The UK's Indian Diaspora: Reflections of Hindutva Ideology Online and Offline

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CONTENTS

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ABSTRACT

India home to over a billion people has around 17.9 million as a diaspora community around the world. With the onset of a far-right political power in India who are proponents of extremist Hindu ideology, the diaspora's engagement and participation in this is notable. The paper proposes research questions which aims to observe the UK Indian diaspora's participation on Twitter and WhatsApp to spread and mobilise for the Hindutva cause. The objectives of the proposed research are to explore themes and contextualise diaspora politics from the lens the Indian diaspora, and to understand how digital media spaces are used by both the political party and its diaspora supporters in creating nationalistic discourse and an identity solidified within these means. The study will also aim to gain in depth understanding of how these online discourses and practices reflect in offline mobilisation. Since this is a MPhil thesis, the paper only proposes a plausible methodology using digital ethnography and semi-structured interviews, that may be used by future researchers either to complete the research questions or for a similar study.

Keywords*: Diaspora, Digital Diaspora, Nationalism, Indian Diaspora, Hindutva, Digital Ethonography*

INTRODUCTION

"Imagine there's no countries //It isn't hard to do// Nothing to kill or die for// And no religion too// Imagine all the people// Living life in peace".

When John Lennon sang these words in his now famous song *Imagine* he encouraged listeners to imagine a borderless world where nations and other dividing elements ceased to exist, where people coexisted with no violence and hatred. However, Anderson's (1991) coined term 'imagined communities' speaks of the 21st century reality- a world divided by imaginary boundaries, nations and nationhood's that often encourage and push a nationalistic sense of patriotism, where countries engage in a race for resources and power to gain more capital. Add to that religious vitriol, Lennon's utopian lyrics are, like boundaries, only imaginable.

Globalisation has given the privileged agency to move across borders and re-settle from their birthplace, while many are forcefully displaced in large numbers due to external factors such as the growing climate crisis, political instability, war, and conflicts. Migratory in nature, these groups of people who are voluntarily or involuntarily displaced from their homeland are collectively referred to as a 'diaspora' in the host country (Sharma, 2012), a definition largely contested over the years and explored further in this thesis. Qualitative and quantitative research on diasporic studies has flooded the academic scene in order to study the socio-cultural, political, and economic impact of migration on host countries.

Diaspora communities, formed because of migration, are characterized by individuals or groups leaving their homeland and establishing themselves in new countries. These communities navigate complex social dynamics as they seek to forge connections with both

their host country and their ancestral roots (Arafat, 2022). Migration patterns in diaspora communities are influenced by various factors, such as historical events, economic opportunities, and political circumstances. The study of diaspora migration has gained significant attention in multiple academic disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, and international business. Numerous studies have been conducted on various diaspora groups, with a particular focus on migrant experiences and their impact on identity formation in association with their nation state.

Anderson's (1991) idea of nations or states as imagined communities was pioneered at the dawn of information dispersion via various mediums using language that was understood by a wider mass. One such medium, the press, was considered revolutionary for spreading news while also encouraging mass literacy. This tool for information dispersal was immediately recognised by the state and gathered support for the onset of a modern state and its sustained effort for 'mass public instruction' (Gellner, 2006). This meant being able to release information to the people covering areas from politics to culture to the arts. The state's monopoly was enormously reinforced by the advent of one-way mass media, namely radio and TV, which ensured undisputed control over the information broadcasted. The nations' supposedly boundless character could still be kept in check through the combined alliance of language and state regulated power by the control of media.

Although Anderson's imagined communities' definition was formed at a time when print media made possible birth of nationhood, with the onset of digital communication imagined communities are furthermore easily sustained through the participation of netizens on the internet from all over the world. This makes national boundaries all the more vague, with nations no longer linked to geographical demarcations rather are thought of more as

networks (Ponzanesi, 2020). Cross media platforms are spaces for establishment of new connection across and within diasporas. This new form of 'diasporic digitality' stands apart from the older notions of diaspora that concentrated on a more spatial unity between people. Power can also play a major role in these blurred line between online and offline events, especially since these spaces today are often used to highlight people's political identities. Therefore, a large area of study in recent times has been the role of social media on real, tangible changes, to question and investigate how social media is being used as a tool to disseminate information, form identities and communities, mobilise people on a common cause, and finally influence real life political policy changes. According to Anderson nationalism was born out of the culmination of 'print capitalism' and spread of literary media, and today parallels can be drawn between print capitalism and digital spaces in terms of enabling the spread of information across the world. Unlike previous modes of information and communication technology such as telephone, television and even radio, the internet brings a unique element to the discussion- that of a flow of data passed back and forth rather than just a one-way news flow.

What started out as a digital space to connect people from all over the world creating a global network of online netizens, is now of great academic interest, as a source of research and wonder at all the phenomenon emerging from practices and human interactions taking place within it. A technological definition of social media that has been proposed is "web applications that process, store and retrieve user-generated content" (Lang & Benbunan-Fich, 2010). Twitter (now X), Facebook and even WhatsApp are applications that can be defined similarly- online, internet generated spaces that churn out user-generated updates called 'posts' on Facebook, 'tweets' on Twitter and just 'messages' or 'forwards' on WhatsApp. Now

a heavily politicised mass communication tool (Thompson, 2011), social media began from rather humble backgrounds as a means to 'make the world a smaller place'. From that to a platform providing space to organise and mobilise people from around the world for a cause, often of political nature. These new platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook few scholars refer to as 'liberation technology' (Diamond, 2010), as it "can expand political, social, and economic freedom" by allowing wide reporting of news, mobilising activists, keeping governing bodies in check by exposing their wrongdoings, encouraging citizen participation in democratic activities, and providing a larger sense of freedom. However, these platforms also fall prey to authoritarian censorship, repression, and a take-over that results in political propaganda.

Overall, the literature review on diaspora migration and theories about diaspora identity reveals a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. It challenges simplistic understandings of diaspora as a fixed and cohesive concept, instead recognizing the diverse realities and fluid nature of diaspora identities. More systematic research-based conceptualization of diaspora, particularly in the context of specific diaspora populations is required to fill research gaps. With growing literature focusing on diaspora as a relevant link to their home country and their impact on development there (Kwaven et al., 2018), this thesis proposes a research to explore UK's Indian diaspora and their engagement with homeland politics, and the ripple effects of the same by specifically studying their online political participation, the ways in which this manifests, and whether this translates to offline mobilisation and actions which directly aid politics in their country of origin, India.

Although several studies have been conducted on the Indian diaspora community in the US, largely due to the huge diasporic community present there, literature on UK Indian diasporas are sparse. It is especially true for research on the digital impact of nationalism and

extremist politics on the diaspora. This is the area of research the following thesis aims to introduce and investigate. Further is a contextualisation of the research within Britain's existing Indian diaspora, their historic arrival, and the political scene in India which influences the diasporas. Not only is this community active participants in the UK's political space, but also in politics in India- especially since the current political party came into power. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has enjoyed significant electoral victories in India and even formed the central government in 1998, marking the first time a right-wing party with a religious ideology compatible with the majority Hindu community assumed power at the national level (Sahgal, 2021) and then later in 2014 up to present times. The rise of the BJP and its political ideologies have had a profound impact on the diaspora's relationship with India, particularly due to the party's emphasis on Hindu identity, culture, and nationalism. The geographical diversity of the Indian diaspora has been shaped against the backdrop of the historical forces of colonialism, nationalism, and neo-liberal globalisation (Hegde & Sahoo, 2017) which is bound to produce strong political opinions and engagement from the diaspora. Further in this paper, themes of nationalism and identity will be explored, as well as the rise in the phenomenon, digital diaspora, especially in light of their involvement in political movements and political identity formation.

The research questions explored in this thesis aim to find out the extent of involvement of the UK's Indian diaspora on politics in India, the role of social media in aiding their engagement, as well as looking at how nationalism and the concept of nationhood plays within this migrated community both in relation to politics back home and their host country. Further investigation will be conducted as to the role of social media in dispersing the current spread of Hindutva ideology within the diaspora, as well the incentives it provides to have an

impressionable and tangible effect on the members of the diaspora. This thesis too aims to study an aspect of BJP's reign over the years and the prominent phenomenon of social media propaganda, information dispersion tactics and mobilising activism via the web. The internet coercion methods used by BJP has been researched before (Chopra, 2019; Zavos 2015), however the influence of social media on the Indian diaspora in the UK is lacking, especially in the last four years when social media activism as well as violent protests have seen a new high in India. The repercussion of these major events on the diaspora will be interesting to record. Below are the research questions that form the basis of conducting the study:

1. In what ways is the Hindutva ideology actively present on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram amongst the Indian diaspora in the UK?
    - Why are these platforms used?
    - Who/What are the major promoters of this in the UK?
    - What is the nature of the discourse prevalent online about Hindutva within the diaspora?
    - What are the other means via which the Hindutva ideology is shared online?
2. How does the online participation of UK's Indian diaspora translate to offline politics?
    - How much is online discourses of Hindutva ideology between active members of the diaspora helping raise support for politics in India?
    - How do the concepts of nationalism and nationhood present itself within the diaspora?

Concepts and ideas such as nationalism, diaspora, Hindutva, and digital diasporas will be dissected, with context drawn from past literature and studies. Considering these research objectives the first chapter introduces diaspora as a phenomenon and theorises different

definitions and arguments presented in existing literature. The chapter also explores nationalism as a by-product of nations existing and also formation of identity within diasporic communities. Finally, it ends with the onset of diasporas within the digital space and the consequences of this recent phenomenon. Chapter two introduces the Indian diaspora and then specifically focuses on this community in the UK. By providing a historical context to both the diaspora as well as Indian politics, this chapter aims at bridging the gap between the two and their participation as a digital diaspora. Finally, chapter three proposes a methodology that may be utilised in order to fulfil the objectives of the research questions.

CHAPTER 1: DIASPORA

1.1 What is a Diaspora?

1.1.1. Theorising Diaspora

Diasporas, by many definitions, refer to communities of people who have been dispersed from their original homeland and now reside in different parts of the world (Ponzanesi, 2020). This dispersion can result from various factors such as economic, social, political, or environmental causes. Diasporic communities often maintain strong ties with their home country and form complex identities that are shaped by their experiences in both their country of origin and of residence. According to Safran (1991), a diaspora is characterized by its members' loyalty to their homeland fellow citizens, as well as their awareness of their identities as part of the community (Toren, 2019). They are not solely defined by their physical dispersion but also by the social networks that sustain their community and the historical and material conditions that have led to their migration (Giovannini, 2022). Amongst several contested conceptualisation and definitions of diaspora, scholars over the years have identified several defining features that characterise a diaspora, including dispersal or immigration, location outside a homeland, community orientation to the homeland, transnationalism, and group identity (Archary, 2022).

Anderson's (1991) 'long distance nationalists' came to be associated with migrants who were involved in politics in their homeland and shared a nationalistic sense of attachment to their country of origin. Long-distance nationalism is characterised by both an emotional and political affinity that the diaspora feels toward their country of origin- a sense of longing for a thing of the past (Anderson, 1991). This longing to belong to a place that the diaspora views

with rose-tinted glasses, often manifests in forms of nationalist ideologies. However, it would be remiss to associate nationalist ideology formation solely on sentiments of the long-distance, it is also developed from external factors which utilise these emotional tendencies of the diaspora and wield it for political support.

Other theoretical frameworks help us understand the formation of diasporic identities. These frameworks include a postmodern theorising of diaspora, which emphasizes the fluidity and hybridity of identities in the diasporic context, and a materialist approach that considers the socio-historical context of migration and settlement in understanding diaspora identity formation (Atashi, 2018) (Yefremov,2021). These theoretical perspectives offer valuable insights into the complexities of diaspora, the socio-historical context of migration and settlement in understanding diaspora identity and challenge simplistic notions of a homogeneous community. The literature review on diaspora migration and theories about diaspora identity reveals that the term "diaspora" is not meant to imply homogeneity within the community, but rather acknowledges the diverse experiences, identities, and backgrounds of diaspora individuals.

The notion of hybridity, which suggests that diasporic communities develop unique identities that incorporate elements of both their host country and their country of origin (Brinkerhoff, 2010) (Dueck & Jacoby, 2017), is reflected in the work of cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1994), who argues that diasporic identities are "constituted through differences, clashes and negotiations between different cultural, social, and political influences (Hack-Polay et al., 2021). Another framework is the concept of transnationalism, which in addition to the fluidity also emphasizes on the interconnectedness of diasporic identities (Ciocea, 2016).

