rather because, through analytic reflection, we have decided that diversity is a good thing; we restrict our diversity in order to ensure that the right type of diversity is achieved¹⁵.

It is not only our ever-increasing homogeneity that is indicative of our creep toward an oral culture, but also our ever decreasing attention span. Ong states that “you know what you can recall”¹⁶ and increasingly our cultural recall is limited to the images that we have seen and the easily remembered bumper-sticker slogans which we have heard. Carefully written and researched polemics are rarely published, much less read, in this new environment. Today, those who wish to transmit a memorable message package it in the form of easily remembered slogans, catchphrases, and buzz. The advent of visual news media have created in the society a sort of collective memory based on powerful imagery instead of in-depth analysis.

Today, the discussion has moved further from the secondary orality that Ong had posited to another level of orality which is much more akin to

¹⁴ McLuhan, *Essential McLuhan*, 304.

¹⁵ Ong, Orality, Literacy, and Modern Media, 69.

¹⁶ Ong, Orality, Literacy, and Modern Media, 65.

primary orality than to literacy. This has been made possible by the development of computer-mediated communication (CMC) systems. This new form of orality occurs in real-time and is asynchronous. Although based on text, the discourse in these computer-mediated forums exhibits many qualities of an oral culture. The existence of this text-based orality may imply that discourse need not be based upon sound in order to have oral characteristics. Rather, oral characteristics grow out of computer-mediated communication which gives participants greater independence over time and space than paper-based text communication. These CMC forums give rise to communities of people who participate with emotion, involvement, and expressiveness.

While it is true that the new digital media has helped enormously in the Arab springs movements and the free democratic movements around the world, has brought about the fall of tyrants and the reinstating of democracies, and helped in installing liberal leaders in positions of power, it has also been used by right-wing groups round the world to spread hatred and homogenize thinking to fanatic frenzy. While this same tool can be used by forces of democracy and civil and cultural liberty, it can very easily and effectively be used by its detractors to take them away. I feel that while we are swayed away by the great potential this tool has to give freedom, we must be aware of the same potential to take it away.

The Political Economy of Digital Propaganda of Islamists Against Liberal and Secular Writers and Bloggers and Their Social Movements in Bangladesh: A Critical Inquiry

Abdur Razzaque Khan

ABSTRACT

The Islamic parties and their activists in Bangladesh have launched a massive propaganda against the liberal and secular writers/bloggers/journalists/artistes and progressive intellectuals through their digital means of communications for quite a long time. They openly term these progressive people as atheists and threat to kill them as their holy responsibility for the sake of Islam in Bangladesh via social media. Apart from this, these Islamist groups are very much critical of the ShahBagh Movement and the Ganojagoron Mancho (Stage for People's Uprising)—a platform of bloggers and online activists in Bangladesh—that has initiated a social movement for the capital punishment to the war criminals of Bangladesh in 1971 since February 5th 2013. The brutal killings of bloggers Ahmed Rajib Haider, Dr. Avijit Roy and Wasiqur Rahman within a short space of time indicates that it becomes common practice of these Islamist groups who felt offended by the writings, posts or statements of those 'atheists' or non-believers and inspired to carry out such heinous acts to save holy religion, Islam. This paper will try to examine what is the political economy of these extreme Islamists in Bangladesh? Why, when and how these groups are using Islam for their political interest openly via different social media? In fine, what is their political motive behind these extreme criminal activities of their Islamisation process in Bangladesh?

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In recent time Bangladesh has experienced a shocking wave of killing progressive writers and bloggers one after another by the extreme Islamists. These Islamist groups even swooped on publishers who have published books of the progressive bloggers in the country. This has created a culture of fear and frustration among the progressive people of the country. The progressive bloggers and writers are withdrawing themselves from different blogs and go on hiding for fear of life. Some of them have already left the country considering they might be the next target of the extreme Islamists. In such a situation, the role of the government is not enough to ensure safety of these progressive bloggers. This is simply because nothing tangible has been done from government side to address all these killings. The situation worsens when ministers and government officials ask the bloggers not to write against any religion which might hurt the feeling of the common people in Bangladesh. In fact, this sort of statement by high government officials encourages the Islamist zealots to carry on their mission with zest and zeal. However, when Rajib Haider was killed in 2013, “Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called him a martyr”(Subramanian, 2015). At present the government doesn’t want to go for any stern action against these bigot Islamists rather Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her cabinet colleagues advised the bloggers not to write against any religion and hurt to the beliefs of the Muslims and other religions in the country. As Subramanian (2015) goes on:

More recently, Hasina has advised writers to refrain from distorting religious beliefs. When she did not publicly condemn Roy’s murder, her son and adviser, Sazeeb Wazed, told Reuters, “We are walking a fine line here. We don’t want to be seen as atheists.” Another government adviser told me, “If we allowed bloggers to write shit about Prophet Muhammad, the people would reject us.” He added, “They’d think we started all this with our secularism business. That’s the reality. This isn’t London or New York. This is Dhaka” (Subramanian, 2015).

Who are the Islamist Militants and why they run after bloggers

The Islamist activists think that blogger is a synonym of atheist. Hence, they consider all the bloggers and progressive writers are atheists. It is their holy duty to kill all these bloggers with a view to protecting the religion “Islam.” By doing so, they will be rewarded by the God “Allah” in the next

life. This is a general understanding of these Islamists about their acts. In fact, they are being trained with this ideology. These young Islamists somehow are and were related with the Jamaat-e-Islam Bangladesh (JIB) and its student wing Islami Chhatra Sibir (ICS). Ali Riaz (2010) finds that all the arrested Islamists of Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladdesh (JMB, the Assembly of Holy Warriors) confessed to the police that at one stage of their lives they had been involved with JIB and its student wing ICS. Moreover, they were inspired by the speeches and writings of JIB leaders. As Ali Riaz (2010) confirms:

