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"DEAL" OF THE DAY

Sex, Porn, and Political Hate on Social Media

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> I had no idea about Sulli deals. And then finally I saw this random girl . . . when I clicked on "find your sulli", [an image of] a girl popped up. I had no idea. I was still trying to understand. The second time I clicked it, a friend of mine popped up. That's when I realized *ke yeh toh kuch galat he* [something is wrong]. Then the third or fourth time when I checked, it was my picture [out] there! Aaargh, I was disgusted, like what the hell!
>
> – Naziya

> [A]nd when my brother opened Twitter, he saw that there was a post where I was being sold. It was written, "enjoy, brother, enjoy this Sulli for 30 cents" and some man was tagged. My brother was furious that we were being sold like prostitutes. And when I say "prostitute," I don't say it in a derogatory way. . . . It's just that we were seen as just a piece of meat. They didn't take our consent; they were just selling us like cows or buffaloes . . . and for sexual trade! It was very bad . . . my brother got mad."
>
> – Nadiya

Naziya and Nadiya were recounting the horrific experiences of being "auctioned" online, two years after this incident erupted as a scandal in India in 2021, stirring a nationwide media debate. The scandal revolved around a chain of events triggered by a "live event" on a YouTube channel, when a male right-wing 'celebrity' hosted what he described as an "Eid Special." The event paraded nonconsensually sourced images of Pakistani women, inviting the followers of the channel to survey the women's sexual worth and "quench their lust with their eyes" ["*aaj apni tharak bhari ankho se ladkiya tarenge,*" in Hindi].

After the stream ended, numerous Twitter accounts proceeded to "auction" Indian Muslim women, employing the same tactics by displaying non-consensually obtained images and videos that were profiled as though they were "items on auction" and encouraging users to browse and rate them. Prominent handles behind the auctions on Twitter were traced to the creator of the first live event on YouTube and another Indian youth studying computer science at the time (Goyal, 2021; Taskin, 2022). Both were in their twenties.

In a short span of time, the obscure online activity had snowballed. In July 2021, the media reported existence of a web application with the name "Sulli Deals" on GitHub, an open-source software repository, which conducted similar online auctions of minority Muslim women derisively labeled as "Sulli" (Goyal, 2021).[1] The app had been created almost a month earlier, and a Twitter handle with the same name and other allied handles shared screenshots of the "deals of the day" and linked the GitHub page in their "bio" to promote the content (Zubair et al., 2021). The handles invited users to the landing page of the app "Sulli Deals," where a randomly selected photograph of a Muslim woman was showcased as "Sulli of the day" (Fazili, 2022). Images were sourced from the web of over 90 Muslim women without their consent. Users could browse the application for the entire "collection" of Muslim women. A slew of police complaints and law enforcement actions ensued.

Law and order actions and media exposures notwithstanding, the auction practice continued to persist. In January 2022, yet another "auction" app appeared on GitHub, listing over a 100 Indian Muslim women. It described itself as "Bulli Bai," another derogatory term for Muslim women. The police claimed that the creator of the app had copied and edited the code repository and graphics features of Sulli Deals to create the new Bulli Bai version of the auction app. Some of the key Twitter handles that promoted this new app had appeared in police complaints related to the 2021 Sulli Deals, indicating a close web of actors who seemed relentless despite disciplinary actions (Ojha, 2022; Shekhar, 2022).

Soon after, the Delhi Commission for Women, a statutory body for protecting women's rights, filed a complaint with the Delhi police drawing attention to the "obscene comments against Muslim women" on yet another platform, Clubhouse, which is branded as a social audio app (Bhalla, 2022). Taking *suo moto* (a court taking action of its own accord) cognizance of the snippet of such sexually offensive Clubhouse conversations made public on Twitter, the police arrested three young men aged between 19 and 22 years. The fourth accused was the creator of the original YouTube auction, who was absconding at the time. The accused men had participated and moderated discussions in two Clubhouse rooms titled "Muslim gals are more beautiful than Hindu gals" and "Girls don't have the privilege to marry upper caste

boys." A related First Information Report (FIR) was filed in relation to a complaint that a Hindu woman had lodged, providing details around how she had been "auctioned" on the two Clubhouse rooms.

Secondary and Evolutionary Developments

As these activities rippled across various platforms, setting off a series of interconnected actions with a shared repertoire, a distinct digital practice began to crystallize. Thick with sexual degradation and "pornification" (Sarracino & Scott, 2008), "online auctions" sought to perform a politics of masculine majoritarianism by peddling objectified female bodies of the minority religious community as online artifacts, without the knowledge or consent of the women. The crass dehumanizing act invited strong criticism, including the attention of the UN (*The Hindu*, 2022), while also spotlighting an amalgam of murky practices that had been brewing on online channels among niche communities of extreme ideological tactics writ in an "extended adolescence of video games, porn and pranks" (Nagle, 2016, p. 71).