Diasporas can be identified for the purposes of research based on either ethnocultural traits or defined by their country (Brubaker, 2005). This has led to research carried out on many country specific diasporas as well as those that arise from cultural phenomenon's such as the dixie diaspora, the liberal diaspora, the queer diaspora to name a few. However, an argument posed by Sartori (1970) is that labelling every minority group as a diaspora renders the term redundant. "The universalization of diaspora, paradoxically, means the disappearance of diaspora". Academics have since vouched to tighten the definition of diaspora. With many academics attempting to define and structure the identification of a diaspora, Cohen (1997)'s five pronged criteria are:

- *" A collective memory and a myth about the homeland.*
- *An idealisation of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation.*
- *The development of a return movement that gains collective approbation.*
- *A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history, and the belief in a common fate.*
- *A sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement."*

Another scholar put forward a checklist to identify diasporas was Brinkerhoff (2009). The following were her points:

- *"Dispersion, whether voluntary or involuntary, across sociocultural boundaries and at least one political border.*
- *A collective memory and myth about the homeland, created and recreated across distances and generations;*

- *A commitment to keeping the homeland- imagined or otherwise- alive through symbolic and purposive expression in the host-land and/or in the homeland.*
- *The presence of the issue of return, though not necessarily a commitment to do so. The idea of return may be explored, discussed, and debated with or without specific intention of physical return;*
- *A diasporic consciousness and associated identity hybridity, expressed party through the creation of diaspora associations or organisations."*

A common attribute that runs across all definitions of diaspora is that migrated groups are classified as diasporas depending on the nature of the connection, they have with their home country. This element of migration as a common factor is apparent in Brubaker's (2005) classification of groups as diaspora, which underlines three core elements: dispersion in space; orientation to a 'homeland', and boundary-maintenance.

Dispersion may be any movement of people from one land to another, provided this involves the crossing of state borders. *Homeland orientation* is the dependency they have with their real or imagined 'homeland' in terms of their values, identity, and loyalty. Clifford (1994) argues that this centred notion of homeland orientation is not necessary and writes about 'decentred, lateral connections' that are equally important. Moving on to the third element to recognising diasporas- *'boundary-maintenance'* (Brubaker, 2005) refers to the attempt showcased by migrated groups to maintain their distinct identity within the host society. Boundary maintenance is the most recognised element of a diaspora- it holds the group together by a "distinctive, active solidarity, as well as by relatively dense social relationships, that cut across state boundaries and link members of the diaspora in different states into a single 'transnational community'". Finally, Eriksen (2007) introduces the term

'hyphenated identity', which essentially means the creation of a stable, diasporic identity that falls in between their home identity and the place they reside in. This shows a lack of yearning for returning back to their origin country, or for social reform there. Diasporas of this kind seek for recognition and respect of a new kind that sees them as foreign citizens in their country of residents.

1.1.2. Nationalism and Diaspora Identity

Nationalism can rear its head in a socio-political context in the form of conflicts and hostility between members of the same society or with people from foreign lands, in this case more specifically- nations. A correlation has been studied by Conversi (2012) where an attempt was made to explore the relationship between globalisation and nationalism. It was suggested that the downfall of neo-liberal globalisation is seen to be directly correlated to the rise in violent ethnic conflict. What is often seen as a result of globalisation's - to form a global united front has proven counterproductive as it has led to ethnic identities being accentuated and strengthened. This could be partly due to the tendencies that arise to globalisation like homogenisation through cultural destruction, Americanisation, and mass consumerism. Just as globalisation erodes and destroys older and traditional boundaries, new boundaries are created almost instantly in its wake (Conversi, 2012). In other words, both globalisation and nationalism foster processes of boundary building and shifting, while mutually reinforcing each other. Nationalism is therefore simultaneously a process of boundary creation and boundary maintenance. The latter can be attributed to nationalism's status as a product of nation-state, where the people belonging to this state are "historically and naturally unified" into a sense of togetherness and belonging.

In his paper *Nationalism and the Internet*, Eriksen (2007), refers to Ernest Gellner's conceptualisation of nationalism where he opined that nationalism created nations and not the other way around. The transition from an agrarian to industrial society was one of many outcomes of nationalism. Although a rather dated view on nationalism Gellner's foundational idea of nationalism still resonated with many cultural theorists. Many argue that Gellner's theory of nationalism is based off a specific period in European history during the Industrial Revolution, and then subsequently Romanticism and the Enlightenment ending with the Versailles Peach Treaty (Eriksen, 2007). However, his theory is rooted in the idea of territorially based identities that people form, and this still stands true as national identities are to a large extent, still territorially based. The ways in which nationalism shows up within a diaspora has been acknowledged by Gellner, where he describes them as "a distinctive, very conspicuous and important sub-species of nationalism."

The feeling of togetherness and belonging as Calhoun (2007) points out most often results in mobilisation on an anti-democratic scale, with people exhibiting intolerant attitudes and distorted world views. Due to these regressive feelings, they have proven to be catalysts for internal and external conflicts. The fluid nature of nationalism makes it accessible to every member of a nation, even though the reasons for holding nationalistic beliefs may shift with changing circumstances. On another note, although friction and hostility are more commonly associated with extreme nationalism, Calhoun (2007) highlights the positive work that nationalism engages in, such as bridging the gap between local communities and their attempts at participating in globalisation. Nationalistic fervour is often a motivating factor for increased political participation, people coming together for public causes, and public debates.

Literature on diaspora migration reveals a rich historical context that highlights the displacement and marginalization experienced by various diasporic communities. These communities have undergone multiple processes of refugee-ness and patterns of mixed migration, leading to complex and layered identities (Lindholm, 2020). Crossing borders, migrating to a foreign land, and the attempt to assimilate with the host community has been observed to enhance people's zeal for patriotism and nationalism. Diasporas are widely studied to understand the link they foster to their home country. Sheffer (1986) defines diaspora's as "modern ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin – their homeland". Several different kinds of diasporas were conceptualised by scholars over the years of research; Anderson's (1991) 'long distance nationalists' came to be associated with migrants who were involved in politics in their homeland and shared a nationalistic sense of attachment to their country of origin.

Mobilisation can be an outcome of either of the two types of nationalism distinguished by Shahed (2019)- that which is either *ethnic* or *civic* in nature. When nationalism is civic in nature it translates as voluntary mobilisation for national interests and most importantly, lacks ethnic elements. Whereas ethnic nationalism tends to be exclusive with participation reserved for those belonging to the dominant ethnic group. In comparison, ethnic nationalism may display regressive and hostile characteristics, while civic nationalism is one which can enhance the progress of a democracy (Kapur, 2010). In countries with a dominant religion and a political leadership that banks on this divide, ethnic nationalism is most witnessed amongst its politically active members. When actors from these countries become migrants in a foreign land they carry with them ethnic majoritarian sentiments, only to become minorities in their

host countries. Most often than not, although nationalistic feelings remain, the motivation driving these sentiments are reversed due to their new social status in their new host country. Diasporic communities not only share a civic and ethnic similarity between its members but often band together with a shared sense of mobilisation for a cause that can be religious, political, social, or economical. These issues are often unique to the diasporic community in question. Although physically detached from their homeland, members of a diaspora often connect with politics back home in an attempt to maintain their sense of belonging and identity to their home country (Appadurai, 2008). This shared emotion and identity is very specific to diasporic identity formation and becomes important to analyse when studying collective behaviours that arise out of these communities.

Reverting back to the phenomenon of nationalism previously attributed to aggressively patriotic citizens of a nation, tracing the same idea onto diasporas becomes an interesting area of study. Diasporic nationalism tends to be a defensive reaction (Conversi, 2012) to the claim that mobilisation is necessary in order to preserve ethnic and cultural boundaries that are under perceived threat. At the same time, long distance nationalism (Anderson, 1991) lends a safe physical distance for political members to encourage risky strategies in their homeland, resulting in diasporas being more radical in nature than 'native' community members. In line with this Nussbaum (2009) highlights how for example, the Indian American diaspora is crucial in shaping the discourse around identity and Hindutva nationalism. Just as much as they are significant contributors of wealth and resources to India particularly in areas of poverty (through raising funds through charities) and disaster relief, they are at the same time ignorant of the extent of communal division and violence that perpetuates due to Indian politics in the civil society.

1.1.3. Identity within a Diaspora

Identity, Fearon (1999) argues is "people's concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others", whereas national identity is a condition in which "a mass of people have made the same identification with national symbols – have internalised the symbols of the nation…" (Bloom, 1990). Diasporic communities engage in various forms of identity formation, which can be shaped by their experiences and interactions with different cultures. One of the key theories on diasporic identity formation is that of an imagined transnational community (Brah, 1996; Clifford, 1994; Cohen, 1997). This theory suggests that diasporas form a sense of common identity and belonging through their shared experiences, memories, and cultural practices even when physically dispersed. Amongst these older literature on theorising diasporas, a sense of individuality is lacking. These definitions function to understand the relationship of the diaspora with an imagined, constructed entity- a nation, a land. But this land is inhibited by humans who are complex beings who require a deeper level of understanding. Human motivation and identity run deeper than their association with a place and its politics. Human interactions, connections built between people, and the memories that travel with them to their foreign countries form the crux of developing an identity and attachment to a place, which then will subsequently have an impact on their political affiliations.

Whilst conducting research on diasporas, these above-mentioned criteria and definitions may be consulted to provide a basis for characterising members of a migrated community as a 'diaspora'. However, more recent literature on diasporas seek to re-conceptualise diasporas as more than just migrants and minorities. Such as Ponzanesi (2020) who argues against older models of identifying diaspora and instead introduces new areas of

discussion to this area of research. In this contemporary conceptualisation of the requirement to be recognised as a diaspora, they are seen as not merely communities who migrated from one land to another, rather they are groups of people who share either a tangible or emotional tie to their homeland. This feeling of connectedness brings together diasporas in their foreign country and aids in facilitating group cohesion when required. Hence, diaspora becomes an intersection between nation and identity. Ponzanesi (2020) highlights these communities as travellers who form and create relationships between members of the host community and themselves. In her reasoning, she suggests diasporas as important contributors to the "birth of a new political subjectivity with respect to globalisation in which migration, diaspora and nomadism are equally important and constitutive aspects" (Ponzanesi, 2020, pp. 979).

Several studies highlight the complexities of diaspora identity, recognizing that the experiences and identity formation amongst the community can significantly vary based on various factors such as religion, gender, generations, and reasons for migration. Conceptualisation of diasporas as homogenous are dated, instead the individuality of its members makes it a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing individuals with varying political beliefs, social backgrounds, and generations. The very shift from using terms like "refugee" to the term "diaspora" reflects a reconceptualization and expansion of the concept of diaspora (Ouissa et al., 2021). This becomes more evident when understanding the target audience of this research paper – the Indian diaspora in the UK is not a monolithic entity displaced under one event, rather they consist of generations displaced during the colonial era, then the post-colonial migration, then people resettling seeking job opportunities, and now more recently an influx of international students moving for higher education and

subsequently assimilating with the local workforce. Conceptualising, 'diaspora' should be understood as a dynamic and varied phenomenon (Birch-Bayley, 2020) rather than a monolithic or static category as motivations, intentions, values and lived experiences may differ for each of these diasporic groups. However, what are the threads of similarities and shared beliefs that can be weaved between the diverse members of this diaspora? Is there any to begin with?

Anderson's (1991) imagined communities are "imagined because the member of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion". This is reflected in the formation and sustenance of diasporas, even though members of a diaspora are far removed from their homeland they are observed to maintain a group dynamic and relationship that binds them under the same umbrella be it ethnic, cultural, spatial, or assumed. This has been made even more accessible through the highly networked virtual realm- the internet. Besides being used by them as a platform for enhancing in-group interaction, exchanging information, and mobilising for political causes (Oiarzabal & Reips, 2012), the internet's communication facilities have over the years been increasingly used by political actors from the diaspora's homeland to engage with those migrated to a foreign country. Due to the rapid advancements in digital use within the diaspora to stay connected, there has also been a rise in both theoretical and empirical studies on this added facet to literature on diasporas - digital diasporas.

1.2 Digital Diaspora

With increase in globalisation and mass migration of people from their home countries to other nations, scholars have been studying the impact of 'imagined communities'. Identity formation is one such aspect of migration that is extensively researched, and within this scope of research falls the study of relationship between nationalism and cyberspace (Therwath, 2012). The internet provides a platform for those who had previously no medium to express their opinions. Despite early Internet commentators believing the de-territorialised and supranational character of the internet would mean the fragmentation of population due to broken stable national identities, some observational studies have suggested otherwise. Internet use has reported a stronger national identity amongst people, even in reproducing such tendencies across vast distances (Eriksen, 2007). Internet provides an almost 'free public space' for discussions, debates, mobilisation, and activism.

According to anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (2008), transnational social fields allow for the formation of what he calls "diasporic public spheres", which are imagined communities that exist outside of the homeland. These diasporic public spheres are characterized by the integration of online and offline dimensions, expanding the sphere of interaction from the local to the global and involving diasporic communities in discussions, debates, and collective actions that transcend geographical boundaries (Arafat, 2022). In the context of diasporas engaging in social media and forming digital communities, these theoretical frameworks provide insights into how diasporic identities are shaped and negotiated in the digital space.