Delwar Hossain Saidee, whose speeches are available as audio and video tapes, within and without Bangladesh, sends a clear signal to the audience that these messages are sanctioned by Jamaat-i-Islami Bangladesh. The messages provide legitimacy to hate, anger and violence, and contribute to an atmosphere supportive of militant Islam. On many occasions police have found cassettes of Saidee’s waz mahfil speeches in militant hideouts. Some of the militants, notably Javed Iqbal (alias Aman Ullah alias Mohammad alias Abu Hurrab), the chief of JMB Chittagong region, confessed to the law enforcing agencies that “he was imbued with the spirit of jihad to establish Islamic rule in Bangladesh after listening [to] the speech of Maulana Delwar Hossain Sayedee [sic] at Tafsir Mahafil held at the parade ground in Chittagong.” (Ali Riaz, 2010 :58)

Imbued with the spirit of Jihad (holy war) these Islamists killed five bloggers and one publisher in the last 32 months (B. Ahmed, 2015). Their last victim was publisher Faisal Arefin Dipon, who was killed on 31st October in 2015 at his office. Faisal Arefin Dipon was a close friend of blogger Avijit Roy and published some of his books. On the same day these Islamists swooped on another publisher of slain Avijit Roy, Ahmedur Rashid Tutul and two other bloggers Tareq Rahim and Ranadipom Basu at Tutul’s Lalmatia office in broad daylight. All the three victims had a narrow squeak for their lives. The Islamists first killed Rajib Haider near his Dhaka home on 15th February in 2013. Since then the killing process is being continuously carried out by the Islamist militants. They killed Bangladeshi born American citizen Avijit Roy on 26th February 2014, Washiqur Rahman on 30th March 2015, Niladre Chatterje Niloy on 7th August 2015. Niladre was killed at his home on Friday. These four bloggers were killed in Dhaka. Only Ananta Bijoy Das was killed

in Sylhet on 12th May 2015. All the killings were carried out in the same way attacking on neck and head by using machetes. The fact is that eight of the listed (list made by violent Islamist organizations and their allies) 84 free thinkers, activists, bloggers already have been killed in similar way in recent years.

The Islamists in Bangladesh are divided into different groups with different objectives. But they have one common goal to actualize their objectives through political Islam like JIB and ICS. In fact, all the Islamist groups are more or less connected with JIB and ICS with same political objectives. As Riaz and Fair (2010) find:

“the Islamists” of Bangladesh are not a monolithic and homogenous group of actors who adhere to a consistent set of objectives to be actualized through political Islam. Rather, there is a wide array of groups and individuals who seek to instrumentalize Islam in the pursuit of their specific organizational and perhaps individual political objectives (Ali Riaz & Fair, 2011: 3).

The political economy of their ugly propaganda in social media

The main objective of the ugly propaganda of these extreme Islamists against the progressive writers and bloggers is to defame them and to assassinate their character as atheists and so on. Through their social media they continuously propagate against these progressive writers and bloggers. And even they openly threaten the progressive writers and bloggers to kill them. These Islamists try to portray the bloggers as anti Islam and against the Holy Scripture Quran and the prophet Muhammad. They want to label these progressive writers and bloggers as having strong hatred against Islam and Muslims. In such a way, they want to buy both the support and sympathy from the common Muslim people in Bangladesh. Through Facebook they try to motivate and convince the common people in Bangladesh against progressive writers and bloggers with their political posts which are full of lies and ill-intention to create unrest in the society with a view to creating their political hegemony over the common people of Bangladesh in the name of protecting the Holy religion Islam. They have created four groups in Facebook—Hefazot-e-Islam Bangladesh, Nastic mukto Bangladesh chai (we want an atheist free Bangladesh), IS Bangladesh and Basher Kella (Bamboo Fort).

Through these four groups they continue to carry on their dirty propaganda against all progressive forces --writers, bloggers, journalists, artists and intellectuals in Bangladesh. Their propaganda in social media took an ugly shape when the Shahbagh Movement was launched on 5th February in 2013 demanding death sentence of the infamous war criminal Abdul Kader Molla, assistant secretary general of JIB and other war criminals (Raychoudhury et al 2015). The International Crimes Tribunal (ICT)-2 sentenced Abdul Kader Molla to life imprisonment. The judgment was unexpected even to Molla simply because of his heinous crimes during Liberation War in 1971 in Bangladesh. That's why Molla left the court by showing V-sign to his supporters after sentencing.

Molla, who led a *razakaar* squad during the war and is known as the Butcher of Mirpur, had good reason to rejoice – he had been expecting the death sentence, sitting silently as witness came forward to testify to his crimes – raping an 11-year old girl, beheading a well-known poet and shooting 344 people in the Mirpur area (Sen, 2013).

The members of Bangladesh Online Activists Network (BOAN) assembled at Shahbagh and spread the news of Kader Molla's case judgment in social media. All on a sudden, people from all walks of life – from an infant to a septuagenarian—gathered at Shahbagh in demand of the death sentence to Kader Molla.

The same evening, a small group of young political bloggers started a sit-in at the Shahbagh intersection near Dhaka University, a traditional venue for both protests and celebrations. The news spread quickly on blogs and social media, and other joined in, mostly young people and students, but also veterans of the Mukti Bahini, members of progressive organizations and others (like the *Ekatarrer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Samity*) who had long been demanding justice for war crimes (Sen, 2013).

Jamat-e-Islam Bangladesh (JIB) and its student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) and other Islamist parties and the then leader of the opposition party in the parliament Begum Khaleda Zia of the Bangladesh Nationalist

Party (BNP) were against this Shahbagh Movement and termed that it was a movement of atheists and Islam haters. JIB and ICS started online propaganda in social media against the Shahbagh Movement and its organizers. Again and again they were labeling the movement as the movement of atheists and Islam haters. When the entire nation expressed its solidarity with the Shahbagh Movement in demand of the capital punishment to the arrested war criminals of Jamaat-e-Islam Bangladesh at that moment Jamaat, BNP and their allies were trying to label this movement as the propaganda of Islam haters.

Again and again they were trying their best to motivate people not to support the Shahbagh Movement via social media, political meetings and gatherings. Begum Khaleda Zia herself termed the Shahbagh Movement was the movement of a group of atheists and writers who want to defame Islam and Muslims of the country in several political meetings.