Following fragmented law and order measures and YouTube's decision to ban the channels that featured this content, the creators sought alternative online avenues. A leading figure reassembled his loyal audience on Telegram, an encrypted messaging application known for its lax content regulation (Semenzin & Bainotti, 2020). Utilizing the platform's functionalities such as creating public or private groups with as many as 200,000 members, and public channels for broadcasting content (Khaund et al., 2021), auction actors launched both chat groups and channels. The newly created avenues, some of which were still active as of this writing, feature an archive of banned videos, new video creations, and interactive messaging and largely contains anti-Muslim content alongside graphic and explicit sexual "humor." Sex and sexuality are indeed the running themes in the videos and chats. Muslim men are portrayed as having an uncontrolled appetite for bestiality, with no desire or ability to sexually gratify their many wives. In turn, Muslim women are portrayed as stuck in loveless marriages, often being forced to have sex with their fathers-in-law or brothers-in-law or enjoy "halala" (sexually suggestive in-group idiom with alleged scriptural reference). The Muslim woman is portrayed as young, with or without hijab; she is sexual and sexually vocal and seeks sexual gratification repeatedly. A semi-clad and hijab-adorned picture of Mia Khalifa – the Lebanese porn actress who is a vocal Muslim and liberal activist on social media with 4.8 million followers on Twitter – is often used in the videos to refer to porn, virgins, and other references to sex, and so is another Indian porn star, Sunny Leone. The content is dotted with parodic Islamophobic *shayaris* (short verses in Urdu/Hindi with lyrical and semantic flourish) and occasional career tips for the youth in addition to sexual material. The news covered in the groups relays political ideologies of Indian

Hindu nationalism, training its criticism against Muslim Pakistan as well as religious minorities, liberal media, and those seen as "moderate" Hindu nationalist leaders in India.

The Focus of this Study

In this chapter, we navigate this corpus of volatile and provocative content and activities, to explore new social dynamics of hateful cultures emerging at the intersection of gender, religion, and platform affordances. We combine the analysis of Telegram posts and extracts from online auctions with ethnographic interviews among women political actors who were affected by the auctions in several ways and journalists who investigated the episode. The goal is to better understand how online actors who espouse extreme forms of religious majoritarian ideologies distinguish themselves from other "moderates"; exhibit their masculine politics vis-à-vis the Muslim male "rivals" through a rather contrived way of sexualizing Muslim women; and participate in homosocial networks in which porn, sexual innuendo, political messages, and career advice comingle. Although direct interactions between the authors and the message perpetrators were not possible because of difficulties in accessing that elusive group, we aim to gain a grasp of their manners, motivations, and gratifications by navigating the corpus of content they leave behind online, alongside an analysis of how targeted women and journalists who reported the incident recount describe and assess the dynamics of these "auctions" and related online activities.

Taking a social dynamics and media practice approach to digitally mediated forms of life and relatedness (Couldry, 2012; Geismar & Knox, 2021; Walther, this volume) and informed by speech act theory which posits content and conduct as co-constitutive (Butler, 1997), we advance three analytical points around online hate dynamics that take a specifically gendered dimension. First, we dispute what the "cute cat theory of Internet censorship" (to be described further, later in the chapter) considers as a neat separation between the seemingly apolitical activity of porn and online political activism (Zuckerman, 2008) and argue instead that digital sexual violence gets enmeshed with political aggression via the consumption of porn. Here, we engage with philosopher Rae Langton's (2012) arguments around structural affinities between pornography and hate speech. Second, we suggest that such grave practices are shaped by digital environments which are consumed and articulated as "fun" through the specific affordances and playful interactional frames of online media (Udupa, 2019). Finally, these overlapping practices are embedded within a longer history of postcolonial politics of religious majoritarianism and recent manifestations of global Islamophobia (Hansen, 1999; van der Veer, 1994). In particular, we show how pornified abuse of Muslim women ironically complements the Hindu nationalist

narratives around "moral restraint" and its conservative politics focused on regulating the sexuality of Hindu women (Sinha & Fernandes, 2014).

For digital hate scholarship, the social interactional dynamics captured in this study reveal the ways in which exclusionary ideologies with long histories perpetuate through niche groups of supporters as they draw strength from the viscerality of sharing, playing, and mashing up objects floating in the Internet world, charging some of them with widely consumed tropes of sex and porn.

The content we analyze, cite, and show is extremely offensive and presenting them here bears the risks of amplifying the voices of online actors who circulate such content. However, by limiting the cited online texts to the defined objectives of content and ethnographic analyses carried out here, we seek to not only follow the data minimization principle but also evince the possibility of advancing a critical conversation around them.

Porn, Politics, and Misogyny

Pornographic and sexual content in online political discourses has drawn the attention of various recent studies of digital communication. While feminists remain divided around questions of sex work and pornography – reflecting the tension between exploitative and agentic views of porn among contesting feminist traditions (Patu & Schrupp, 2017) – a significant branch of recent scholarship has linked pornography with online misogyny and massive troves of anti-feminist, anti-women, and transphobic content in social media networks (Mantilla, 2015; Massanari, 2015; Tranchese & Sugiura, 2021).

As studies attest, such practices are not contained within the silos of Internet communities. They have seeped into and increasingly frame mainstream political cultures. Segarra and Anderson (2019) define this as a "pornified political culture." Using the example of the 2015 Spanish elections, they argue that pornification of politics extends beyond the United States and is now a global phenomenon "endemic to twenty first century democratic cultures shaped by the 24-hour news cycle, the reach of social media, the ubiquitous objectification of women, sophisticated image-editing technology, and political norms that are persistently patriarchal" (p. 205). They draw on Nussbaum's (1999) concept of "fungability" to describe "pornified political culture" as political processes in which women are divested of their uniqueness, suggested to be violable, and are treated as interchangeable objects.