The concept of diasporas and their formation of digital communities is influenced by social economic, cultural, and political factors. According to Kumar, digital technologies serve

as “transnational springboards” for diasporic identity politics, providing diaspora communities with opportunities for visibility and political impact (Leurs & Smets, 2018). These digital platforms enable diasporic individuals to actively participate in political discussions, share their perspectives and experiences, and mobilize for collective actions. Furthermore, the rapid diffusion of mobile and social media technologies among migrant populations has facilitated transnational political communication (Aricat, 2015), by allowing members of the diaspora to connect, share stories, and engage in discussions about their shared heritage. This further creates a space to participate in civic deliberation and communicate diverse opinions on social, economic, and political concerns, both in their homelands and country of residence (Atashi, 2018).

For instance, the use of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp offers diasporas a space to actively participate in discussions on political events happening in their home country, such as elections, controversial policies, and social issues. This bottom-up strategy of activism, as described by Brinkerhoff, ensure that diasporas have a direct influence on politics back home. One example of diasporic engagement in political causes can be seen among the Indian diaspora in the UK and their association with the Hindutva ideology. Through social media platforms, the Indian diaspora in the UK has been able to form digital communities that support and promote the Hindutva ideology. These communities engage in online discussions, share news articles and videos, organize virtual events and campaigns, and express their political views on various platforms. At the same time, the digital engagement of the Indian diaspora in the UK with the Hindutva ideology raises questions about the role of social media platforms in the dissemination and normalization of populist political ideologies. This phenomenon highlights the complex dynamics between online platforms, diasporic

communities, and their role in shaping political discourse. These communities employ digital communications to reconnect with their 'homeland' and foster long-distance nationalism, as these internet spaces fosters a sense of community among its members and plays a pivotal role in redefining notions of citizenship and national identity.

The advent of these technologies has created unprecedented opportunities for transnational multi-identity mobilization at individual, diasporic, and ideological levels, hence it important to study active audience perspective in order to understand media usage by diasporic groups who consume different forms of media for various purposes including information, entertainment, engagement, commerce, and faith-based participation (Afshana and None, 2018). Internet spaces hold significant democratic potential (Leurs & Smets, 2018) capable of facilitating issues of political (Smoliarova & Bodrunova, 2021), allowing the integration of online and offline dimensions by diaspora journalists, activists, and non-activist refugee groups (Arafat, 2022). This involvement within digital communities and contribution to societal issues is not restricted solely to their adopted country but also extends back to their homeland. The physical barriers are overcome as they establish connections with individuals from their place of origin, fostering an interchange of ideas, solidarity, and engagement in activism. The advent of new media has facilitated the ability for individuals to simultaneously stay connected with their homeland and actively participate in global issues.

Leidig's (2019) analysis of anti-Muslim Indian diaspora activism following Brexit and Trump shows that digital media enable individuals to transcend geographic constraints and connect with like-minded individuals across borders. This allows for the cultivation of shared social identities, the establishment of strong organizational bases, the framing of important issues clearly, and effective coordination - all key factors in achieving a range of benefits from

digital activism. Moreover, the rapid adoption of mobile telephones in conjunction with the increase in usage rates on various online platforms has been instrumental in facilitating the formation and growth of virtual communities within diasporas. These digitally empowered communities have altered traditional notions pertaining to community dynamics while reshaping conceptions related to citizenships within their respective nations. Appadurai talks about how new digital technologies allow individuals belonging to different geographical areas to maintain cross-border relationships (Leurs & Smets, 2018) (Arafat, 2022) that ultimately lead towards establishing "diasporic public spheres" or imagined alternate homelands away from one's place(s) of origin as mentioned earlier.

1.2.1. Social Media as a Driver of Political Ideologies

These diasporic communities often navigate the challenges of maintaining their cultural heritage while assimilating into their new host societies. Furthermore, diasporas have increasingly utilized social media platforms as a means of forming digital communities and engaging in larger social causes, particularly those of a political nature. The advent of social media has provided diasporas with new opportunities to connect and interact with fellow community members, regardless of geographical boundaries. This has allowed diasporic communities to strengthen their sense of belonging and solidarity, despite being physically dispersed. Moreover, social media platforms have provided diasporic communities with a powerful tool for political activism and mobilization. By using social media, diasporas can amplify their voices, raise awareness about issues affecting their homeland and country of residence, and engage in political discourse and advocacy.

Beyond fulfilling the relational and entertainment usage of social media and instant messaging- relational needs being keeping in touch with family and friends, and entertainment being sharing of online content- these platforms now also have an added *informational* element (Zuniga et al, 2021). Pre social media, people received news, particularly political news, from a secondary source such as broadcast media, newspapers etc. making the audience a 'third actor' (Iannelli & Giglietto, 2015) of mediated public spaces. Due to this relational dynamic between news bringer and the news receiver, the power relationship between these actors places the viewers, also voting citizens, on a very low playing field establishing a one-way information flow with no room for input from the viewers. This is significantly different to the information flow post social media where more than a 'flow' it is an 'exchange' of information. Audience opinion weighs into the discourse toppling the previously existing power relationship. The two-way exchange of dialogue makes social media a vital part of political debates and discussions today. Spaces such as Facebook and Twitter have made audiences more 'performative' and 'participatory' in nature- the 'networked publics' (Iannelli & Giglietto, 2015) whose voices count in deciding the political future of a nation, all while having a role of an everyday debater behind the screen, where facts are muddled, and fact checking is often lacking. Moreover, social media allows for a 'networked media logic' where information is received by the primary audience who are in turn capable of dispersing the information to a secondary audience (Vaccari & Valeriani, 2015)- hence the spread of a message have a wider reach as well as larger engagement.

Several studies have been conducted on individual political tendencies such as a study that found people can align their views to a certain kind of news if they are exposed to it frequently (Prior, 2002). This selective exposure can then lead to people picking more of the

same thing, both online and offline in terms of the kind of people they associate with to have political conversations with, which in turn leads to an echo chamber of opinion (McPherson et al., 2001) wherein similar perspectives bounce off each other, amplifying the user's belief on a very specific ideology or principle. This has been noticed more so with news and news like forums that are now heavily present on social networking sites.

Echo chambers can also lead to polarising political opinions and groups with no middle ground. A comparative study done on data collected from followers of several political parties' Twitter account in 16 democratic countries, Urman's (2020), paper, a recent research on social media political polarisation, showed polarisation was most prevalent in countries with two-party systems with plurality electoral rules and were also found to be lowest in multi-party systems that practised proportional voting. In contrast, there are also researchers like Nelson & Webster, (2017) more recently looking at the perceived effects of social media on political polarisation where they studied Facebook users who are active on well-known media outlet Facebook pages and observed an ideologically diverse audience sharing their differing viewpoints. Barbera (2014) also published papers showing social media users are, in fact, exposed to a more diverse political crowd than previously postulated.

However, there are more studies on proving the existence of political echo chambers, such as Hong & Kim's (2016) paper which also addresses the 'echo chamber' effect of social media, where political polarity is widespread, but also structured in pockets of similar perspectives and ideologies- hence the formation of 'echo chambers'. Although the argument has been made that the internet allows for accessibility to various viewpoints, it is a fact that echo chambers exist within interactive online forums such as social media platforms. In their study, Hong & Kim (2016) examine social media's "potential role in

contributing to partisan polarisation", by looking at the twitter activities of members of the U.S House of Representatives. The variables observed were the rate of posts uploaded by politicians and the readership they received to the said posts. The study aimed to show the irreversible nature of online political polarisation, the effects of which influence "the process and integrity of government decision-making in several ways." Barbera et al (2015) also hypothesise that echo chambers are heavily prevalent in social media with individuals prone to interacting with others who reflect similar views as themselves.

Campaigns benefit the most from increased access to political participation through social media, and their respective mobile apps, as many formal political participations includes donating money to a campaign, contacting politicians directly (Zuniga et al, 2021), and organising movements quickly, efficiently and with low effort. An integral part of building social capital (Valenzuela et al, 2012) for mobilising citizens for a common ideology is addressing a sense of group identity (Zuniga et al, 2021), and social media plays a major role in the construction of group identity through targeted message tailored to influence a certain demographic and facilitating the development of shared experiences and views.

With the fastest Facebook follower growth in India recorded in 2014, social media and traditional print media had a massive impact on the 2014 general election. In line with this trend, studies have also been conducted to understand whether the number of 'likes' acquired by a party or party leader on Facebook has a correlation to the popular vote share. For the 2014 Lok Sabha (Lower House of Commons) elections in India this trend was put to study by Barclay et al (2015), and a strong positive correlation was found. Inspired by Barclay et al's (2014) study on effects of Facebook on US elections, several academics, scholars, and researchers produced work based on their respective national politics. One such study is

Gondal et al's (2019) paper on Pakistani youth's exposure to political content on Facebook. These contents included speeches, information about political gatherings, and photos of political activities posted by either politicians or political agents (Gondal et al, 2019). The study used Facebook as a tool for political propaganda was qualitatively researched and contextualised within Pakistani politics. Results reflected their hypothesis that the youth, a demographic more prevalent on social networking platforms, were exposed to political content on Facebook which in turn affected their political behaviours. Since this proposed thesis considers two separate social media platforms to study online behaviour of the Indian diaspora in the UK, digital ethnography has been proposed as the ideal methodology for data collection.

1.2.2. Diasporas in Digital Spaces

Ponzanesi's (2020) revisitation of the phenomenon of diaspora and nationalism in the wake of increasing advancement in communication technologies, highlights a new era of diasporic connectedness. This digital spin to diasporic literature adds to understanding values, motivations, and behaviours of this community. Rather than look at diaspora from an ethnic and nationalistic lens, Ponzanesi instead focuses "on how new digital technologies enable hybridity, diaspora, and cosmopolitan affiliations". Unlike previous modes of information and communication technology such as telephone, television and even radio, the internet brings a unique element to the discussion- that of a flow of data passed back and forth rather than just a one-way news flow. Within the context of diasporas and global networks, the internet facilitates and reinforces the sense of national and local identity while augmenting and giving a platform to global interactions.

Digital media both shrinks the physical proximity between people and ensures that the 'virtual' aspect of it does not disconnect the people from ground reality. Online and offline worlds co-exist in diasporic spheres, thus reinterpreting migration as "being part of imaginaries on the move" rather than "mere territorial dislocations" (Appadurai, 2008). Conversi (2012) terms these communities that discuss ethno-political agendas over social networks as virtual ethnic communities. Social media is an excellent gatekeeper in influencing a diaspora's nationalistic sentiments. Especially when a nationalistic diaspora is *state-linked.* Sheffer (2003) analyses two types of nationalist diasporas: 'stateless' and 'state-linked' diasporas. Stateless diasporas can be described as those which aspire to be recognised on an international level either in the form of political autonomy or reunification with an existing state. On the other hand, state-linked nationalist diasporas are those radicals who although are internationally recognised, still aim to expand their political hold and clamp down on minorities. Where mass media such as TV and radio were considered boundless in terms of literary dispersion and were kept in check through a combination of language and power in the form of state regulation and control of media- now social media and online platforms are similarly under surveillance and regulated by populist governments in order to disperse their nationalistic ideologies to large masses. Politics showcased by these diasporas have a reputation of embodying more radical elements irrespective of them manifesting in digital spaces or outside of it. This is in part due to the most elite, literate, and successful migrants participating in politics from safe virtual spaces based in a country far detached from their homeland (Conversi, 2012).

The political habits of various ethnic diasporas have been an extensive topic of research, like Donya Alinejad's (2017) investigation of the web media practices demonstrated by

Iranian- Americans in Los Angeles. Internet was seen to play an integral role in identity formation for the second-generation Iranian- Americans. Other studies have also been conducted on the Palestinian diaspora where Hanafi (2003) noticed digital media rather than increasing diasporic connectedness instead led to deterritorialization of their homeland. In contrast Aouragh's (2012) research found the internet being used for a more positive purpose where participants reconstructed a virtual 'Palestinian homeland' using internet platforms to promote activism and social change. In this way, the internet is used as a political tool beyond the spatial reach of the nation in question. Diasporic members are therefore capable of engaging in political activities back home and participate in their politics remotely. In more recent days, the Palestinian diaspora have utilised the dispersing power of social media to bring to light the brutal atrocities taking place in the Gaza Strip, as well as the continued occupation in the West Bank at the hands of the Israeli government. This act not only ensured a unification amongst the Palestinian diaspora around the world but opened up a digital space for people from different countries and nationalities to participate in acts of offline mobilisation, dispersion of valuable information, and calls for solidarity. However, on the other hand, the platform has also lent itself as a haven for misinformation from the opposing actors and leads to amplification of propaganda.