When the bloggers and online activists of BOAN were peacefully leading the Shahbagh Movement for the demand of highest punishment to the war criminals then the JIB and its student wing ICS launched their killing mission of the progressive bloggers. They first brutally killed Ahmed Rajib Haider, an architect by profession and one of the pro-Shahbagh movement bloggers, near his home on 14th February in 2013. Ahmed Rajib Haider was the first victim of JIB and ICS heinous acts for gearing up Shahbagh Movement. JIB and ICS termed Rajib as an atheist and Islam hater. He was given online threats, including a 'death warrant' posted on a JIB website and on the recently abolished pro JIB 'Sonar Bangla' blog (Roy, 2014; Sen, 2013). In fact, Rajib wrote regularly on his blogs against Jamaat's activities (Raychoudhury et al. 2015).

When the verdict of capital punishment was given to Sayedee by the tribunal ICT on 28th February (at first, the capital punishment verdict was given by the tribunal and after the appeal it was downgraded to a life sentence). After the verdict Jamaat Shibir allies spread violent riots around the country that killed more than 30 in different parts of the country. The casualties included six policemen, three of whom were beaten to death in the northern Gaibandha district, in a Jamaat protest involving about 2,000 supporters. In addition, a Hindu temple and houses belonging to Hindu families had been attacked in Noakhali (BBC News, 2013).

Apart from this, Sayedee's supporters spread different rumors by using new media. One was 'Sayedee on the Moon', - the implication that some people had seen Sayedee on the moon. A photo of 'Sayedee on the Moon' was spread throughout the internet and was announced it from the mosque at mid night. It has created outrages in different places. On March 3, 2013, when the rumour was spread in Nandigram upazila soon thousands of Jamaat-Shibir activists and their supporters equipped with lethal weapons rushed to the upazila parishad area and vandalized local police station and 16 other government offices. Over the same rumour, the same political groups' activists and supporters ran amok also at other places in Bogra on the same day. Where at least 13 people were killed during the clash with police in Bogra on the same day. (The Daily Star, 2013)

Ajivit Roy was given continuous threat to his life via different social media by the JIB and ICS activists. Even it was said that Avijit Roy lives in the USA so they can't kill him and as soon as he comes to Bangladesh he will be killed. "On Facebook, one extremist wrote, "Avijit Roy lives in America, so it's not possible to kill him right now. But he will be killed when he comes back"..."(Subramanian, 2015). Finally, they succeeded in killing Avijit Roy on 26th February in 2014.

Why JIB and ICS are openly involved in this sort of dirty propaganda in the name of saving and protecting Islam religion in Bangladesh? The political economy of their dirty and ugly propaganda against progressive writers and bloggers in Bangladesh is two-fold. Firstly, they want to stop the on-going trial of all the war criminals that are main figures of JIB.

The online activists and bloggers demanded ban of Jamaat from politics and urged the nation to quit all institutions (educational, pharmaceutical company, media, Bank other service sectors which are a huge economy) of Jamaat. Abul Barkat, a professor of Economics at Dhaka University, pointed that Jamaat earns an annual profit of \$278 million from different business endeavors it runs in Bangladesh.

'Barkat has calculated that Jamaat's net annual profits from such ventures amounts to about \$278 million and the largest chunk—27.5%—of this comes from banks, insurances and leasing companies. The NGOs contribute 18.7%, 10.5% comes from trade and commerce, 10.1% from pharmaceutical industries and healthcare institutions, 9.4% from the education sector, 8.8%

from real estate business, 7.3% from transport and 7.7% from the media and information technology business.' (Mukherjee, 2016).

Hence, they want to create unrest and disturbance in Bangladesh society so that the present Hasina Government cannot carry on the trial of the war criminal which the Awami League (AL) pledged in its election manifesto in 2008 general election. Secondly, they want to capture political power by any means to run the country."Islamists in Bangladesh, as elsewhere, often express their disdain for democracy and declare their intent to use elections merely as a means to power"(Ali Riaz, 2010: 99)

Conclusion

The Islamisation process was begun in Bangladesh after the killing of the Father of the Nation Bangabondhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975. Sheikh Mujib and along with all his family members but two daughters were killed in a coup d'état in the early hours of 15th August in 1975. Since then most of the governments in Bangladesh took a soft stand towards the Islamists in the country. General Ziaur Rahman started the Islamisation process by allowing Jamaat-e-Islam and other Islamic parties to do politics in the country. Secularism was one of the four principles of Bangladesh's constitution. General Zia removed it and added the Quranic phrase "Bismillah-ar-Rahman-ar-Rahim"(In the name of God, the Most Gracious, and the Most Merciful) in the constitution in 1977. Zia blended religion with politics for mere his political interest.

Later General H. M. Ershad declared Islam as the state religion and added it in the constitution by the 8th amendment in 1988 for the same purpose like Zia. These steps encouraged and helped the Islamists to carry on their mission with a view to making Bangladesh an Islamic state like Pakistan. After 1990s when electoral democracy was restored, Begum Khaleda Zia and her Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) took a pivotal role for speeding up the Islamization process by forming alliances with the extreme Islamists. In her second regime 2001-2006 Begum Zia developed very close connection with the extreme Islamists and included them in her cabinet." The close ties between the militants and the ruling parties (2001-2006) are also obvious from the presence of a number of individuals in the close circles of the then ruling

coalition" (Ali Riaz, 2010: 46). Extreme Islamists and their organizations mushroomed in the country which made progressive people hopeless and hapless. "Undoubtedly the rise to power in 2001 of the four party coalition led by the BNP created a favorable atmosphere for the organizations' proliferation; the government then allowed the Islamist groups to carry on their activities with impunity" (Ali Riaz, 2010: 45).

In fact, all the political parties in Bangladesh extend support for establishing mosque and madrasa in the country. The people and political parties should not over look what is going on inside the madrasa. In some madrasa they teach hatred against progressive people like writers and bloggers. As Rafida Bonya Ahmed finds (2015)

Islamic fundamentalism has spread for many years through Bangladesh via the support of all the political parties, growing number of mosque-*madrasa* complexes all over country which have been established and funded by locally influential people or through the funding from a few countries in the Middle East. Islamic fundamentalists use many *madrasas* as a way of spreading their message of hate and intolerance (R. B. Ahmed, 2015).