Although sexualized abuse arguably permeates and shapes different ideological groups within diverse local and national contexts, studies of the alt-right and far-right in the West have highlighted that online anti-feminist discourses prominently figure in right-wing radicalization processes (Keskinen, 2013; Walton, 2012). Fuchs (2018) considers resurgent nationalism in contemporary Europe as an articulation of racisms, misogyny, sexisms,

and xenophobia. Socially conservative sections within these groups express the desire to preserve patriarchal and heteronormative families by allocating traditional gender roles and reducing women "to sexuality, biology and housework" (Fuchs, 2018, p. 240). Such utopias around heteronormative traditional families have found a renewed emphasis within newer movements such as QAnon – a pro-Trump conspiracy movement with a large number of women supporters advocating for notions of femininity "centered on motherhood and maternal duty" (Bracewell, 2021, p. 1; Forberg, 2022).

The conservative "happy family" trope has reappeared at the same time when online worlds have seen a veritable expansion of explicit anti-women subcultures – loosely defined as the "Manosphere" – ranging from "reactionary and alt-right YouTubers who rage against the apparent current moral decline due to the sexual revolution and feminism" and MGTOWs (Men Going Their Own Way) who advocate a "male lifestyle without women" to "NoFap members who abstain from pornography and masturbation but hold equally problematic views of women and feminism" (Johanssen, 2022, p. 4) and groups "obsessed with rape statistics and false rape claims" (Hawley, 2017, p. 62).

While the Manosphere's contradictory strands pull the communities in different directions, posing conceptual quagmires to researchers, what emerges is the common thread of sexualization of women that runs through these varied groups, as sex figures in deeply conflicting forms of anxiety, withdrawal, desire, fantasy, and morality. Psychoanalytical perspectives, to cite one stream of scholarship, have highlighted the contradictory impulses of fantasy, victimhood, and sexual anxiety of male perpetrators of the Manosphere (Johanssen, 2022). Hinting that such seemingly contradictory impulses are subsumed within a discourse that is already bounded and sexualized, studies have rightly drawn a comparison with pornography, arguing that

> both pornography and incels [involuntary celibates; Dekeseredy, this volume] are different manifestations of the same misogyny . . . both . . . share discourses that reflect a broader societal misogyny in which sex is punitive and strictly connected with women's submission.
> (Tranchese & Sugiura, 2021, pp. 2709–2710)

All these leave us with a picture of sexualized anti-women discourses and alt-right discourses developing closely and almost inseparably in the transatlantic context. Johannsen describes this relation as "borrowing": "The Manosphere . . . explicitly borrows from or makes use of alt-right discourses, ideas, images, and terminology" (Johanssen, 2022, p. 8). While Manosphere members "borrow" alt-right tropes, the reverse, as we demonstrate in this chapter, is equally true. Right-wing political ideological groups that are racist, anti-minority, and anti-immigrant *rely* on a particular form of

misogyny – sexualized and pornographic visual-textual practices – to sustain their practices, while what comes first and what follows is a chicken and egg question. It is in this context that the sexualized objectification of Indian Muslim women as items in an auction via social media takes on numerous layers of meaning.

Sexual Politics of the Hindu Right

The auctioning of Muslim women particularly reflects the ideology of Hindu nationalism, which frames the politics of the current ruling regime in India and has had a Janus-faced moral position on sexuality. Hindu nationalism's advocacy for a Hindu-first India and repression of minority religions (Hansen, 1999; van der Veer, 1994) have shaped the schism around sexuality in ways that follow and replicate the religious divide (between majority Hindus and minority Muslims). Hindu nationalists have articulated patriotism in relation to conceptions of *maryada* [honor], which partly unfolds through a conservative politics focused exclusively on regulating sexuality and celebrating the heteronormative "happy family" seen as coextensive with the national community (Udupa, 2018). However, the gendered conception of *maryada* maps out in diametrically opposite ways for the Hindu and Muslim women.[2]

Studies have shown that sexual violence has been a part of interreligious conflicts and riots in India, especially in the late colonial period and years following its formal political independence in 1947 (Agarwal, 1995; Das, 2007; Sarkar, 2021). Examining gendered communal conflicts in India, Megha Kumar (2022) emphasizes the importance of the interaction of an elite ideology (Hindu nationalism) and the unique economic, social, and political dynamics at work within different conflict situations, tracing some of the motivations behind sexual violence to the founding texts of the ideologues of the Hindu nationalist movement. The founding members of Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS), the nodal Hindu nationalist organization established in 1925, articulated sexual violence against "enemy women" within a historical narrative of India's misery under a violent Muslim rule (Kumar, 2022). An image of sexually depraved yet physically powerful Muslim men was pitted against virtuous but weak Hindu men. Muslim women were condemned as complicit in the sexual and material exploitation of Muslim men. In contrast, Hindu women were portrayed as honorable who would rather commit suicide than fall prey to the lascivious marauding Muslims. Paola Bachetta (2004) similarly informs that the core and marginal informational materials of RSS, which had an effective marketing machinery even as early as the 1990s, construed "Muslim women as objects of potential and realized communal and sexual appropriation" (p. 98) vis-a-vis an idealized patriotic Hindu male and the alleged anti-national sexually violent Muslim

male. Representations of Muslim women in the Hindu nationalist discourse, Bachetta states, draw on a long tradition of colonial and fascist discursive practices of gendered sexualized "othering." However, instead of an assumed biological inferiority, Indian Muslim women, she argues, are viewed as "lost property" for the Hindus because of religious conversion that "took away" women who were Hindus from their "original" religious community while their status in Islam is assumed to be of tradeable sexual objects. Such ideological justifications for cultivating an aggressive male sexuality have served to exempt sexual degradation of Muslim women from moral reproach within the Hindu nationalist thought.