In line with that, Zavos (2015) writes about the internet phenomenon that created 'networked societies' with 'networked individuals' who are then brought together as a collective whole through notions of shared community identities, and 'networked self-interest'. He quotes Cardoso and Jacobetty's argument that we still-

> *"…live in a network society under network individualism, but the underlying culture that frames our actions is moving toward the adoption of a paradigm centred less on*

self-interest and more on the ability to adopt common interests and belong to a group that shares objectives within a given network".

This shift is noticed in the prominence of social activists, resistance politics and alternative community movements that are formed in the digital space and then made more tangible in localised social contexts. For example, Eriksen (2007) mentions one of the largest ethnic groups in the world the Kurds, who have a distinct cultural identity and form a collective self-identity. But they have also never been in control of any form of state power. The Kurdish diaspora as a result of their history is in large numbers in Germany, the USA, the UK, Sweden and Australia. They filled the void of Kurdish-language communication infrastructure by developing a variety of their own media, ranging from magazines, satellite TV channels, and internet resources. Through these virtual spaces a shared identity is built amongst the Kurdish community. Some of these online resources and websites are even run by journalists to distribute news in their language, making the internet a perfect medium for the consolidation of identity and dissemination of news for the Kurds around the world.

Similarly, Sri Lankan Tamils also utilise the internet to form online resources in order to stay connected with their diaspora around the world as well as to disperse news from their home country. These websites which act as newspapers and TV Channels play a role in both identity formation among Tamils overseas as well as shaping international opinion (Eriksen, 2007). This also aids Sri Lankan Tamils to participate in long-distance nationalism (Anderson, 1992) and supporting political activity in Sri Lanka.

Castells (1997) makes a case for social media activism as a digital space for the network society to reconfigure global power since power-

"…is no longer concentrated in institutions (the state), organisations (capitalist firms), or symbolic controllers (corporate media, churches). It is diffused in global networks of wealth, power, information, and images, which circulate and transmute in a system of variable geometry and dematerialised geography."

Although different diasporas and their internet wings exist to form a sense of community and belonging in a new country, the root motivation behind the need for mobilisation varies between every diaspora. While some are driven by political causes such as the white Afrikaans speaking South Africans in South Africa who champion developing a 'white homeland', some others exist solely for connections and forming of a new national identity. During the course of this research, it will be pertinent to record the motivation behind the diaspora's usage of the internet for political causes, during the interview stage of data collection. Although open ended questions may be inadequate to fully understand the motivations and sentiments behind this, over the course of observing the chosen participants and interacting with them the incentives for digital political engagement should become evident. This should be specific to their utilisation of online platforms to engage with information, as well as take part in the creation of and spread of these messages.

CHAPTER 2: THE INDIAN DIASPORA

2.2 Historical Context for Indian Diaspora

As a country, the UK has attracted migrants from across the world, the motivation behind the global movement has been varied from World Wars to simply seeking better jobs and lives for their families. This was mostly observed during the British colonial era when migrants settled in the UK for better job prospects and living conditions. These migrants included those from the British colonised Caribbean, African and India (Sharma, 2012). In 1960 Britain saw an influx of migrants from India and Pakistan with the majority of them from Punjab and Gujarat.

Ghosh (1989) highlights that India has always been shaped not just by its centre, but also by its periphery, and the diaspora is an extension of this concept (Deivasigamani & Sharmila, 2019). Indian migration patterns have been shaped by various factors, including historical events, economic opportunities, and political circumstances. The historical context of the Indian diaspora can be traced back to several key periods in history. These include the indentured labour migration during the colonial era, the post-independence migration of professionals and skilled workers, and more recent trends of international student migration and high-skilled employment opportunities, making this diaspora as one of the largest and most modern diasporas in the world. The geographical diversity of the Indian diaspora has been shaped by historical forces such as colonialism, nationalism, and neo-liberal globalization. These forces have influenced migration patterns and the formation of diaspora communities in different regions of the world. For example, the transatlantic slave trade led to the dispersion of Indian labourers and their descendants in various parts of the globe,

creating a unique "double diaspora" community that has a complex relationship with both their Indian roots and their new home (Chetty, 2017). Additionally, the Indian Ocean diaspora, influenced by colonialism and trade networks, has also contributed to the dispersion of Indian communities across East Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean islands. Due to the extremely diverse and widespread nature of this community, the concept of identity and belonging is crucial to understanding the Indian diaspora (Ashutosh, 2015).

Indian diaspora is observed to have similar consequences wherein there exists numerous off-shoots of the diaspora on the basis of reasons for migration, placement in historical timeline, and demographic. Hence, they have a different relationship with the post-colonial nationalism of South Asia. After the abolition of slavery, the British colonial emprie required cheap labour and led the immigration of large groups of Indian men and women to various parts of the globe such as South Africa, Mauritius, Suriname, the Caribbean, Fiji, and East Africa (Gopal & Marimuthu, 2017). The formation of the Indian diaspora is influenced by diverse conditions and reasons for migration, resulting in the categorization of old and new diasporas (Uppal, 2011). The old diaspora refers to the movement of Indian laborers under the indenture system in the mid-nineteenth century to British colonies, such as plantation and railway workers. The experiences of the old diaspora, which includes third to fifth-generation emigrants from India, are shaped by their history of labour and imperialism. The new diaspora, on the other hand, represents more recent waves of migration and settlement, often resulting from economic opportunities and globalization. This new diaspora includes a wide range of individuals, from skilled professionals to students pursuing education abroad. Although the South African Indian diaspora can be categorised into the old and new diaspora, Raman (2004), argues that several indentured workers were able to move up into merchant

positions once their contract ended, some even becoming white-collar workers and small-scale traders. It is this group of people who then later migrated to the UK and formed a major part of UK's current Indian diaspora. A strong political and social identity grew within the Indian diaspora in South Africa, which was invoked by the notion of the "'Motherland' which became a potent symbol of 'Indianness'" (Gopal & Marimuthu, 2017).

Two notable case studies of the political participation of the Indian diaspora are the United States and the United Kingdom. The Indian diaspora in the United States has played a significant role in shaping political outcomes (Kumar, 2016). Indian Americans have been appointed to important federal posts, indicating recognition of their influence and expertise. In the United Kingdom, members of the Indian diaspora have also made their mark in politics. Indian diaspora in the UK have been elected to various political positions, including Members of Parliament and members of local councils. Their political affiliations have also evolved, with a shift towards supporting the Conservative Party in recent years. A comparative analysis of the political beliefs within the Indian diaspora reveals a diverse range of affiliations and while it is difficult to generalize, some broad patterns can be observed. From the available literature, it can be inferred that a significant portion of the Indian diaspora tends to lean towards conservative ideologies. This is evident in their support for right-wing political parties and leaders, both in their host countries and in India (Bhatt & Mukta, 2000). There is evidence to suggest that the Indian diaspora's political affiliations are influenced by a variety of factors, including their socio-economic background, cultural values, and experiences in both the host and home countries (Ghosh, 1989).

2.1.1. Identity Formation within the Diaspora

These different types of diasporas highlight the diversity within the Indian diaspora and the varied experiences and identities of its members. It is not a monolithic entity but rather comprises various sub-diasporas that are distinguished along religious, regional, linguistic, and cultural lines and these sub-diasporas reflect the diverse historical, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of the larger Indian diaspora. Identity here refers to the sense of self and belonging that individuals develop based on their cultural, social, and historical contexts (al-Shar & al-Tarawneh, 2019). While exploring the concept of Indian diaspora and its identity, academic literature offers several case studies to deepen our understanding. For example, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2007) highlight the voluntary and forcible movement of people from their homeland into new regions as a defining characteristic of diaspora (Kadam, 2022). Similarly, Chakrabarty's (1998) work emphasizes the benefits of combining area studies and South Asian diaspora studies in understanding identity within the Indian diaspora (Ameeriar, 2017). Furthermore, Dickinson and Bailey (2007) argue that the Indian state strategically constructs the idea of a global Indian diaspora to further its globalizing agenda, utilizing notions of emotional belonging and blood ties to maintain a connection with the homeland (Ho, 2008).

The concept of the Indian diaspora presents a paradox in terms of homogeneity and heterogeneity within its communities (Gopal, 2017). On one hand, scholars like Radhakrishnan (1996) note that the Indian diaspora exhibits a sense of homogeneity, with communities networked around the world sharing common cultural practices and identities. On the other hand, scholars like Anderson (1991) and Werbner (2004) highlight the heterogeneity within the Indian diaspora, referring to it as an "imagined diaspora" (Gopal,

2017). This concept acknowledges that while there is a shared identity and connection to the homeland, there are also diverse experiences and identities within the diaspora community. For instance, the Indian diaspora is not devoid of tensions and conflicts, despite increased connectivity between the diaspora and sending societies. This can be seen in the case of Toronto, where the promotion of a global Indian identity by the Indian state clashes with how it is lived and experienced in the specific locale (Ashutosh, 2015). This tension between the institutionalized notions of Indian diaspora identity and the lived experiences of individuals in specific locations reflects what Tim Cresswell describes as the "frictions of mobility (Ashutosh, 2018). These frictions arise from the intersection of global and local forces, shaping the everyday lives of the Indian diaspora transnationally. Furthermore, the transnational activities of the South Asian diaspora also have an impact on the societies of origin (Ashutosh, 2015).

Apart from a nostalgic pull toward their homeland, the motivation to be active political members is because of the influence and marketing of Hindutva ideology. It had been becoming part of the diaspora sentiments since the early days as a result of the 70's political struggle (Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi) that connected the overseas Indian community against a common cause. Anderson (2024) invokes the turning point event which was the Emergency imposed by then PM Indira Gandhi in June 1975. This period saw rampant censorship, thousands of protestors were imprisoned, and elections were postponed. The injustice that was felt by people then is still reminisced by the BJP government and used a trigger point to garner support for their party. This was a major event that forged relationships between diaspora across mainly US and the UK. The overseas network was strengthened as a result, as they helped in the spread of awareness and information, provided a platform to amplify the Emergency on an international scale, and also transfer funds.

2.1.2. Indian Diaspora in the UK

When far from home, diaspora communities recreate, restructure, and redefine their socio-cultural identities in order to assimilate and feel a sense of belonging. Attempts at assimilating with the local community can be complex and not rewarding. In many cases Indian diaspora may assimilate economically, but struggle to culturally assimilate (Anderson, 2024). The "hyphenated identity" (Erikson, 2007) concept is also a possible outcome of assimilation which may be more prevalent in the younger second-generation diaspora as they attempt to walk the line between forming their own cultural identity rooted in their families identities and trying to 'fit in' with their peers belonging to their country of residence. In this case they fall into a middle ground without fully integrating with either identities hence the "hyphenated identity".

Post 1970's, areas like London and the Midlands saw a significant rise of the Indian population. This was in part a direct result of post-World War II migration. Especially with the introduction of the British Nationality Act allowing Commonwealth citizens to settle in the UK to balance labour shortage at the time, as well as a large wave of migration from East African Asians of Indian descent (Anderson, 2024). Expelled from countries like Uganda and other newly independent African states, these 'twice-migrants' arrives with social and economic capital. It was also this group who played a crucial role in developing Hindu organisations in the UK- marking a significant moment in history of Hinduism and Hindu nationalism in the West.

Comprising mostly of skilled and semi-skilled workers these migrants sought jobs as electricians, plumbers, mechanics, construction workers, carpenters, masons, and technicians

in the ship-building industry (Sharma, 2012). As the largest immigrant ethnic group in the UK, in 2011 it was recorded that the Indian diaspora constitutes 2.5% of the total British population (UK Gov, 2019). Due to the size of the Indian diaspora Hinduism comes in as the third most popular religion in the country. In a 2020 report by the UN called in the International Migration 2020 report, India topped the list with the largest diaspora in the world (UN, 2020).

Drawing parallels between the fact that the US Indian diaspora has a significant Gujarati population- the state from which PM Narendra Modi hails, UK also holds a large number of Gujarati diaspora. This could also explain some of the lack of awareness of true political situation in their homeland as they support the leader from their state (Nussbaum, 2009). It becomes important to consider the influence this Gujarati diaspora during data collection and in subsequent data analysis for this research.

The Indian diaspora is often perceived as 'the model minority'- the ones who achieved the ultimate immigrant dream. They usually hold well paid jobs, are highly educated, are business owners, and many positions of power around the world are helmed by an Indian origin. Despite these economic success' of a large percentage of the Indian diaspora today, the community still fails to culturally integrate and assimilate into the host country (Nussbaum, 2009). The negative stereotypes still persists and the lack of representation in media, professional industries, and politics often forces the diaspora to hold on to another thread of their identity- religion. "Thus the diasporic community occupies an insecure position- praised for financial contribution to the American success. But not honoured by its highest rewards that America gives its own" (Nussbaum, 2009).