Establishing mosque and madrasa is a unique approach of the Islamic fundamentalists to produce the extreme Islamists. For madrasa they pick up children and young boys and girls to teach them so called Islamic education. In the name of Islamic education they train up these young people against the progressive forces of the society to fulfill their political goals and missions. Those who were involved in killing the bloggers said that they think it is their holy duty to kill the atheists and establish Islamic rule and law in the society. In fact, most of these young militants do not even know what does blogger mean and what the bloggers are writing about. In fact, a major part of them are in dark about bloggers' writings and works.

Why are the extreme Islamist activists of JIB and their student wing ICS are killing progressive bloggers and writers one after another? The simple answer is that the progressive online activists of Bangladesh have launched a movement against the war criminals and Jamaat. They simply want capital punishment to these war criminals and ban Jammata and all their organizations

which make a huge economy for their survival. The progressive online activists have urged common people of Bangladesh to boycott the products those are produced by Jammāt's organization. In fact, if it is done or followed then JIB will lose its political identity as a political party and its economy will collapse. That will be a disaster for the party. Their political and financial power will be ruined. JIB and ICS are afraid of these. That's why they are killing the bloggers one after another with a view to protecting their political party and economic power for their future in Bangladesh.

The government must take into serious consideration of killing of bloggers one after another with a short span of time is deeply rooted with the militant Islamist groups' political goals, mission and vision. They simply want to create a closed Islamic society where free thinking is not allowed at all. The ruling party cannot compromise with these groups by not taking serious stand against the extreme Islamists." The growing militancy, especially the associated violence, needs to be seen with the context of the mode of governance pursued by the ruling classes of Bangladesh" (Ali Riaz, 2010: 47). In present Bangladesh, it is a reality that militancy has become a part of political culture especially in the case of extreme Islamic parties of the country like JIB and its ICB. "Islamist militancy in Bangladesh must be addressed as part of an overall progression towards political stability and democracy" (Ahsan & Banavar, 2011: 87)

It's the government duty and only government can do it to give protection to the different voices they may be bloggers or not. Any sort of attack on the bloggers is an attack on the free thinking. Without free thinking a society cannot advance. Free thinking is a must of a civilized and democratic society. In a civilized society one cannot be killed for simply expressing his or her opinions which may not go with others' opinions. The government should politically deal with the issue and ensure safety and security for all bloggers of the country. The government should not only ensure safety and security only to bloggers but to all citizens of Bangladesh. Every citizen of the country expects it from the government.

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‘Networked’ Religion in Network Society: The Case of Swaminarayan Sect

Mira and Kapil Desai

ABSTRACT

Historically, religion is a potential dynamite in India and is a reason of political, social and economic upheavals. The twenty-first century Indian society is witnessing the dynamics of change where religion is no exception. While globally, the Internet is being viewed as ‘individual’ driven space, in an Asian context the same may not be the case as evident culturally.

The paper is based on textual and semantic analysis of web presence of one of the Hindu sects known as Swaminarayan. Google comes up with “52,70,000 results” as of March 4, 2015 for the word ‘Swaminarayan.’ It explores what is the nature of online presentation of the sect of Swaminarayan and what are offline strategies the organisation is using which suggest merging online and offline existence of the religion as well as organisation.

Tracing the journey of the sect and its sub-sects and its intervening presence in Indian socio-political space including the terrorist attack on one of the temples in Gujarat in 2002 and judgment in 2014, the paper examines how online presence of offline institution indicate network of networks. As self proclaimed “socio-spiritual” organisation, the website remarks, “though varying in size, every node of this network runs in synchronization with others providing inspiration for better living. For the ease of access, Global Network of BAPS (Bochasanwasi

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Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha) is divided into five geographical regions.”

The website analysis clearly indicates that a ‘local’ religion is no more ‘local’ but a ‘global brand.’ It is not about ‘asian-ness’ but an interesting interplay of ‘Hindu,’ ‘pan-Indian,’ ‘global Indian’ identities, simultaneously attempting to attract ‘global’ audiences to ‘Indian cultural traditions, heritage’ and not ‘religion’!! The paper concludes that in a network society, religion is becoming ‘networked’ identity of ‘collective culture’ rather than ‘individual preference.’

Background

For centuries, religion has been responsible for socio-cultural and political upheavals in India and influenced the very existence of Indian state, post-1947. Historically, India is a melting pot of multiple cultures and religion is no exception. Indian Census officially counts six religions yet notes ‘other religious persuasions’ for its billion plus population in its Census. Table 1 shows that miniscule proportion of Indian population ‘does not report’ religion and ‘other religious persuasions’ include ‘tribal religions.’

Table 1: Diversity of religions in Indian population over the last decade

Religions	2011		2001	
Hindu	966257353	79.8 %	827,578,868	80.5 %
Muslim	172245158	14.2 %	138,188,240	13.4 %
Christian	27819588	2.3 %	24,080,016	2.3 %
Sikh	20833116	1.7 %	19,215,730	1.9 %
Buddhist	8442972	0.7 %	7,955,207	0.8 %
Jain	4451753	0.3 %	4,225,053	0.4 %
Other religions and persuasions	7937734	0.7 %	6,639,626	0.6 %
Religion not stated	2867303	0.2 %	727,588	0.1 %
Total	1,210,854,977	100.0	1,028,610,328	100.0

Source Compilation from: <http://censusindia.gov.in>

Twenty-first century Indian society is witnessing the dynamics of change due to technological development and religion is no exception. While the Internet is being viewed as ‘individual’ space, in an Asian context the same

may not be the case. Multiple religious organisations have been taking to the digital space like fish in water.

Manuel Castells' book *The Rise of the 'Network Society': Information age: Economy, Society and Culture* first published in 1996, subsequently in 2000 and then in 2010 examines how 'networks' in information age goes beyond the borders of nation/state and constitute itself as a global system. Technology and nation/state both play significant role in network society and space is redefined in the concept of flows and not mere place.