Against this historically fraught sexual politics of religious majoritarian nationalism which has sought to "divide Muslims along gender lines, and to use Muslim women to denigrate Muslim men" (Bachetta, 2004, p. 123), including through seemingly emancipatory legislations around banning the hijab and the tripal *talaq* (Piedalue et al., 2021), a broader culture of sexualized imagery and sexualization has swept mainstream politics in recent years. In an ethnographic conversation with the authors, Kavita Krishnan, a left-progressive feminist and staunch opponent of Hindu right politics, tells us:

> One set [of people] will keep reacting by calling you a terrorist and a terrorist supporter, and these will always be sexualized because they will say you are the *hoor* who will be gifted to Muslim terrorists when they go to heaven. So [they chide us that] you want to sleep with Muslims, they ask you how did you like the taste of this guy's . . . take this, that . . . all that kind of thing. So there's a whole sexualization of that political angle.

Sexist and sexualized attacks of the kind Krishnan describes have become not only more common but also more sweeping, since women who come from the Hindu communities are also targeted by Hindu nationalists for their feminist and critical views about nationalist politics (Amnesty International India, 2020). This enlarging of the ambit – of who is considered as rightful targets for sexist and sexually violent attacks – has upset, if not completely upturned, the schism in sexual politics along the religious divide. Simultaneously, it has accentuated the contradictions of a conservative politics of the "save the family" discourse of the Hindu right and the disruptive energies of sexualized epithets that drive the ideology.

We suggest that digital mediation is squarely at the center of this churning. As affordable Internet media and social media platforms have expanded, India has become the second-largest country in terms of Internet users (700 million in 2022; Farooqui, 2023). If thousands of newly minted nationalistic ideologues are drawn into a recursive loop of digital influence strategies of the right-wing party – blurring the boundaries between organic and

manufactured traction – a bottom-up swelling of nationalist affect on digital platforms has also led to a diversification of strategies, actors, and affects that compose this ideological space.

A significant rupture exists along an emic divide between "trads" (staunch traditionalists) who have sought to revive practices deemed as "properly" Hindu, versus "raitas" ("moderates") who are blamed by the opposing camp for going soft on Hindutva (Hindu nationalism). Trads have taken up some of the most regressive tropes of gender, including the dehumanizing tradition of Sati – the alleged voluntary and divinely sanctified sacrifice of a widow by ending her life on the burning pyre of the deceased husband – which is now considered illegal. Much of their activities heavily hinge on digital work, as these tech-savvy actors charge up a panoply of digitally native tactics to assemble and articulate nationalist views and combat and counter those seen as hostile. In the next two sections, we examine digital activities (online auctions and Telegram chats) of a particular community of such niche extreme actors – the self-defined trads – to ask whether and how they renew and revamp key ideological tenets of exclusionary nationalism foremost by centering the Muslim female body and ramping up gendered discourses with the vocabularies and visualities of Internet porn.

Online Auctions

The online auction scandal in 2021, with which we began this chapter, first came to public knowledge when journalists and members of Article-14, a legal advocacy group, reported about a "tool" called "Sulli Deals" on GitHub (Jafri & Aafaq, 2021). Fashioning itself as an "auction" tool, Sulli Deals showcased images of Muslim women largely sourced from Twitter without their consent or knowledge, inviting users to "take their pick" from the stock of "Sullis" as the "deal of the day." These pictures and more information about the auctions were shared on Twitter and other social media platforms, inviting more users to haggle their "deal of the day." Typically, users would select the image, "rate" the woman in the image, and "auction" her off to each other. Even before the tool appeared on GitHub, similar "deals" were offered on some accounts of Twitter. Several Twitter accounts with apparent pseudo names – some with Muslim-sounding names and others sounding Sikh – with a follower count ranging from 600 to 65,000 were actively promoting the auctions (Jafri & Aafaq, 2021). The deals were also "broadcast" live on YouTube. "I saw it live on YouTube," said Nazia Ahmad, our interlocutor in Delhi; "They were talking like, '2 *rupees ki #&**, *khud ki paisa* [a #&* of 2 Indian rupees worth]'. '*iska yeh, iska wo*' [she's for him, she's for the other]. I cannot even say the word they were using. I saw them, I saw them being auctioned like that" (see Figure 6.1).