Participation in politics by citizens is an important aspect of community building and helps bridge the gap between and establish connections between people and political institutions as well as the system as a whole. In order to develop a sense of belonging and be properly integrated into a country it is important to showcase some form of political participation. Political participation forms the foundation of any political system and enhances the notion of citizenship while also boosting the trust and confidence in the system (Sharma, 2017). The Indian community in the UK have been active and yet noticeably absent participants in UK politics. Despite this, few prominent Indian figures who were involved in certain positions of power in the government like Dadabhai Naoroji during the freedom struggle days, who was elected to the British House of Commons as a Liberal MP in 1892 (Sharma, 2017). Bhikaiji Cama a journalist and campaigner for Indian freedom was also part of the International Socialist Congress at Stuttgart in 1907, where she demanded the complete withdrawal of British rule from India. Even after India gained independence in 1947, the diaspora community continued to be proactive in political activities in the UK. There was an impressive turnout of South Asian voters during every election, resulting in the Indian diaspora having a large influence in local politics within the UK. Sharma (2017) observes that the political leaning of the Indian diaspora over the years have shifted from supporting the Labour Party to the Conservatives, a move from liberalism to conservativism. Although Sharma (2017) attributes this shift to "change in demographic profile of the Indian diaspora, rise in the level of educational achievements and employment levels, increasing income and a greater self-assertion among diaspora communities", it is pertinent to question whether this shift still persists, and whether there is an influence of the political influences from their homeland on this continued shift or lack thereof.

The mode of adaptation to their host countries and societies is marked by a clear preference for economic integration rather than cultural integration. This preference for economic integration may influence the political affiliations of the Indian diaspora, as their focus could be on policies that promote business and economic opportunities rather than cultural preservation or promotion (Sharma, 2014). Furthermore, studies have highlighted how the Indian diaspora is sometimes considered inferior for practising and maintaining socio-cultural attributes that are deemed inferior to norms and expectations in the host countries (Kiamba, 2014). This perception of inferiority may lead the Indian diaspora to align themselves with political ideologies and parties that prioritize economic growth and prosperity. Moreover, the political affiliations of the Indian diaspora also intersect with issues of nationalism and homeland investment. The unequal power dynamics of globalization plays a role in their engagement and the ways in which they reflect the Hindutva ideology. Bhatt & Mukta (2000) argue that the diasporas often grapple with the complexities of living in a foreign country as they may face marginalization, discrimination, and a sense of cultural dislocation. In these circumstances, embracing conservative ideologies, such as in this case Hindutva, can provide solace, identity affirmation, and communal unity within the migrated community (Bhatt & Mukta, 2000).

Many Indian diaspora individuals have become active participants in the political and economic landscape of their host countries by engaging in activities such as joining religious organizations, participating in social movements for increased services, and making strategic political moves. There has been a steady rise in UK's Indian diaspora supporting conservative politics in the UK, this can be attributed as a direct result of a rise in BJP supporters among the diasporas (Anderson, 2024). This phenomenon is part of a broader trend of political

realignment among immigrant communities where they seek to align with the party that best represents their interests. Moreover, Hindutva ideology tends to be exclusionary in nature which is in stark contrast to the multicultural framework of the British society. This could create friction with other communities particularly the Muslim community as tensions rise in India, it could reflect in the UK as well. This tension manifested on 17 September 2022 in Leicester in a predominantly Muslim neighbourhood, when a “safety march” was organised by a Hindu committee over WhatsApp in the pretext of “important for every Hindu to attain this meeting, otherwise in future, we will have to live in fear” (Koshy, 2024). A counter protest mainly formed by Muslim men was formed and fights broke out. Communal tensions in India are beginning to reflect in the UK- through further data collection a more concrete understanding can be formulated regarding the depth of influence of the diaspora on local politics.

The diaspora has also played a crucial role in shaping political outcomes through their financial contributions and other forms of political support (Bentz & Guyot, 2021) (Mohammad-Arif & Moliner, 2007). They can donate significant amounts of money to political parties and candidates of their choice, which can greatly impact electoral campaigns and political outcomes. Financial support aside, diasporas have the capacity to influence policy making in their home nation on matters that are of strong economic interest to them (Kapur, 2010). The network they build can facilitate trade, investments, and in large part flow of information which can shape the economic and political landscape of their homeland. Kapur (2010) highlights the Indian diaspora’s influence on Indian economy by being a large source of remittances. For instance, Indian migrants to the Gulf countries have sent substantial remittances back home, which have contributed to economic stability and growth in regions

of high emigration. Whether it be the diaspora in the Silicon Valley bolstering India's reputation in the IT sector, or their lobbying efforts in the US to impact US foreign policy in favour of India/Indians, or their practices of transmitting ideas and information within their network, the diaspora plays a significant role in impacting the economic, cultural, and political dynamics in India. As a result, they influence Indian politics through their active participation in political campaigns and movements by engaging in activities such as organizing rallies, participating in grassroots campaigns, and mobilizing support for specific political parties or candidates (Rafique, 2021). These multifaceted ways of influence demonstrate the potential power of the diaspora in shaping their country of origin.

For example, the Indian American diaspora in the United States has founded and established various organizations that focus on philanthropic projects in India, as well as advocacy groups that aim to influence policies and legislation related to India. These diaspora organizations have been instrumental in promoting Indian culture, language, and religion in their host countries, while also lobbying for political influence on behalf of the Indian diaspora both in the host countries and in India (Singh & Koiri, 2018). The UK diaspora has also been active political members in being a voice for BJP. This was evident when UK diaspora assembled en masse in support of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement during the Ayodhya Babri Masjod demolition in the 1980's. They were financially contributing to the cause which further indicated a strong financial backing from within the diaspora (Anderson, 2024). Another important way in which the Indian diaspora influences Indian politics is through their transnational networks and connections. These networks allow for the circulation of ideas, resources, and information between the Indian diaspora and their home country. This enables

the diaspora to stay informed about political developments in India and actively engage in political discussions and debates.

The Indian diaspora in the UK, like many other diasporic communities, has relied on social media as a means of forming digital communities and engaging in political causes. There has been a significant association with the Hindutva ideology amongst the Indian diaspora both in the UK and across the globe. This association stems from a combination of factors, including religious affiliation, cultural preservation, and political engagement. These online communities allow diasporic individuals to connect with others who share their cultural background and ideological beliefs, creating a virtual space where they can express their support for the Hindutva ideology and participate in discussions surrounding political issues relevant to their homeland and country of residence. Additionally, the construction of diasporic identity among the Indian diaspora in the UK is influenced by social remembrance and commemoration (Rothenberger et al., 2019) (Brinkerhoff, 2010) (Nogueira & None, 2020). This includes the preservation of cultural practices, historical events, and collective memories through social media platforms.

2.2 Rise of BJP: Hindutva Ideology in the Making

Steeped in multiple corruption scandals, Mahatma Gandhi's Congress Party began to lose its credibility in India after 54 years of being in power. In this broken political environment emerged a promising opposition in the form of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Leading up to the 2014 general elections, BJP's Narendra Modi, now prime minister of India offered a counter discourse to the nationalism mediated by early Congress leaders such as Gandhi and

Jawaharlal Nehru. The success of Modi's 2014 general election win has been extensively studied starting from his years as the chief minister of Gujarat, especially what came to be known as the 'Gujarat model' of leadership (Jaffrelot, 2015).

Bhatt & Mukta's (2000) explanatory essay details an overview of the origins, ideologies, and reach of the Hindu nationalism in India, but mostly within the South Asian diaspora. They focus on the impact of the South Asian diaspora on the ideological and political shaping of Hindu nationalism in India. In their paper, they recognise Hindu nationalism or Hindutva as a political ideology that seeks to reorganise and reform the social and civil formation of the Indian state into a holistic and organic system that exclusively follows the 'Hindu' precepts. Under this imagined society Muslims and Christian minorities in India would be compelled to live in India under the prescription that India is primarily a strong 'Hindu nation'.

This idea of a Hindu nation came into prominence in the mid to late nineteenth century during the British colonial period. The idea took many meanings and practices throughout the year in order to get to the highly politicised and polarised ideology it is now. *Hindutva- or who is a Hindu?* - a book written by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (Bhatt & Mukta, 2000), is considered the founding text of the Hindu nationalist movement. Hindutva in the book is conceptualised as the 'the essence of being Hindu'- 'Hinduness'. The two criterions for enabling the essence of Hindu according to Savarkar are sharing a common civilization and a common 'race' (the decedents of Aryan blood). This racial and spatial element of Hindutva ideology still remains in today's conceptualisation of Hindu nationalism. An aversion to other religions as well as the lower castes within Hinduism in India.

Soon after in the 1920's the male Hindu nationalist organisation was formed in India under the influence of Keshav Baliram Hedgewar. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is

a large organisation that strongly holds the ideologies of the Hindu nationalism movement. The current Indian ruling government, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) were formed as a political offshoot of the RSS in 1980. A militant semi-paramilitary organisation, the RSS is highly centralised and authoritative group, that has formed its grassroots outside of India, such as in the US, the UK and Canada (Zavos, 2010). For the RSS the Indian identity is the same as the Hindu identity (Therwath, 2012).

The family of organisation created by the RSS both within India and outside of it are collectively referred to as the *Sangh Parivar* (*Sangh* meaning organisation and *Parivar* meaning family). Branches formed within this during the post-war migration, such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP, the World Hindu Council) in 1964, and Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS, Association of Hindu volunteers) (Therwath, 2012). These groups routinely organised meetings called *shakhas* which served as spaces for ideological indoctrination, party activities, and community engagement by focusing on targeted messaging and outreach to specific demographic groups. They have tailored their campaigns and policies to cater to the interests and aspirations of various sections of society, including farmers, youth, women, and marginalized communities. In order to expand their outreach efforts, BJP also formed alliances with regional parties and social groups to expand its support base, a strategy that allowed them to tap into the existing networks and resources of these parties and groups, thereby strengthening their grassroots support (Jha, 2021).

The first *shakha* outside of India was established in Kenya and subsequently through pre-existing contacts, more branches were opened across several countries in East Africa. Due to the nature of its inception, to study Hindutva it becomes important to acknowledge these East African influences. When living conditions worsened due to post-colonial policies in

Africa, Indians re-migrated to the United Kingdom (Therwath, 2012). Here the RSS set up their UK wing HSS. When RSS was banned in India twice, the branches abroad helped keep the movement running, by spreading their ideology and also by collecting funds to be sent back to India. The VHP and BJP used this growing international network to mobilise and disperse their ideology as well as political messages.

There was also a considerable lack of institutional structures outside of religious places for the diaspora to form a community, which can limit their understanding the true political scene in India outside of upholding and safeguarding an alleged dilution of Hindu values (Nussbaum, 2009). Organisation such as the HSS and RHS provided better spaces for organisation and community building than events promoted by the Indian government.

VHP's had the strategy to establish their presence- one to counter the growing influence of Christian missionary organisations in the North-East and two to expand their strong hold outside of India. The latter was very successful with around 80 countries around the world having VHP influenced organisations and groups (Zavos, 2010). Peter van der Veer as quoted by Zavos (2010), identifies a 'cosmopolitan Hinduism', one where the Hindus in the diaspora demonstrate 'a capacity to live in multiplex environments and an ability to accommodate 'co-existing multiple identities.' With only seven members, the UK VHP started in 1969, officially becoming a charity in 1972. Now the organisation has around 12 branches across the UK including three which have their own buildings in Ilford, Croydon, and Bolton (Zavos, 2010). Along with their initial goal, which was to defend, protect & preserve their Hindu cultural against what they deemed as 'alien ideology' such as Islam, Christianity, and communism (Katju, 2003), the organisation also began as a purely religious one detached from politics. It

aimed to combine both traditional religious dynamics as well as modern technology to 'revitalise Hinduism' and 'free Hindu society" residing both in India and abroad.

Although the VHP lacks the central role of representing British Hindus, they have been involved in few national level events in the UK. During the 2001 Gujarat earthquake the VHP with other Sangh organisations raised funds which were then channelled through other international Sangh NGOs, and subsequently the year after that during the violent pogrom in Gujarat, the VHP made their presence known. When Hindu extremists murdered thousands of Muslims in Gujarat, this negative publicity led to several 'Hindu community leaders' meeting the Home-Office minister to "complain about Muslim anti-social behaviour" (Zavos, 2010).

Sharma (2012) notes that the first generation of the Indian diaspora are still keen on maintaining connections to their homeland in various cultural and spiritual forms. However, the second and third generation of the diaspora are slightly detached from these attempts owing to better integration into the UK society, where they identify more with mainstream culture and show marginal and occasional interest in the Indian culture. In the same vein their involvement in politics both in the UK and back home in India is interesting to note. Historically, famous political figures such as Dadabhai Naoroji and Gopal Krishna Gokhale ensured Indian participation in the British political process from the early stages of India's freedom struggle against British colonial rule. Participation in politics by citizens is an important aspect of community building and helps bridge the gap between and establish connections between people and political institutions as well as the system as a whole. In order to develop a sense of belonging and be properly integrated into a country it is important to showcase some form of political participation. Political participation forms the foundation

of any political system and enhances the notion of citizenship while also boosting the trust and confidence in the system (Sharma, 2017).