The objective of this paper is to analyse digital representation of the *Swaminarayan* sect on the Internet. In order to understand ground realities, the authors of this paper visited three temples of Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS); two at Gujarat (Valsad and Sarangpur) and one at Maharashtra (Mumbai-Dadar) besides interviewing Adarsh Jivan Swami from Dadar temple for about two hours on January 14, 2016 by the second author. Textual analysis of multiple websites of *Swaminarayan* sect was also undertaken. Reasons for examining BAPS more closely was the finding that amongst all the sub-sects of *Swaminarayan*, BAPS appear to be the most 'digitally networked'.

Swaminarayan: Sect of Hinduism

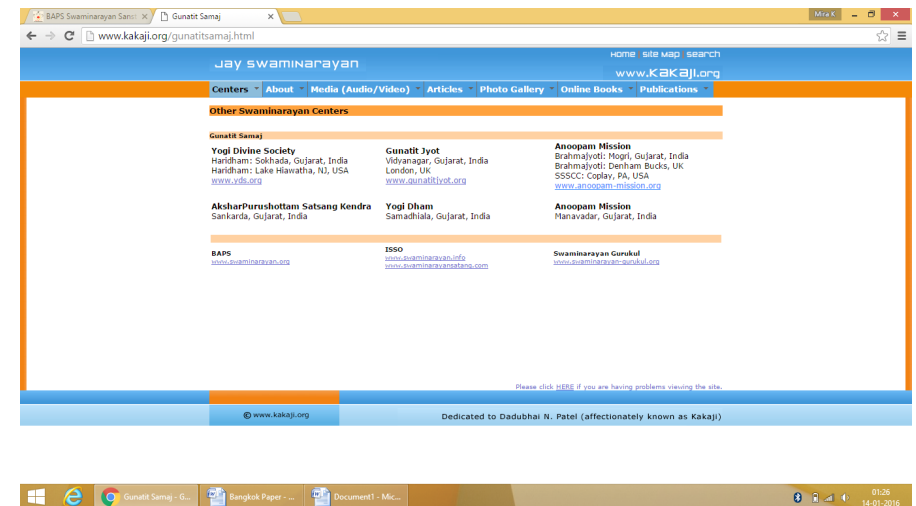
Multiple encyclopaedias on religion refer to *Swaminarayan* as a 'movement' initiated by Sahjanand Swami (1781-1830) known by his followers as *Swaminarayan*, incarnation of Lord Vishnu/Krishna. Though born in Ayodhya, northern India, he spent most of his life in Gujarat, Western India. The sect was borne out of fighting social evils during British and French rule in India at that time.

Though the sect came into being in the 18th century and got divided into factions/sub-sects in the 19th century. The bochasanwasi akshar purshottam sanstha (BAPS) was founded by shastriji maharaj in 1907 after he parted ways with the vadtal temple. In 1947, dharamjivandas swami left the vadtal temple to form institutions which provide hostels and education at the high school level, called 'gurukuls'. Another sub-sect was formed in 1940 after muktajivandas swami left the Amdavad temple and established his own sect in Maninagar, known as the Swaminarayan gadi whereas in 1966, Dadubhai patel and his brother bababhai,

(both devotees) left the BAPS to form the yogi divine society. The yogi divine society also initiates women as 'sadhvis.' Interestingly the sect went global as early as 1973 yet the expansion and global presence in the 20th century is remarkable.

Swaminarayan remains a complex tradition for outsiders with vast temples, large number of higher education institutions and boarding school spaces. There are multiple subsets within the *Swaminarayan*, which is a sub-sect of Hinduism itself. No sect within *Swaminarayan* talks about other subdivisions of the sect may be for competitive or complementing reasons. Wikipedia elaborates individual affiliations of the sect sub-divisions which needs verification. Amongst all the websites of the sub-sects of *Swaminarayan*, <http://www.kakaji.org/> is the only site which refers to other fractions of the Swaminarayan sect as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 'Other Centres' of Swaminarayan referring to fractions within the Sect



Source: <http://www.kakaji.org/>

The Descriptions of the fractions within the sect varies so as their websites. Different fractions label them differently like *Sampraday*-sect, *Satsang*-collective prayers, *Sanstha*-organisation, *Gaadi*-seat, even *Society*. The sect is broadly divided into six major 'panths'; Ahmedabad (also kalupur), BAPS, vadtal, maninagar, vasna and sokhada (The Times of India, 2002), most of which are present in digital space as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Digital Presence of Swaminarayan sect

No	Name of the Faction/ Place	Website	Site Descriptions
1	“The Original Swaminarayan Sampraday” Kalupur- Ahmedabad	http://www.swaminarayan.info	Nar Narayan Dev Gaadi, International Swaminarayan Satsang Organisation (ISSO) is a national charitable organisation
2	Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), Ahmedabad	http://www.swaminarayan.org, http://www.baps.org, http://kids.baps.org/ and http://www.bapscharities.org/.	socio-spiritual Hindu organization
3	Bhuj Mandir, Kutch	http://www.bhujmandir.org/ http://www.swaminarayansatsang.com	Under Shree Narayan Dev Mandir Bhuj
4	Yogi Divine Society, Sokhda	http://www.kakaji.org/isrc.html http://haridhamnj.org	Trusted Hindu spiritual and humanitarian charity organisation
5	Anoopam Mission	http://www.anoopam-mission.org/	Swaminarayan socio-spiritual and charitable organisation
6	Swami Narayan Mandir Vasna Sanstha, Ahmedabad	http://www.smvs.org/, http://www.swaminarayandham.org/, bhaktiniwas.org, kids.smvs.org, smvshospital.com, tirthdham.org	Spiritual and cultural and social activities
7	Official website of Shree Swaminarayan Mandir Vadatal	https://www.vadtalmandir.org/	Head quarter of Shri LaxmiNarayan Dev Gadi.
8	Maninagar, Ahmedabad	http://www.swaminarayangadi.com/	Worldwide centre for spiritual, cultural and social welfare.