FIGURE 6.1   A Tweet on Sulli Deal

Source: Retrieved June 30, 2023, from https://twitter.com/ALeelwala/status/1393076401826 271239

Once images of "auctioned" women appeared on the screens, a typical interaction unfolded as follows:

User 1: *Like thoko bhaiyo* [shower with likes, brothers]
User 2: *Link do bhai* [give me the link, bro]
User 3: *Edi inki nahi mili to unsubcribe kar denge molana* [If indeed I don't get to take them, then I'll unsubscribe, maulana]
User 4: *Band karo yeh chutiyapaa Kameeno* [Stop this f***ery, scoundrels]
User 5: *Video utube se nikal Gaya toh firse upload karna warna unsubcribe karenge n private bhi mat karna* [If the video disappears from YouTube, then please upload again, otherwise we'll unsubscribe and don't even make it private]
User 6: *Bhai inko bakri ki review karo tab khus hoke one hand dumble karenge* [Brother, do reviews of goats and only then they'll be happy to exercise their one hand]

Soon after the incidents came to the attention of the media, journalists reported that a 23-year-old resident in a Northern Indian technology city, who maintained multiple accounts on Twitter and YouTube, was the central figure running the technical set up for the first of such auctions in May, 2021, and, thus, he was an influencer for the large social media following he commanded. Before facing suspension, the YouTube channels "Liberal Doge" and "Secular Doge" that he ran had a combined viewership of 200,000 (Goyal, 2021). The key protagonist of the videos on these channels was a caricaturized Muslim male in the image of a Cheems dog from the global memes world but with a Muslim skull cap (Figure 6.2). Auctions were arguably the most insulting of what these channels produced. As Liberal Doge's posts created a stir, an auction "app" (Bulli Bai app) was subsequently created by a group of youths in November 2021, and soon attracted more attention (Garg, 2022).

The new controversy dragged opposing political parties into the fray, raising the political stakes of this obscure online practice that had now spanned different platforms (see Table 6.1). The arrested youth were software engineering students from different cities of India, and, according to our journalist interlocutor, who published detailed stories on the episode, the parents of the teenagers were unaware of what their children were up to. "They are from very simple middle class family," said the journalist, hinting that one might appreciate their teenage vulnerabilities without casting too harsh a light on them as masterminds of an elaborate criminal conspiracy. "They were really young chaps," he continued; "They did not get the bail in the beginning but after spending some months in the jail, they were released on bail." A feminist politician who spoke to us added, "These 18-year-old, 19-year-old, 20-year-old youngsters who are behind the auctions are earning a buck as well as getting a kick out of doing this kind of thing."

FIGURE 6.2   Meme Shared in the Chat Group

TABLE 6.1 Activities Related to Auctions and Pornified Content on Different Platforms

Twitter	YouTube	GitHub	Clubhouse	Telegram
Amplification and promotion of auctions on other platforms	Live broadcast of an "auction" of Pakistani women	Creation of applications to "auction" Muslim women	Audio discussions around Muslim women and their sexual worth	Chat groups created for circulating political, communal, and misogynistic content
Trolling and auctioning exclusively on Twitter	Misogynistic and Islamophobic content creation and hosting	Hosting of such applications	Auctions of both Hindu and Muslim women	Channels were deleted; YouTube videos are archived and made accessible. Other new channels created at different intervals

"Auction" as a form of online activity is not merely persistent individual heckling that typifies "trolling" (Hardaker, 2010). As the conversation thread and Figure 6.1 illustrate, prankster perpetrators of Sulli/Bulli Deals offered it instead as an activity where users can collaboratively "rate" the images, ask for more images, and express a sense of "procuring" the women depicted in them. The activity bears a similarity with pornography in that they both work on the assumption that women could be rated, sold, and "consumed" in a sexualized way. However, it sits oddly with generous readings of "traditional" pornography as "in a sense, a substitute for a sexual partner" and harmless fiction (Burgess, 1970, p. 8). With nonconsensually sourced images of real women thrown into a male virtual marketplace, the online auction recreates pornographic conditions that depict and endorse women's degradation (Brownmiller, 1975). Even more, with its interactive features, the "auction" transforms the seemingly solitary activity of porn consumption into group aggression laced with sexual innuendo and shaming and the pleasures of "rating" and "bidding" for "items" tagged with real pictures of actual women. Thus, the exemplification of hate becomes a highly social process.

Social Organization

As Nur Akhtar, who was one of the Muslim women "auctioned" online, recounted to us:

> It was not like any other. It wasn't even like a rape threat or whatever that you face online. It was more real, it was more real than mere trolling. It wasn't just saying something and moving on, because there was this element of auctioning . . . a whole activity around you where there are people now commenting on you and talking about you, objectifying you.

This "whole activity," as Nur says, suggests that what emerge in auctions are not just individual and isolated strings of comments to a pornified image but a "porn event," a social interaction episode.

Clusters of users who congregated at the auctions were also simultaneously talking to one another and building up more cheerleaders. One of the women who were "auctioned" told us:

> Before the auctions, I had probably taken it [online harassment] for granted. I thought its okay, *chaar panch log he jo troll karte byathe he types* [it's just about four, five people trolling and suchlike]. After the auctions, I realized they are very well connected, they talk to each other, they have all these DM [direct messaging] groups in which they are discussing, and they are constantly finding people, making lists of people whom they want to attack.