Additionally, religion also plays a significant role in aiding the diaspora to cope with life in a new country such as UK in the case of the Indian diaspora. It is associated with providing a sense of group identity and feeling of belonging (Sharma, 2012) while acting as a cohesive force and assisting in the process of adaptation. Religious places of worship provide centres for maintaining traditions and act as a medium through which cultural identities are reinforced among the diasporas.

It was in the late 1980s that the BJP began to gain prominence and push its Hindutva ideology. It envisions India as a Hindu nation and seeks to promote Hindu values and principles in all aspects of life, including education, development, the environment, and industry (Malji, 2021). This ideology played a pivotal role in the rise of BJP, by emphasizing on the cultural and religious identity of Hindus. During the 1980s and 1990s, the BJP strategically positioned itself as an alternative to the dominant secular ideology in Indian politics (Alam et al., 2022), offering a narrative that tapped into Hindu nationalism and cultural pride. This narrative resonated with a significant portion of the Indian population, particularly among Hindus who felt that their identity and interests were being neglected in the secular political landscape.

This narrative gained traction among a substantial segment of the Indian populace, especially amongst Hindus who believed that their identity and concerns were being overlooked amidst the secular political milieu (Rafique, 2021). The rise of Hindu nationalist leaders and parties highlighted this sentiment and challenged prevailing notions of religious

neutrality in politics. These developments can be understood within the context of India's historical partition and its implications for societal divisions along religious lines. The BJP capitalized on these divisions and sought to unite Hindus under a common political platform.

Not only does Modi appease nationalistic Hindutva beliefs, but also combines it with a promise of developmental success (Kaul, 2017). This combination of promises appeals to both Indians in India, as well as Indians and India origins overseas. Historically and politically a minority race outside of India- it almost empowers the diaspora in their 'Indianess' to be portrayed as developed and successful. Previously often labelled as a third-world country, and then as a developing country (which it is seen as in global geo-politics), Modi promises a departure from the economically 'poor' trenches and gives the diaspora a sense of hope to stand at par with their mostly white dominant economically powerful host countries. Whether these developments in India are based in equity and fair representation is an investigation on its own. By giving avenue to a shared identity amongst the diaspora, the Hindutva ideology plays into identity politics. Modi's promise of a 'New India' constitutes of reshaping the economic prowess of the country and seeing India as a global superpower. Modi's success in elections can be attributed to a combination of symbolic gestures, media propaganda, and pure charisma on his part. The Babri Masjid demolition created a political momentum that favoured Hindus and created a general air of Hindu vs. the 'other'- usually Muslims (Kaul, 2017). It is important to note that this was not restricted to just religion as caste politics plays a big role in India's social, cultural and political scene. Kaul (2017), attributes Modi's hold on the Indian vote bank as well as the influential diaspora on his capabilities in 'myth-making' wherein he relies upon propaganda and spread of delusion.

Political myth is more performative which emphasises on creating a reality rather than describing it or even implementing it.

In addition to being able to call India a superpower, the Indian diaspora who are (in the current context) financially well off, hold Hinduism as the tether to their cultural identity. Hinduism is not just about the religion; it is their norther star that instils a sense of community and identity formation when away from their homeland (Lal, 1999). The diaspora often follows traditions equally if not more stringently than homeland Indians – it is not uncommon for a second generation Indian to be told to uphold traditions in order to "remember our roots".

Early 1990s saw the emergence of the Hindutva ideology within the South Asian community in countries like the UK, US, Canada, the Caribbean and eastern and southern Africa. In the UK many Hindu organisations, known as *sampradayas* and their religious leaders mobilised active support for UK and Hindutva causes especially through Gujarati vernacular press. Mukta (2010) in her work highlights the ways in which the Hindutva movement within the diaspora takes on a more anti-imperialistic element in order to form a more illiberal and exclusionary global community. In the UK, the VHP was established to 'consolidate, strengthen, and make invincible the global Hindu fraternity'. Along with the one in the UK as well as other international VHP's, they played a significant part in building a collective Hindu identity through various cross-regional, high-profile movements. One such movement was the politicisation of the Babri Masjid dispute in Ayodhya (Zavos, 2010). After the VHP campaigned for the destruction of the sixteenth-century mosque in Ayodhya in 1992, the Babri Masjid under the pretext that it was the alleged mythological birthplace of God Rama, anti-Muslim violence rose in both urban and rural India. This incident saw repercussion even

in the Indian diaspora across the world. The narrative against Muslims was driven by the RSS from its inception with RSS leaders believing the 800 yearlong Turkish-Afghan invasions in India left the Hindus tired and easily conquerable by the British. This monologic narrative of Hindu fighting against the 'other' was first introduced by Savarkar and now forms the fundamental view of contemporary Hindu nationalism (Bhatt & Mukta, 2000).

The BJP has actively reached out to the Indian diaspora, recognizing their potential as influencers and ambassadors for the Indian nation. Furthermore, the BJP has implemented various policies and initiatives aimed at engaging with the Indian diaspora, such as the Overseas Volunteer for Better India program (Paik & Kumar, 2019) which encourages overseas Indian volunteers to contribute to various developmental activities in India. The Hindu diaspora is thus an important financial stronghold for Indian Hindutva projects. While in India the discourse follows a more majoritarian element, with messages of remaining the superior power against other non-Hindu communities, within the diaspora in the West a rather minority discourse is at play. The minority discourse is concerned with the minority ethnic and religious rights in the West (Bhatt & Mukta, 2000). In order to establish this sense of collective Hindu identity and garner more support from within the diaspora, the VHP led a series of events to present the Sangh's identity and dominate the public presentation of Hinduism. In 1989 a two-day Virat Hindu Sammelan (Great Hindu Assembly) was held at Milton-Keynes, in the UK (Zavos, 2010). This event saw some 55,000 Hindus gathering which acted as evidence of the prominent forces of Hinduism that existed within the UK diaspora. However, this was a singular event of this scale.

The BJP's international outreach and engagement with the Indian diaspora have been crucial in promoting majoritarian politics in India. The party has actively sought political

support from the diaspora and has recognized its potential as a key constituency. In 1996, the BJP included non-resident Indians in their election manifesto, giving them pride of place and highlighting their importance in shaping Indian politics (Prasad, 2017). Prominent BJP leaders, including current Prime Minister Narendra Modi, have personally engaged with the Indian diaspora during their visits to countries like the United States. During these visits, they have not only raised funds from wealthy Indians but also called upon them to act as ambassadors for the Indian nation (Prasad, 2017). This engagement with the diaspora has allowed the BJP to rally political support abroad and promote their majoritarian politics in India.

2.2.1. Internet to the Rescue: Bridging the Gap Between Hindu Nationalism and Diasporas

In addition to offline mobilisation, BJP has also established a strong online presence through adept utilization of social media platforms and by harnessing the power of digital media, the political wing has been able to establish direct connections and efficiently galvanize its supporters (Ulker, 2021). Literature and print media, has been historically used to connect people from across the pond, this means of information decimation is now largely digitised. Hindu nationalist groups recognising this growing trend adopted the digital media from a very early stage in their grassroot mobilisation (Anderson, 2024) such as the use of computers and fax machines for communication and later setting up the Global Hindu Electronic Network (Anderson, 2024). The use of the digital media to gain support culminated to BJP's 2014 electoral win as it has been party attributed to their digital tactics and then subsequently the current onslaught of BJP's proficient IT cell propaganda.

They have effectively utilized online social media platforms such as Twitter (now *X*), Facebook, and WhatsApp to propagate their ideologies, connect with supporters, and spread

their message to a wider audience (Patel et al., 2020). Through these platforms, the BJP has been able to directly communicate with the public, bypassing traditional media channels and establishing a direct connection with voters as social media also allow for faster and more interactive communication. But at the same time the mainstream traditional media's alignment with the BJP's right-wing narrative normalises Hindu nationalism in the country and supports messaging distributed through social media (Chopra, 2019).

The Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom has emerged as a prominent player in the digital realm, particularly about their association with the Hindutva ideology. Scholars and researchers have examined the phenomenon of digital Hindutva (Ndi, 2017; Conversi, 2012; Zavos, 2010), which refers to the use of digital technologies and social media platforms by members of the Indian diaspora in the UK to promote and propagate Hindutva ideologies and engage in political activities. The use of digital media platforms has provided a powerful tool for the Indian diaspora in the UK to connect with their homeland and support majoritarian nationalism in India. Through digital platforms, the Indian diaspora in the UK has been able to actively participate in political discourse, mobilize support for their causes, and influence public opinion both in their host country and in India.

Digital Hindutva has received considerable attention within the Indian diaspora literature as it supports majoritarian nationalism in India. The BJP government uses Twitter as a tool to divert attention from unfavourable news against them whereas Facebook is generally used to propagate and normalise the Hindutva ideology, by promoting and disseminating information the aligns with the Hindu Right (Chopra, 2019). Chopra (2019) describes WhatsApp as a 'network of networks' – here communication is encrypted, and

politically charged information is repeatedly forwarded facilitating fast spread of misinformation - a key strategy used by the BJP to sway public opinion.

Furthermore, the rapid adoption of mobile telephones and social media platforms has enabled virtual communities to form transnational networks quickly, shaping public-sphere activity within these diasporic contexts. This process alters notions of community, citizenship, and nationhood (Ndi, 2017). Online platforms provide transnational springboards for new forms of identity politics among diasporic groups which empowers them politically through increased visibility and voice on a global scale. Additionally, digital mediums offer opportunities for mobilization and collective action at individual levels as well as ideological engagement across different diasporic agendas. However, these platforms are also inept at regulating misinformation, more so now as the company heads are billionaires who publicly support right wing populist leaders in their own country. It also serves to benefit them to offer censorship where it favours their ideologies, hence misinformation if in support of the leading government, is deregulated and in some cases encouraged (Chopra 2019). These digital strategies are not restricted to BJP, it is a tactic popular in US election campaigns as well (Bansal, 2019). In India, the Modi government under the stewardship of now Home Minister Amit Shah, have their infamous IT cell working around the clock to spread falsehoods that frequently incite communal tension leading to violence.

Hindus settled in the West, particularly North America used the world wide web as an outreach medium and pro-Hindutva activists has been recorded to be present at forums as early as 1985 to unify Hinduism, its practices, and its rituals, through online media (Helland, 2007). In the late 90's began RSS' expansion of their online presence through websites dedicated to organising events and call for attendees. The first cyber-shakha launched in 1999

and the inauguration was attended activists from around the world. The RSS formed an 'imagined community' online by quickly understanding the internet's potential and tapped into the power of the internet to bind together a "heterogeneous and geographically spread-out community" (Therwath, 2012). For the diaspora, the internet and its forums allow them to construct and reinforce their identity as part of the global Hindu community. They also engage in political commentary and critique through blogs, social media posts, and online forums (Chopra, 2019).

From the myriad of literature on Indian diasporas' role in nationalist politics in India is one such study of the American-Indian diaspora. Many American Indians are noticed to harbour a resentment for the 'Americanisation' of diasporas. This combined with the need for meaning and community (Conversi, 2012) and as a solution to their isolation, they get attracted to diaspora nationalism and turn to the internet for information on South Asian politics. Here they are presented with the Hindu right ideologies disseminated through internet forums and social network platforms. Yankee Hindutva as coined by Mathew & Prashad (2000); the US Indian diaspora have a large network of US based Hindu extremists who participate in Indian populist politics. They actively consolidate the Hindu-Americans by raising patriotic awareness about radical homeland politics. Digital platforms allow these migrants easy access to expressing their long-distance nationalism. In pro-Hindutva activisms several Hindu Americans found their Indianness- this online activity has only accelerated since the destruction of the Babri Masjid (Mathew & Prashad, 2000) when religious sentiments were triggered back in the homeland as well as in the community outside India. Islamophobia and anti-minority vitriol was strong within the diaspora, and this acted as a binding factor amongst diasporic members. The hatred harboured by the community was reflected on

online spaces where netizens were increasingly using digital media to promote hostility and aggressive patriotism.

The proponents of these online spaces also play a part in understanding the intention behind internet nationhood. It becomes important to question whether it was state-sponsored. Which state sponsored them and why? Was it a community effort from within the diaspora? If so, then what purpose does the internet serve to the community? State sponsored internet spaces that encourage the formation of a virtual nation is not uncommon. These spaces ensure the continuous loyalty and identification of citizens or ex-citizens living abroad. For example, the Chilean government has attempted to reintegrate overseas Chileans and their descendants by speaking to their sense of Chileanness rather than a call for return to their homeland. The government is hence benefitting from the investments made by overseas Chileans and their activities (Eriksen, 2007).