There is a website of Swaminarayan Akshar Purshotam religion (<http://live.gunatitjyot.org/>) which is predominantly in Gujarati. There is also <http://www.swaminarayan-gurukul.org/> which is a domain registered for international school/college but there is no content on the site. Both these sites are listed on the site shown in Figure 1. The Maninagar Gadi sanstha site has ten separate web-sites (<http://www.swaminarayangadi.com/sites/sites.php>). The site descriptions listed in Table 2 above clearly indicate the global connect and intersected identity of *Swaminarayan* as a sect of Hinduism. Interestingly Hinduism is not an ‘institutionalised’ religion unlike most *Swaminarayan* sub-sect listed above.

BAPS: The Sub-sect

Google came up with “52,70,000 results” as of March 4, 2015 for the word *Swaminarayan* which became “62,00,000 results” on January 4, 2016, the rise of 9,30,000 entries in mere ten months. If the search is refined to “baps shri swaminarayan mandir” in 2016, the results are about “3,67,000.”

As self proclaimed “socio-spiritual” organisation, the BAPS website remarks, “though varying in size, every node of this network runs in synchronization with others providing inspiration for better living. The website presents its global connects using words like ‘For the ease of access, Global Network of BAPS (Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha) is divided into five geographical regions: USA, UK-Europe, Africa, Pacific, Middle East’”.

Figure 2. Global Network of BAPS with Centre Locator

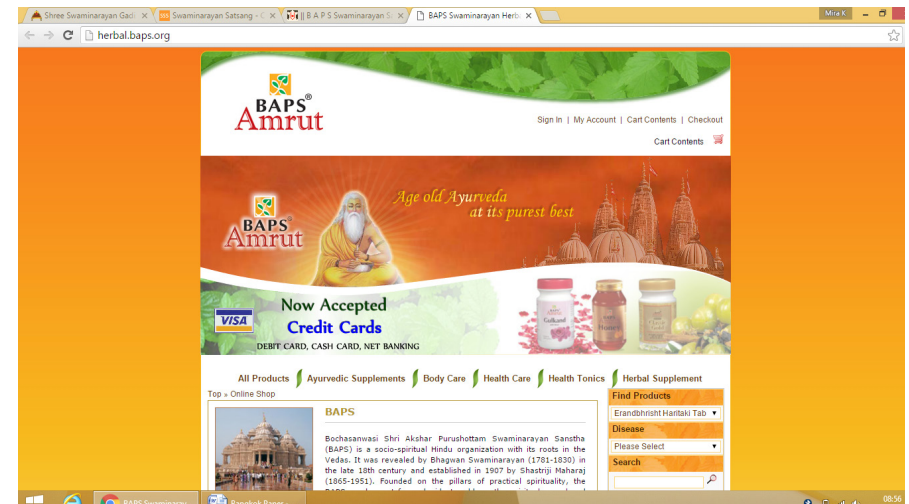


As per the website, founded on the pillars of practical spirituality, the BAPS reaches out far and wide to address the spiritual, moral and social challenges and issues through more than 160 activities in six categories. BAPS strives to care for the world by caring for societies, families and individuals. This is done by mass motivation and individual attention, through elevating projects for all, irrespective of class, creed, colour or country. It has received many national and international awards and affiliation from the United Nations. BAPS Global Network is composed of more than 1100 mandirs and 3,850 centers. BAPS is also well known for the cultural monuments Akshardham (New Delhi & Gandhinagar, India) and the Swaminarayan Mandirs in London, Houston, Chicago, Toronto and Atlanta.

Swami Adarsh Jivan Swami informed that the website functions are managed by volunteers. The monks (Swamis) are not associated with the digital management of the site but are mainly into religious and social activities. The headquarters of digital processes for BAPS is at Ahmedabad. Video conferencing is used for international connection but is not within India. The main change after computers for the Swami is now he does not need to carry material for *Satsang* as one only brings a pen-drive. He was of the opinion that the digital presence is more to reach out to audiences and not for 'interactivity.'

The site is a network of sites since the Swaminarayan.org main site (<http://www.swaminarayan.org/index.htm>) links multiple sites including the sect site (<http://www.baps.org/>). The site has sections on prayers, food, herbal products, education (Satsang exams with old exam papers) and other country temple sites and so on. There is a section on food within the site with elaborate recipes (<http://www.swaminarayan.org/thal/index.htm>). But the herbal products from soaps to shampoos to herbal supplements as evident in Figure 3 is a sister site (<http://herbal.baps.org/>) with highlighted ecommerce "now credit cards accepted" tag. No doubt the announcement for herbal product site mentioning "products of this site are not for sale outside India" makes it geographically localised, the website analysis clearly indicates that a 'local' religion is no more 'local' but a 'global brand'.

Figure 3 Herbal Care sister site of BAPS



Source: <http://herbal.baps.org/>

Interestingly none of the three temples of BAPS visited has any public mention of website addresses. Most people, few of whom were asked by the authors, were not even aware about the web presence of the sect. Even the two publications: one about BAPS (Gurg, 2011) and other on the Sampraday (Sect) (Mukundchrandas, 2012) obtained from temple stores (both were in Hindi as there were no English editions) have any mention of digital presence. Dadar temple visit and interview with the Swamiji provided an English booklet on the BAPS temple Dadar which is more of the corporate document about the organisation. The booklet titled "BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir (temple), Dadar" having inspirer credit to Pramukh Swami Maharaj does not have publication date or details but it talks about BAPS as an organisation.

Analysis based on BAPS temple visits, interview with Swaminji and website analysis suggest that locally the organisation is 'local' but in digital space it is not only 'asian' but interplays 'Hindu', 'pan Indian', 'global Indian' identities simultaneously attempting to attract 'global' audiences to 'Indian cultural traditions, heritage' and not 'religious sub-sect'!!

Digital Swaminarayan Sect

Most Swaminarayan sites listed in Table 2 has unique sections like chanting recording, radio, mobile ringtones, downloads (screensavers, songs, wallpapers, virtual darshan, videos of respective sub-sect Swamis, publications and products with e-commerce options, even hall booking or even hospital sister site with promo. Most sites have calendar to inform readers about festivals and activities to be performed around the festival. Three sub-sect sites have stronger digital presence compared to others. <http://www.smvs.org/>, <http://www.baps.org>, <http://www.swaminarayangadi.com/> have most updated site version where BAPS has real time updated sites. Most sites are in multiple languages- English, Gujarati and Hindi suggesting attempt for extended reach. The kids site of BAPS (<http://kids.baps.org/>) has a section for Gujarati learner suggesting design to reach next generations who may not know the language. Besides it also for immigrants children who may not be speaking in Gujarati.