Group Participation

The online uproar that erupted following the arrests of the auctions' creators is a vivid illustration of group camaraderie and tactical noise of supporters. While feminists and liberal progressive voices welcomed the originators' arrests and rallied against the grossly degrading online activity, right-wing patrons of the auction sites posted angry comments. Coining the hashtag "#IamWithLiberalDoge" and claiming that it was trending on Twitter, supporters urged fellow users to "make sure to tweet as much as you can. They are fighting alone, we must support them" (Goyal, 2021). "They have entertained us a lot," reminded another supporter, adding "it's our payback time." Some of them were reeling with anger: "Is freedom of speech for Muslims and leftists?" asked a user; "Why can't someone from HINDU community express himself #IamWithLiberalDoge" [original capitalization].

It was thus of little surprise that following the bans on YouTube and Twitter, some of auction masterminds migrated to Telegram, one of the least regulated platforms, carrying with them the loyal tribe of gleeful hate mongers and the entire bank of deleted content to curate elsewhere. The next section turns to assess content that has been archived on a public Telegram channel run by these actors and samples of conversations among them in a Telegram chat group.

Telegram Chat Worlds

For this analysis, following an initial search on Telegram for the keywords "Liberal Doge," "Secular Doge," and "Sulli Deals," three sites were selected for closer exploration: "Liberal Doge All Videos" (LDAV, a public channel with archived videos), "Secular Doge" (a music, discography public channel), and "Secular Doge Chats" (SDC, a public chat group). The sampled content gathered during observations of group activities between May and June 2022 contains videos, audio clips, chat texts, and still images. LDAV had 59 videos, out of which 2 were forwarded videos and the rest were "restored" from the YouTube channel after it was banned following the live auctions in May 2021. Although the creator of this channel appears to have many more videos scattered around social media channels, this corpus of videos presents an interesting sample of banned videos that are now archived and available using Telegram's unique affordances of encrypted and group messaging functionalities, as well as its radical free speech approach to regulation (Rogers, 2020). Aside from the 57 videos archived in this channel, 13 new videos that the channel owner created and shared on the chat group (SDC) were included in the sample of videos for annotation and analysis. Using the feature of Telegram exports of historical data, we also obtained 149 voice/audio clips from the chat group. The material from the chat group contains images (.png files), stickers (Telegram's own stickers and those created by users), video

TABLE 6.2 Corpus Description

Data type	Location	Total number of items found	Annotated items
Video	Telegram Channel + Chat Group	72	70 (97.2%)
Voice/audio	Telegram Chat group	149	51 (34.2%)
Still images	Telegram Chat Group	811*	129 (15%)

* Excluding duplicates and thumbnails

files (short and embedded videos), other files (shared on the group, including pdfs), and text messages in html files.

For the final annotation, all 70 of "original" videos created by the channel owner were selected for analysis (see Table 6.2). From the large chat data from SDC, only posts with explicit or indirect reference to sex/sexuality, porn, women, and gendered violence were selected. With this selection, a total of 811 images in the chat group were reduced to 129 images for final annotation. Textual data in the chats helped to interpret the meanings of videos, still images, and audio files in the chat group and make sense of the contexts of sharing, but it was not included for coding.

We built two annotation schemes based on bottom-up coding and labels derived from previous work on Hindu nationalism, listing key themes in the corpus. The first list contained gender-based labels: (1) Porn, (2) Muslim femininity and female sexuality, (3) Muslim masculinity and male sexuality, (4) homophobic, (5) morphing, (6) sexually explicit "humor," (7) calls for violence, (8) allegations of sexualizing Hindu deities and motifs, and (9) threats to Hindu masculinity and safety of Hindu women. The second list had "general" themes: (10) Islamophobia, (11) extreme Islamophobia, (12) Hindu nationalism and patriotism, (13) anger against liberal/secular/left politics, and (14) derogatory speech against religions other than Islam (a detailed description of the labels is available from the first author).

Prominent Themes

Table 6.3 shows the most frequently occurring themes in the dataset across videos, voice, and images. It might be noted that coding here is based on its obviousness in the elements analyzed and not its contextual presence. As we gleaned from observations of group discourses during the two-month period, subtle calls for violence are running themes and constitute the ideological framing of the posts. The dataset contains no direct calls for violence, revealing that indirect expressions are employed to signal the desire for sexual and political aggression.

TABLE 6.3 Frequency of Themes

Code	Theme	Occurrences
3	Muslim male sexuality	77
10	Islamophobia	76
12	Hindu nationalism	41
9	Threats to Hindu masculinity	37
11	Extreme Islamophobia	33
1	Porn	32
2	Muslim female sexuality	30
13	Anger against liberal/secular/left politics	24
6	Sexually explicit humor	22
14	Derogatory speech against other religions	10
4	Homophobia	8
8	Allegations of sexualizing Hindu deities	6
5	Morphing	3
7	Direct call for violence	0

Islamophobic and anti-Muslim minority speech constitutes a major part of the content. Masculinity and sexualized speech form core components within the discourse. Doge's videos draw on historical stereotypes of Muslim men as sexually and politically aggressive, and he expands their scope by claiming that Muslim men's hypermasculinity extends to animalistic tendencies including bestiality. Stereotypes of Muslim women are also regurgitated – they are over-sexualized as well as shown to be oppressed. In the chat group, for instance, a user started an "anonymous poll" with the question, "*Mulli ki ch**t kaise hoti hai?*" [What does the vagina of a Muslim girl look like? "Mulli" is an offensive term for Muslim women.] The question was followed by a list of options with sexually explicit descriptions on which users could vote.