In case of the Indian diaspora in the UK, the efforts made to organise a Hindu community might not be directly state sponsored, however the group in charge of this has affiliations with the state institute- namely the VHP. Despite VHP's presence within the Indian UK diaspora has been widely recorded and studied even to this day, Zavos in his 2010 paper writes about their surprisingly weak internet presence. When other Hindu organisations maintained well-developed websites and kept them up-to-date, the VHP fell short on their end. Zavos states that the VHP spread in the UK was far less impressive than the power they held back home in India. A major event that would soon develop four years post Zavos' paper is a BJP leader coming into the prime ministerial role in India and utilising the power of social media and internet literacy for their political agendas. This thesis aims at contextualising and

proposing a methodology to study and observe the extent of influence applied on online spaces in order to shape a certain political ideology within the Indian diaspora in the UK.

Narendra Modi's reign into prime ministerial position marked the beginning of a new media age. His utilisation of social media began much before the election as part of his campaign. If tracked even further back, the Sangh and its several off shoots, of which BJP is part of, have tapped into the persuasive and global networking power of social media to win support amongst Indians at home as well as abroad. During his election campaign, Modi practically shunned traditional mainstream media. His team of 'diasporic Indian techies' (Ullekh, 2015), mirrored advertising strategies used in American elections to garner support and financial donations from the Indian diaspora. This was done through using social media as a political tool with Modi's team engaging with their supporters constantly over Twitter (Sardesi, 2014). The team also sent millions of emails and made several thousand calls to Indian voters and made YouTube videos in order to uplift Modi's image. The extensive use of social media and such digital means by the Modi government can be attributed to their way of governance which follows a delegative democracy system (Rao, 2018). This is noticeable in Modi's disregard for institutions such as press, courts, and legislatures.

As a proponent of digital technologies, Narendra Modi even introduced the "Digital India" programme which intended "to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy" (William et al, 2022). Hence, the grassroot requirements needed to use digital spaces to gather the Indian diaspora were built even before their election win. The neo-Hindutva dogma has surpassed being just an institutional political framework bound by the Sangh Parivar, and the RSS. It has now successfully permeated most if not all relational

spaces- “institutional, territorial, conceptual, ideological”, and now technological (Anderson & Longkumer, 2018).

Rajagopal in his research links changing communication methods and globalisation to the new phenomenon of ‘internet Hindutva’. The first ‘*cybershaka’* (internet wing) was launched by the RSS in 1999 in New Delhi (capital of India), which saw attendees from the US, the UK, and across the globe. The developed network of Hindu nationalist groups have a significant impact on this form of activism on a more localized level rather than on a national scale, such as HSS, the VHP, and the National Hindu Students Forum (Zavos, 2015). In another study by Udupa (2019), through her ethnographic fieldwork, she studied the media practices of Hindu activists during the internet age. In the study she looks at how media facilitates digitally mediated agency and maintains the momentum of Hindu nationalist ideology. Her work stands out from other research on Hindutva since they mainly focus on the ideological discourse, organisational strategies and political philosophy of the Sangh Parivar and its affiliated branches such as the Shiv Sena. The recency of the study makes it very topical as it considers the shift in political scene in India with the populist rise in the BJP government and takes into account their methods of online mobilisation.

More relevant to this thesis is, Zavos’s (2015), paper which looks at the ability of the internet and people’s interaction with an imagined political space on the internet through the lens of Hindu activism in the UK. He looked at diasporic Hindu activism from two angles, one the intervention of Hindu groups and secondly the articulation of issues that were specific to the Hindus in the British Hindu community on both a social and political level. Zavos notices two aspects of the multicultural discourse at play in the UK within Hindu activism. The first being ‘faith’ based discourses where the state capitalises on the perceived commonalities of

religion and uses this as a means to refashion multiculturalism as “community cohesion”. The second one, is where some religious identities have come to be perceived as a dangerous other.

Zavos (2015), specifically studied the Sewa Day (Sewa meaning selfless service), a movement that materialised in 2010 and proved to be very Hindu nationalist in their engagement and participation. This coming together of people is more so driven by the need for action in terms of societal change rather than previous engagements which focused on the defence and promotion of Hindu-ness within the diaspora. Despite the main form of networking for Sewa Day was observed to be through word of mouth, friends’ network, the use of social media was also prevalent, although more so as a trope of social action than as the key mobilising strategy. The Sewa Day also reflects a prominent element of digitally networked activism, that of self-generation and ‘organic’ growth leading to a more grass-root activism. Although the Sewa Day does not strongly reflect the ideologies of the Hindu nationalists of today, the presence of Sangh influence still exists. Sewa Day has been linked to another organisation Sewa International, a Hindu nationalist charitable organisation which often funds activities of the Sangh Parivar in India through charitable donations raised in the UK (Zavos, 2015).

Understanding the organisational practices that went behind the inception of Sewa Day as well as the existence of it today, makes possible to study the morphological role of social media in shaping the trajectory, perception, and impact of activist movements. Zavos (2015) makes a reference to Bennett and Segerberg’s study where they refer to ‘WUNC’. The acronym stands for *worthiness*, both of the cause and of those involved in the cause; *unity*, the collective intent of those involved; *numerical force*, the number of people involved in the

movement; and *commitment*, to participate in the movement under any conditions. WUNC represents the qualities that are apparent in activist movements. Zavos (2015) argues that movements organised over digital technologies reflect the elements of WUNC.

In her study Rao (2018) analysed around 1,230 Twitter (now X) posts from Narendra Modi's Twitter handle for four months in 2017. The growing political element to using Twitter makes Twitter a conducive digital platform to conduct such studies. It has been increasingly used as a domain to disseminate and gather political information. In her study Rao (2018) uses rhetorical discourse analysis in order to interpret "the inherent inconsistencies of concepts and categories by regrouping and understanding propositions in terms of possible repertoires both speakers and authors use in order to give meaning to the issues" (Rao, 2018).

Rao (2018) characterises Modi's 'selfie nationalism' into four parts. First, Modi's use of frequent photographs and selfies equates him to a symbol around which the BJP's political structure revolves around. Second, selfie nationalism according to Rao rejects plural narratives of nation state and is driven by economic and technological globalisation. Third, selfie nationalism is short lived in nature, where the launch of new policies has a short shelf life, existing only to have implemented and happened rather than provide tangible positive change. Social media in this instance is noticed to be used to disperse the policy with language that is conflated with patriotism and national pride. The fourth characteristic of selfie nationalism is Modi's rejection of traditional media in the sense of being an active participant in interviews and press conferences. Modi's use and encouragement to use social media was widely popular among the diasporic community and urban Indians.

But why is it necessary to understand the social media usage of large nationalist groups and their purposeful influence on the people, especially the diaspora community? In her

paper Therwath (2012) also writes about a report that exposed the funding provided by international Sangh organisations to RSS projects in India for their political benefits. This report exposed the India Development and Relief Fund (IDRF) based in the US, and two years after another human rights team exposed the Sewa for engaging in similar financial activities in the UK. These reports revealed the whole structure of foreign funding of the Sangh causing a scandal in the US, UK and India. Soon after this exposure the Sangh related websites in the USA and the UK adopted a strategy of discretion, without giving away their connection to any political association back in India. This is also due to the fact that legally political groups in India are forbidden from receiving contributions and donations from abroad. In this way it becomes clear the need for the RSS and its branches to get support and build a community outside of India since they still hold political relevance and are capable of making tangible changes in the political scene by exercising long distance nationalism. Hence, 'long distance nationalism' theorised by Benedict Anderson, is not merely a passive sentiment that expresses cultural nostalgia but is more tangible and well-co-ordinated effort by organised groups like the RSS that works towards connecting the diaspora to their homeland politics. It reflects the transnational nature of nationalism wherein the diaspora is able to assert political influence which is amplified through online spaces that further blurs the lines between what is national borders (Chopra, 2019). Further in this paper is a proposed methodology to fulfil the objectives of this study- this methodology will be based on three separate case studies mentioned below, events that transpired in India between 2019 and the present which have had a significant discourse on social media in India.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Twitter, Facebook, And WhatsApp as Spaces off Political Discourses

3.1.1. Twitter (now 'X')

Twitter began as a microblogging platform in 2006 that now allows users to share updates in the form of 'tweets' up to 280 characters long. The platform also supports the sharing of pictures and videos, where users may even 'retweet' posts by other profiles. Twitter accounts are placed under usernames which are indicated by the @ sign. "Twitter updates are seen as public conversations and are increasing not only transparency and potentially accountability but can also- when used appropriately- lead to increased inclusion of public opinion in policy formation through information aggregation processes". (Mergel, 2012).

In recent times Twitter has evolved out of 140 characters of mundane daily opinions posted at regular intervals. Now, with one tweet able to contain 280 characters, the platform has played a pivotal role in modern day politics. With academic scholars eager to conduct several data driven research on Twitter information, the studies are endless, with room for more opportunities. Research using Twitter data ranges from many things from the sciences to now politics. As a platform that holds abundant networked public discourses, dissecting citizen sentiments on a certain event or phenomenon are the most common topic of research conducted. With the reputation of being the immediate platform for politicians and political organisations to use for information dispersal, and campaigns to shape public perception, Twitter plays an important role in weaving itself within socio-political and geo-political realms.

A single tweet provides valuable information such as “distribution of sentiments and topics, personality traits or other individual characteristics, and information-sharing behaviours” (Chen et al, 2022). An example widely studied during the early days of political activities on Twitter, was the use of Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube during the 2009 Iranian election where anti-government activists organised protests by mobilising people through these digital forums (Christensen, 2011).

Twitter also utilises the ‘hash’symbol (#), a ‘hashtag’ to assign keywords to a tweet, as well as creating a link to all the tweets collated under the same hashtag. It is the fastest way to access tweets and twitter threads of similar topics on Twitter. Political campaigns and information dissemination during political events use hashtags to disperse news to a large audience around the world. Using content analysis Small (2011), studies the tweets under #cdnpoli, a political hashtag associated with the Canadian government. The study was conducted to understand the purpose for political hashtags and found “informing as the primary function of a political hashtag” (Small, 2011), and the “value of the political hashtag is derived from the real-time nature of the information shared.” It was also concluded that posting under a political hashtag was considered as a “participatory act”, that is posting a tweet with the hashtag, or even resharing information containing a political hashtag was acceptable as being politically active on an online sphere. Hence, hashtags were the easiest means to disseminate information to others, and sometimes even mobilise large groups of people to start movements and campaigns.

An ideal tool to analyse patterns and phenomenon, Twitter has many variables that can be accounted for and utilised for research such as the longevity of an account, the number of tweets and engagement by the accounts and size of readership (Hong & Kim, 2016). The

source of collected data is reflective of the quality of the said data. Twitter data differ from other more common quantitative methods such as surveys and experiments as the latter are more designed to be in the control of the researcher whereas the former seems more 'organic' (Chen et al, 2022). Although data quality is likely to be higher for more traditional methods of data collection owing to the ease of replication and proof of validation, social media data collection offers a 'newness' in analysing discourse and digital phenomenon that open a wider scope of perspectives.

Chen et al (2022) outline all the means through which twitter data can be collected for various purposes. The standard method of collecting data from Twitter is by using application programming interfaces (APIs) provided by the platform itself. Using publicly available APIs, free but restricted data can be accessed either with a *Streaming API* or a *Search API. Streaming API* returns tweets in real-time, with a *filtered stream* screening millions of new tweets live against a set of specific filters, whereas a *sample stream* returns a random selection of new tweets posted live. *Search API* on the other hand is designed to return historical twitter data as opposed to live ones, also sorted using filters and rules (Chen et al, 2022). Although third party platforms allow for a more user-friendly interface to organise search filters and download results, they are often expensive with annual subscriptions ranging between $7,000 to $50,000 (Chen et al, 2022). An inaccessible pathway for many small-scale researchers such as university scholars, Twitter's recently launched version APIs (V2) comes as a boon to many. This version makes collecting and analysing public data simpler and makes possible retrieval of full-archival data. Although APIs (V2) is programmed to be more academic research friendly, certain skills are required to use the interface, such as a basic knowledge about data science programming languages like R or Python is essential in

collecting tweets. Search queries are also built on a prerequisite understanding of Boolean operation. Coding and programming also come with the inevitable possibility of coding errors and a basic knowledge of these computer languages will aid in debugging and fixing the code. API V2 provides access to all the Twitter archives with up to downloaded capacity of 10million tweets per month. As long as the search topics remain within the research scope submitted upon initial request of archive retrieval, full-archival search is permitted. Since this research track is free of subscription costs, it requires Twitter's approval as well as proof of researcher's academic affiliations.