Most of the material presented across sub-sect sites, is not only for their own 'devotees' but also for onlookers who may be digital natives. Even the e-commerce applications suggest 'marketability' of products may or may not be for their own devotees. Examination of sites and nature of online presentation suggest that offline strategies the organisation is merging online and offline existence of the religion as well as organisation apparently is getting presented to global audiences in general and immigrants and diasporas in particular.

Religion and Society

In 2004, following a criminal proceeding against Vadtal sub-sect Swaminarayan monks, for murdering Chairman of the sect, media glare to the sect was enormous. Indian socio-political space was shaken when terrorist attack on Akshardham temple at Gandhinagar (Gujarat) took place in September 2002 and the judgement came in 2014. Innocent Muslim mechanic who was falsely charged by Gujarat police spent 11 year in jail for no fault of his except for his religious background (The Hindu, 2014).

American Ex-president Mr. Bill Clinton made an unscheduled visit at Gandhinagar (Gujarat) Akshardham temple April 2001. On March 5, Prince Charles launched the 'sponsor-a-home' scheme for the earthquake-hit Gujarat, at the swaminarayan temple in London. Research studies by international

university in Swaminarayan temple (Rudert, 2004) also suggest the global character of the sect.

Goyal (2015) elaborates recent quitting of corporate boss of Fortis to join Radha Soami Satsang Beas (established in 1891) and economic and social capital of the sect which is one of the richest spiritual sects. *Swaminarayan* too is one of the rich religious sects from India which is now global. There is no doubt that it has employed all the digital devices not only to reach out to its followers across fractions but also engage them through their digital interface.

Conclusion

As a neo-Marxist sociologist, Castell takes a critical view of internet whereas BAPS as a stream of Swaminarayan sect became global only because of internet. The digital presence of the sect also suggests that religion is becoming 'networked' identity of 'collective culture' rather than 'individual preference'.

BAPS and other Swaminarayan websites clearly show that as per Castell's analysis, social flows are characterised by art, ritual and myth in the immigrant experience. Imagination is consequential in its collective form, motivating migrants and migrant communities to consider alternative ways of social life. At the same time Castell's network concept has no 'centre' unlike BAPS organisation which is very central in terms of design and operations. The formulation of flexible, decentralised network by Castell is not applicable to BAPS website and its functional processes.

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The Role of Multimedia in Islamic Teaching Propagation: (Da'wah¹): An Indonesian Experience

Gunawan Adnan

ABSTRACT

This study is aimed at elaborating the role of multimedia in spreading out Islamic teaching among Muslim society, particularly as it is practiced and experienced in Indonesia. It is found that high technology, particularly information technology extraordinarily influence almost all aspects of human life. The development of technology has indeed contributed to the emergence of various inventions and simplified human daily lives, including the methods of preaching Islamic teaching to the Moslems. This research finds out that there are many programs and strategies of doing da'wah (Islamic teaching propagation) and developing its methods, among others, by utilizing multimedia both electronic and printed, both digital and non-digital ones. This sort of program integrates different kinds of media, such as, radio, television, text, internet, picture, MP3, animation, narration, video, and music and others. Another important role of this multimedia is to strengthen interactive and communicative ability and attitude between the da'i² (propagator/communicator) and his/her mad'u (communicant/ audience). By utilizing multimedia the so-called ummah (moslem

¹ Da'wah (also transliterated daawa(h); Arabic: دعوة "invitation") means the proselytizing or preaching of Islam. Da'wah literally means "issuing a summons" or "making an invitation", being a gerund of a verb meaning variously "to summon" or "to invite" (whose triconsonantal root is d-ʿ-w دع).
² Da'i (Arabic: "missionary") refers to a person who engages in Dawah, the act of inviting people to Islam. Da'i is different from Da'i al-Mutlaq, which means dai

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This text is the final part of a longer paper considering the usual traditional media in a more general way.

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society) would not only get information passively but also could select information they need and like based on sort of media they like. In other word, this program generates the intense relationship between the da'i (the da'wah doer/preacher) and the media. This program is very important to develop the strategies of spreading Islamic teaching among Muslim society in order to cope with the impact of high technology.

Keywords : Multimedia and Islamic Teaching Propagation

Introduction

The rapid development of technology, particularly information and communication technology makes almost everything easier and simpler. By using technology many kinds of job and duty can easily and efficiently be done and many goals and targets can be achieved. This phenomenon influences all sectors and activities of life including the sector of Islamic teaching propaganda or *da'wah*. This paper will elaborate the utilization of multimedia, including the Internet (social and digital media) in developing Islamic propaganda. It could generally be seen and found that many kinds of technology products have been used and utilized in developing and improving Islamic propaganda both printed, electronic or even digital media.

The Da'wah in Digital Media Era

The growth and development of digital media found its momentum in Indonesian following the growth of middle class of Indonesian Moslems in the eighties (80s). The middle class Indonesian Moslems are viewed as an important community which has extraordinary potential both in terms of economics and political access, knowledge and lifestyle. The community is like a snow ball which tends to grow bigger and bigger following their knowledge improvement and economic growth. In relation to this situation *da'wah* media should also be improved so that it will be matching with their need and situation. It needs, of course, representative and comprehensive *da'wah* strategy to positively respond to the ecosystem of digital media which is different from conventional media.

It is undeniable that the need of using digital media in *da'wah* activities and programs like the Internet (social media) and the like is a must. Referring to

the data released by WeAreSocial (2015), Internet users in Indonesia number to 72.7 million; 72 million of this are active social media users access from 60 million akun media from mobile. This clearly indicates that social media as such is an effective media to send or deliver message including religious messages. Moreover, it is also a representative and strategic way to reach middle class Moslem society. It is, therefore, the strategy of how to use digital media properly and professionally in promoting and spreading out religious teaching and messages is really needed.