Subthemes of love-jihad, "*Hindu khatre mein hain*" [Hindus are under threat], notions of "violent Islam," and allegations that the ruling Hindu nationalist party (BJP) is too "soft" are prominent subthemes. Other subthemes include anti-caste politics and criticism of affirmative action (reservation for oppressed castes) and anger against the "liberals." In videos as well as chats, the language used is often abusive, lewd, and xenophobic. Ironically, the tone is also almost always "humorous" and playful. Further analysis will reveal how diverse themes appear in relation to one another and how full conversational spaces emerge within the Telegram group. To address this lacuna in our content analysis, we conducted conversation analysis of an extract from the chat group, offering a glimpse of how a "typical" exchange unfolds in the group.

Conversation Analysis

- 15 June 2022: Starts like any other day for the group, but sadder. The discussion is sparked by news reports on the grim realities facing young jobseekers from rural areas who had come to the expensive capital city of New Delhi, aspiring to find government and bureaucratic jobs. Members discuss how government jobs are mismanaged and scarce, pushing the youth to commit suicides over failed careers.
- Soon, "CK," a group admin, enters the conversation and launches a diatribe against a group member whom he accuses of blaming the youth for their fate. The messages to which CK replies are deleted already and therefore one cannot gauge the provocation. CK's abuses are packed with Islamophobic, sexist, and sexual punches, attacking Muslim women in particular.
- "Green Bag" intervenes and clarifies that CK has mistaken his target to be a Muslim, when in fact he is a Hindu. He urges CK to calm down saying he is also about to start "raid training" on the group.
- CK clarifies that he was provoked by the person's irreverence toward the deceased and continues to use sexual gifs and to hurl insults against the antagonist's mother, now combining graphic sexual violence against Muslim women with stereotypes around terrorism. A meme with a possibly masturbating body with Leonardo DiCaprio's face pops up in the midst.
- Green Bag suggests that CK and his opponent join forces in violating a "mulli" as a means to foster harmony between themselves. He then suggests that a second phone number, preferably a fake American one, will help dodge Telegram's bans.
- Meanwhile, CK posts a meme that depicts a nude Mia Khalifa, a porn actress and activist of Lebanese origin, with the Pakistani flag painted on her. She is being penetrated by a muscular faceless man painted in the Indian flag. The still image used in the meme comes from one of Khalifa's movies, depicting her contorted face conveying in that moment seeming shock and unease.
- The topic shifts. CK's next message is to Grain Bag asking why their telephone call is not connecting. Grain Bag replies to "Olla Ubar," another active participant in the group, asking him to use the shared fake number to make a sham ID, posing as a Muslim girl.
- CK chips in to suggest "*nudes bhi bhejna*" [send nude pics] and asks Grain Bag to call again.
- Grain Bag says he shall deliver [nude pics] and continues to elaborate on his idea to infiltrate Muslim groups with fake ids. The idea is to act like an ex-Muslim, doxx them, and destroy their online presence. The matter of youth suicides is thus laid to rest for the day.

The mind-numbing mix of themes in the thread – beginning with the sober story of youth suicide to a swift descent to sexualized abusive message to

violating a "Mulli" for group solidarity to a wacky cry for nude pics – all ostensibly for the noble cause of the nation – reveals how masculine rage and revenge fantasies around a sexualized female Muslim body animate and hold up the groups. In a vital sense, these groups represent and tap an expanding uptake for porn in India, which has peaked since the advent of smartphones and affordable data plans (Aulakh & Sengupta, 2017; Singh, 2020). According to Porn Hub, India is one of the top consumers of porn ("Pornhub's Third Largest Customer Base Comes from India," 2018) and registered the greatest visits during the pandemic (Kannan, 2020). In addition, India now boasts of amateur local porn productions as well as subscription-based mobile apps for porn (Jaiswal, 2021).

Set in this context of digitally delivered porn riding on cheap data and smartphones, the striking visuality of sexualization and occasional self-references to incels among the "Doges" might be tempting enough to conclude that they are like incels who "dehumanize, yet desire, women" (Johanssen, 2022, p. 4). However, the affective charge of religious nationalism that animates and binds the social interactions among the members – and the group energies around the political ideology which they draw on and fuel – suggest that the confusing concoction of political, pornographic, and sexual matters within such communities holds some new lessons for digital hate scholarship. The next section raises some of these.

Online "Basic Misogyny" to Porn Fun

In his succinct and widely cited "cute cat theory of Internet censorship," Ethan Zuckerman (2008) considers the Internet's immense potentiality for social movements as arising from its architecture that poses a deep dilemma for dictators inclined to control what flows through these channels. Authoritarian will to control the Internet confronts a double bind. If regimes do not censor, all manner of speech, including resistance, will flood the public space. If they censor the Internet, they raise the risk of blanket banning the content, including content that has nothing to do with politics. Censoring the net risks politicizing publics who were until then unconcerned or unaware of what was going on. Worse still, it could antagonize them since they now cannot search the Internet for cute cat pictures and – this is perhaps even more important – pornography. Furthermore, the Internet's open architecture allows for features that expand and improve regardless of the purpose to which they are put. He argues, "Sufficiently usable read/write platforms will attract porn and activists. If there's no porn, the tool doesn't work. If there are no activists, it doesn't work well." While much of this analysis holds true for the risks of censorship, the argument, although not intended, makes a sweeping distinction between porn and political activism, to the extent of suggesting that they represent two different social processes altogether or at the very least, two separate domains of online activities. The analysis

presented in the preceding sections reveals how online porn and political activity are not only intertwined but co-constitute one another.

Rooted in the pragmatics tradition, Langton (2012) offers some important clarifications. Bringing hate speech and pornography into the same analytical frame, she highlights how hate speech and pornography "work" as speech acts in "a perlocutionary, causal sense, and an illocutionary, constitutive sense" (p. 76). Extending speech act theory with the argument on "presupposition accommodation," Langton concludes that hate speech and pornography

> work more subtly. . . . They implicitly presuppose certain facts and norms. . . . Consumers then change their factual and normative beliefs by taking on board the common ground . . . or the conversational score . . . that is presupposed in the pornographic [or hateful] conversation.
>
> (p. 83)

The pragmatic model offers an "adequate story about how belief change can be achieved," she points out, but what about "feelings and desire" (p. 85)? Here, Langton ventures to take a leap:

> [T]he phenomenon of accommodation might extend beyond belief – beyond conversational score, and common ground, as originally conceived – to include accommodation of other attitudes, including desire and hatred . . . just as a hearer's belief can spring into being, after the speaker presupposes that belief, so too a hearer's desire can spring into being, after the speaker presupposes the hearer's desire; and so too a hearer's hatred can spring into being, after the speaker presupposes that hatred.
>
> (p. 86)

In so doing, Langton puts emotion in an explanatory model that was originally conceived to explain processes that apply reason to achieve belief. What this formal analysis in the pragmatic model lacks – which makes the argument seem like a leap – can be addressed with a social interactional model and a media practice approach linked to it. The social interactional frame of "fun" as a "meta-practice of extreme speech" (Udupa, 2019) offers ways to account for how Doge and his followers are not merely reproducing religious majoritarian nationalism as a cognitive script – a belief – but renewing it through the affective charge of participation, drawing support from one another, scheming "raids" on opponents, and applauding the "hard work" of fellow members, all while consuming and beseeching porn. Fun as a meta-practice of online extreme speech unfolds in four interconnected ways:

- "being 'funny' as a tactical way to enter and rise to prominence within online debates and, by extension, the broader public domain

- deriving fun from the sheer freshness of colloquialism in political debates, which stands in contrast to the serious tone of political deliberation and official centricity, and by mainstreaming the witty political campaign styles as an everyday form of political communication
- fun as satisfaction of achieving a goal by working with one's own resources and in finding tangible results such as hashtag trending, virality, and perceived "real world" changes
- as group identification and collective (if at times anonymous) celebration of aggression"

<div align="right">(Udupa, 2019, p. 3144)</div>

While pornified hate groups share all these features, male homosociality – "performance of manhood as staged in front of, and granted, by other men" – is a distinctively pronounced feature (Semenzin & Bainotti, 2020, p. 3). The sexualized nature of conversations builds on an appetite for porn, as ring leaders of the movement articulate disinhibition and open embrace, in distinction to a more conservative view of feeling secretive or even embarrassed about porn consumption. Homosociality can itself have disinhibiting effects as there is a performative aspect to such group gatherings with validating impacts, but what is significant, as the thematic mix in the chat groups illustrates, is that right-wing nationalist groups of Doge's kind indicate they need no further justification than the frame of the nation itself. Put differently, there is not just an "elective affinity" or "family resemblance" (Brubaker, 2017) between right-wing discourses and misogyny, but right-wing political cultures thrive on sexualized and pornified anti-women cultures as digitally savvy teenagers become their torchbearers.

   In the Indian context, for right-wing nationalism, which today relies on extensive networks of digital propaganda and an army of seemingly spontaneous "volunteers," gendered abuse is a crucial tactic, strategy, and sensibility. As gendered abuse expands within different political groups in their online campaigns and confrontations, it has become not only more common, as our interlocutors vouch and reports confirm (Amnesty International India, 2020; Gurumurthy & Dasarathy, 2022), but it has also become more variegated. Trolling, slut-shaming, infantilizing, and *ad hominem* attacks that make up what one of our interlocutors described rather piquantly as "basic misogyny" are today digitally "enhanced" with the easy creation and devious circulation of "dick pics," pornified images, and auctions, brewed as such within the caldrons of Internet fun and in service of nationalist majoritarianism.[3] While the content and manner of engagement around porn fun are not uncontested even among right-wing ideologues, they are absorbed within the vastly diversified digital antics, as one other activity that helps the purpose.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1 "Sulli" and "Bulli" are derivatives of "Mulli," a slang word for Muslim women. These are considered as "Islamophobic slurs" which originate from the derogatory use of the word "Mulla" which refers to a Muslim male (Salim, 2022).
2 Politics around queer publics is also shifting within and beyond Hindu right ideological groups. This requires a separate discussion, which is beyond the scope of this chapter. The discussion here also leaves out questions of sexuality in relation to Christians, Sikhs, and other religious minorities.
3 Rape and death threats against women constitute another type of misogyny, which is recognized as a serious issue in contemporary digital politics (Gurumurthy & Dasarathy, 2022; Iyer et al., 2020; Kenya ICT Action Network, 2020).

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