The *Da'wah* through Internet

The emergence of Internet access, facility and other ICT technologies are inevitable social phenomena. Through Internet access many kinds of information can be easily accessed by the international community both for personal or private and educational, political and business purposes as well. The Internet together with its social media facilities and networks are viewed as a new human civilization and a revolution of communication and information. When the Internet was first introduced by Western scientists, most prominent Moslem persons and even scholars had such a suspicious opinion and worried so much on the negative effects of this technological invention. But Dr. Muhammad Sa'id Ramadhan Al-Buthi, a grand Syech of Syria, is different. He said that the Internet networks which are covering and connecting international networks are a huge field and stage which can be used as podium and arena (media) to sound Islamic messages, to introduce Islam to the world and to solve human problems collectively. The *da'wah* through the Internet is viewed as one of the most effective and potential methods. This opinion is based on many logical reasons, among others:

1. It may reach and penetrate the time and space border in a very rapid way, simple and again can be done in a relatively economic manner.
2. The user of this media (Internet) keeps on growing rapidly. It means it is so influential to the *da'wah* mission receivers.
3. Islamic scholars, Imam, Syech, and the like who are doing *da'wah* via the Internet will be able to focus and are more prepared to react and response if any sensitive and crucial problems that need Islamic law or jurisprudence may happen.
4. The *da'wah* via the Internet is becoming one of the most enthused by Moslem society member since it provides various models of *da'wah*

which enable them to choose or select what they need to know, to learn, to follow, etc

5. By using and adopting various sorts of *da'wah* model utilizing internet media—consisting various model of social media—the *da'wah* message will be able to reach almost all segments of communities and the *da'wah* itself has to be understood in a wide definition and context as well. The *da'wah* then becomes less formal and borderless
6. By utilizing website as *da'wah* media as commonly used by many Islamic organizations in Indonesia, the *da'wah* will be more flexible and innovative and effective as well as it can be accessed anywhere, any time and by everybody
7. The *da'wah* can also be done by using a mailing list by which the members on the said list may gather themselves for a discussion on religious issues or just sharing religious teaching; they may also give comments and answers..
8. Religious knowledge, teaching and messages can also nowadays be approached, spread and obtained through online media, such as by surfing the Internet like Google, YouTube, Facebook, Line, What's App, and many other servers, etc.

Conclusion

It is undeniable that religious life could not be separated from information technology, especially from social and digital media. As a logical consequence, a religious leader like priests, Imams and the like are becoming more and more dependent on social and digital media (information technology). They are, therefore, obliged to have sufficient knowledge and skill in mastering those information technologies so that they may approach their community (ummat) and solve their social and religious problems in a very representative, comprehensive and effective way. Last but not the least, religion should definitely be promoted and actualized as an integrated part of solution, not part of problem.

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A Digital Culture Ministry: A Case of the Korean Church

1. Introduction

South Korea is a powerhouse of global information and communications technology (ICT). South Korea's wireless Internet subscription rate is not only the world's fourth largest, but also has the fourth largest generation mobile communication (LTE) subscription rate. According to the United Nation's evaluation on e-government South Korea is a leader in the global market share of semiconductor, mobile communication terminals and digital TV. As such, ICT has played an important role as the driving force which has contributed to the economic development of the country.

In addition, ICT has had a huge impact on the worldwide spread of Hallyu (Korean Wave) which was initiated from exporting TV dramas and has led to K-pop, K-beauty, K-food, and so on. As a typical example, singer Psy's music video "Gangnam Style" continues to break a world record, counting on more than 230 billion views on YouTube since 2015. The global diffusion and popularization of smart media such as smartphones and social network services (SNSs) has resulted in the far-reaching power of Hallyu on a very fast speed.

The globalized and routinized digital culture by the Internet and mobile media severely affects the form and content of Church communications. "The communications revolution affects perceptions even of the Church, and has a significant impact on the Church's own structures and modes of functioning."¹ Beyond the existing digital activities like simply visiting a website, blog, or sending an email, or using messenger, smartphones and SNSs are utilized in the various fields such as communication with the congregation, mission, ministry, education, and so on. Buddhism, Protestantism and Catholicism the three major religions of South Korea have the significant advantage of their mission and pastoral through the active use of the Internet and mobile media in their respective

¹ Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Aetatis Novae: Pastoral Instruction on Social Communication* on the 20th Anniversary of *Communio et Progressio*, Feb. 22, 1992, article 4.

areas. The Korean Catholic Church has built 'Integrated Yangeop System' as a computerized system operated by the unity of the administration of whole dioceses and pastoral information since 2013. A representative Internet portal site of the Korean Catholic Church, 'the Good News' of the Seoul archdiocese (www.catholic.or.kr) helps Catholics to be readily accessible to Church information gathering, information exchange, and diverse faith application services such as daily Mass, Bible, address, spiritual song, and so on.

On the other hand, the digital culture also has very harmful effects despite its positive effects. It creates very serious social problems and diverse digital addictions such as pornography, gambling, shopping, SNS as well as cyber-terrorism, cyber-violence and invasion of privacy. Furthermore, it deprives a lot of time and effort from search rather than thought so that people are gradually changed to 'the Shallows'² as it were, like people who do not think anymore. As a result, the faithful neglects Kerygma, Diakonia, and Koinonia that forms the foundation of Christianity and also goes away from repentance and prayer based on introspection and reflection. Therefore, the Church should perform the evangelization of digital culture by appreciating on the dysfunction of digital culture on the contents and practices of faith and suggesting an alternative.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the current situation and prospect of digital culture ministry of the Korean Catholic Church. The culture ministry has emerged as one of the new pastoral ministries to embody and practice the new evangelization of the new era, including a digital culture ministry. This paper first introduces the positive and negative realities of the Internet and mobile media usage in South Korea. Second, it explores the concept of digital culture ministry and describes ways how the Korean Catholic Church accepts and responds to digital culture. Finally, it suggests the prospect for desirable digital culture ministry.

2. The Current Status of the Digital Culture in South Korea

1) Internet and mobile media usage

South Korea has celebrated the authentic information age with the advent of Internet services in the 1990s. The first Internet service was commercialized

² Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows*, W W Norton & Co Inc, 2011.