Full archival retrieval is necessary for the study outlined in this thesis, as information dating back to 2019 and leading up to the present is required for analysing the discourse within certain Twitter spheres that contribute to the propagation or sustenance of the Hindutva ideology in the UK. Full- archival access is also necessary as the project involves understanding networks, looking at replies, and retweets, and subsequently the result of these on a larger political scale. Since the new APIs (V2) provides access to tweets dating back to March 2006, this method of data collection should be adequate for the study.

Social media data often include scanning information posted by a digital ID (in case of Twitter, a 'twitter profile' or a 'twitter handle') or profiles owned by an individual. A researcher needs to be wary of 'bot accounts', which are computer programmes masquerading as real profiles. Since this study involves the analysis of online discourses and public opinion and its effects on offline activities, it is important to distinguish between real profiles and bots in order to collect valid data. This can be kept in check and verified through the interviews conducted where participants will be either the account holder themselves, or

group modulators in case of data collected from groups. External tools and software can also be used to detect bots.

3.1.2. WhatsApp

Marketed as a "simple, secure, and reliable" platform, WhatsApp was launched in the USA in 2009, an end-to-end encrypted digital messaging app for private communication (Williams et al, 2022). Although Facebook and Twitter have applications that can be accessed via mobile phones, the direct messaging nature of WhatsApp makes it easier to share and send messages in real time. Unlike other social media platforms WhatsApp does not require an account to be made, rather it uses mobile numbers to sign in. A Facebook-owned app that supports sharing of textual messages, images, voice notes, video, internet links and even documents, this end-to-end encrypted platform has been especially popular in recent years for its political information distribution. Forwarding messages from one user or group to another is also made easy on WhatsApp that allows for news both factually correct and incorrect to circulate globally. Traditional media has previously reported on the spread of 'fake news' on the app between its users, which then saw several democratic countries such as Brazil, India and Nigeria experience what is now coined as *WhatsApp election* "with the dissemination of rumours, conjecture, and lies allegedly undermining the democratic process itself" (Cheeseman, et al, 2020). Several research has been conducted on WhatsApp's role in politics today, and eventually its effect on political outcomes such as elections by influencing the vote bank.

As opposed to the public nature of Twitter and Facebook, WhatsApp stands apart due to its encrypted messaging system allowing for private discussion and message sharing

amongst people in groups or individual chats. Few studies even suggest some users have reported having shared political information on WhatsApp that they would otherwise have refrained from sharing on other more public platforms (Valeriani & Vaccari ,2018). Unlike Facebook and Twitter where policies may be capable of regulating the information posted on their platforms, WhatsApp has more freedom to share messages as well as forward them multiple times. This also makes WhatsApp harder to research as messages and discourses are more difficult to track, with direct access to the users involved necessary. Moreover, echo chambers are more ubiquitous on this platform due to its more private nature allowing its users to target the people they share information with. Whereas Facebook and Twitter which are public platforms offer more potential for opposing discourses and debates to fester. As with Twitter and Facebook, WhatsApp is no stranger to political 'echo chambers', which becomes especially dangerous with the ease it provides for the spread of misinformation (Cheeseman, et at, 2020).

Ethical guidelines are of utmost priority when conducting studies, especially of an immersive nature such as ethnography, especially through WhatsApp. Informed consent (Thompson et al., 2021) is of dire importance, consent from those from more vulnerable background, or even participants involved in research dealing with sensitive topics, in the case of this thesis- political identity, consent is of utmost importance. Later in this chapter the ethical consideration for social media ethnographic research, especially in the case of WhatsApp will be extensively outlined.

With data collected from three different countries, Spain, the USA and New Zealand, Zuniga et al's (2021) study investigates "the mediating role of WhatsApp political discussion in the relationship between different types of news use and various forms of political

participation". Zuniga et al's, (2021) study concluded that online political discussion eventually translated to conventional forms of participation like voting amongst certain age groups. Additionally, WhatsApp discussions were also observed to have increased both dialogue and participation in unconventional political participation like activism. Lastly, age related differences surfaced through the study wherein both conventional and activist participation were stronger amongst younger users of WhatsApp than older respondents.

Cheeseman, et al's, (2020) qualitative study looked at the role of WhatsApp on the Nigerian general elections of 2019, the impact it has on the public as well as the ways in which they interact on the app. As a competitive authoritarian state with an ethnically and religiously diverse population, the case of Nigerian election is comparable to India politics. Interviews and focus groups with party activists, social media 'influencers' and wide demographic of urban residents the study concluded that "WhatsApp is a disruptive technology that challengers existing hierarchies in ways that are simultaneously emancipatory and destructive, strengthening and undermining democratic consolidation at the same time" (Cheeseman, et al, 2020). While on one hand it increased opportunities from otherwise politically marginalised communities like the women and the youth, it also raised the risk of political instability due to the mass distribution of misinformation. Although the app was used to share information about the election candidates' policies it was also used to spread attacking messaging about the opponents which were often in the form of 'fake news' against them.

Like Cheeseman et al's, (2020) study on the impact of WhatsApp on Nigerian politics, Williams et al, (2022), conducted more recent research on the rise of WhatsApp's centrality to 'political talk' in India and therein its consequence on lived democracy. In a democracy that

is conceptualised as a distribution of power between private and public spheres, their research is based on the idea that digital technologies have transformed the connections that are formed between individuals and hence the way in which power is distributed (Papacharissi, 2010) by offering "new possibilities for civic connections and dissent". William et al's, (2022) ethnographic research focuses on the everyday role of WhatsApp as a digital private space on democracy in India, how WhatsApp groups are used by the Hindu right to form a sense of kinship by offering security and inclusion, and finally it also demonstrates how the app is used to enhance people's political ideologies to reconfigure tangible relations and relationships outside of just the digital space or political realm. WhatsApp offered a better platform for BJP to target their vote bank more than Facebook, due to its private and encrypted nature (Singh, 2019). They have famously been exposed to have organised an IT cell that created thousands of WhatsApp groups of party supporters in 2014 leading up to the now historic general election. The app was also heavily used for 2019 national elections making it "a major part of the party's arsenal" (Singh, 2019). These groups were strategically manufactured to club like-minded people into interest groups on the basis of their caste, religion, and class background, by grassroot volunteers as well as paid party workers, to send targeted messages to them. These targeted messages were often communal and separatist in nature against the minorities, specifically religious minorities in the country, sowing the seeds for heightening the nationalist belief system within people. Besides uniting people for and against a common ideology, WhatsApp groups also succeeded in building a large network of volunteers and internet party workers who felt 'privy to the meeting and private spaces of the party" (William et al, 2022).

3.2 Digital Ethnography

Today an added external element reshaping and redefining our identities is the digital media- through digital displays of expression, representations, routine undertakings and various other experiences, digital media has become an intrinsic part of our daily lives. Digital ethnography is one way of observing behaviours, cultures, and phenomena occurring on digital media. Where several studies are survey-based, interview based, or collect online data for empirical analysis, digital ethnography as a method is used to "address questions of the social on digitised spaces. In other words, digital ethnography encompasses ethnography of virtual spaces, cyberspaces, new media, and social media" (Kaur-Gill & Dutta, 2017).

Just like outside of the digital realm, social interactions and cultural behaviour exist even on the digital realm (Hine, 2005). Research that aims to form a connection between the online and offline sphere, where behaviours and phenomenon on one are reflected on the other, require a flexible and fluid (Postill & Pink, 2012) research methodology like digital ethnography. It allows the researcher to observe "from up close the interpretations, practices and everyday experiences that foster dynamic realities inside chat apps" (Barbosa & Milan, 2019). "It allows the researchers to get access to mapping and describing the online-offline interactions presented in the backstage of these chats" (Lee & Gregory, 2008). With anthropological roots, ethnography is based on the idea of interpretivism- where an ethnographer interprets "social stories" (Murthy, 2008), and people's everyday realities and lived experiences (Pink et al, 2016). As a longer, more immersive methodology consisting of participation observation of communities, and deeper face-to-face interactions with community members an ethnographer's 'data' is essentially an extensive description and

understanding of the community's lived experiences recorded as journaled field notes (Murthy 2008).

Ethnography on a digital scale entail looking at cultural realities that exist on an online sphere, where real life is reflected on a digital platform such as chatrooms, discussion groups, or more recently social media. Through engaging in texts, images and information shared on an online platform, a digital ethnographer collects, questions, and evaluates the data available to them on the internet platform of their choice. Instead of making broad generalisations, the result of an ethnographic study is a direct result of interrogation of the community's knowledge, experiences, and behaviours, with culture and identity being the central theme of the participant contributions.

Digital ethnography is also best suited for studies that require capturing how self-identity, or even group identity is formed, structured, and expressed on a digitally based platform (Kaur-Gill & Dutta, 2017). Here self-identity can be defined as the way one comes to make sense of themselves. Additionally, studies can also focus on social relations formed within these online spaces which can be either done on a micro level- networked social interactions, or a meso-level- understanding the dynamics of the communities formed online, or further on a macro-level (Kaur-Gill & Dutta, 2017)- researching the larger predictors of culture and human behaviours such as political and economic power relations. Where ethnography allows for observation of identity formation amongst a group or community (i.e. meso level), paired with semi-structured interviews, it aids the researcher in exploring more micro level elements such as meaning-making, motivations, and intention (Barbosa & Milan, 2019). In research that has a large component of identity formation, or identity crisis,

ethnographic methodology is the most appropriate means through which identity (Lindlof & Shatzer, 1998) can be conceptualised.

Postill & Pink (2012) write about activism on social media and activist practice that eventually result in socio-political change in their critical paper. By looking at the nature of the internet itself, they critically comment on existing literature and suggest how concepts of routine, movements, and sociality make understanding social media ethnography better. Perusing Postill & Pink's (2012) paper, social media can be viewed as more than just a network of people and discourses, but rather as 'an ethnographic place' that "traverse online/offline contexts… are collaborative, participatory, open and public". It means emphasising on routines, mobilities, and socialites existing on social media, since these practices together make the crux of community behaviour. While the usual methods of collecting social media research such as content analysis and social network analysis can provide extensive empirical and statistical overviews, to answer questions that seek to understand the how's, why's and the consequence of social media behaviours, ethnography is more suited. Participant observation and interviews that constitute ethnography (Ardevol & Cruz, 2014), when applied on a digital level allows us to refigure social media as a fieldwork (Thompson et al., 2021) environment that is "social, experiential, and mobile" (Postill & Pink, 2012). Postill & Pink (2012) describe the internet and internet realms as 'messy fieldwork environments' as the lines between online and offline worlds are often blurred or sometimes non-existent. Online communities are not simply 'virtual' but in many cases are people who participate and meet face-to-face as well (Kozinets, 2010).

Normally, social media platforms are not isolated in their usage- in the sense that, a user who peruses Facebook either for personal purposes or political dissemination, is most

likely to have accounts on other similar platforms such as Twitter. Information shared on these forums can easily be then shared/ forwarded on WhatsApp through personal chats and groups using links (URL). Hence, a sort of mobility in methodology is required to completely encapsulate the data flow between all platforms when conducting studies on it. This dilemma can be resolved using digital ethnography. It is also not necessary that a certain user, or online community that is active on one platform is active on another, this can only be found during the ethnographic data development stage of the thesis. Therefore, a certain sense of freedom must be afforded in methodology, which is possible in ethnographic studies.

As this thesis questions the political identity of its participants both online and offline, and requires an extensive, deeper understanding of its development and sustenance, digital ethnography works well as a research methodology. Identity formation in this case is also a group matter, where communities that hold similar political values and beliefs are identified and studied- these communities are held by social bonds and a sense of common communal purpose (in this case a political motivation) (Ardevol & Gomez-Cruz, 2014). Lindlof & Sharzer (1998) argue that traditional forms of studying media are insufficient in covering a "contextual understanding of social action", since only interview methods and document analysis fails to investigate the unobservable actions themselves rather drawing conclusions about it from the participants description of their actions. Ethnography rectifies this lack in data study, by taking into consideration both observable (social media data) and unobservable (interview data as well as data collected being part of the groups and communities the participants are members of). Ethnographers thus provide valuable context to actions and outcomes.

3.2.1. How-to Digital Ethnography?

Conducting ethnographic research both online and offline necessitates the consideration of a few things. Firstly, drawing out clear reasoning as to the need for an ethnographic study on a digital space, understanding the need for fieldwork. When considering the framework of the fieldwork one of two perspectives need to be utilised- the emic or the etic. Emic perspective requires the researcher to acknowledge their relationship to the field, the participants, and the field of study. Tracking field notes, participant observation (Ardevol & Gomez-Cruz, 2014), regular self-reflections, and interim reports are the heart of such ethnographic studies. Often interviews are also a vital part of the research for more in-depth understanding of the participant actions.

Secondly, identifying the field of study, drawing our boundaries, and recognising the elements of power online. Although complicated, it is important to draw out different values, beliefs, customs, and behaviours that exist online and demarcate the elements necessary for the study. Third, is understanding the public and private aspect of online spaces (Jensen, 2012), as this addresses several ethical questions. While accessibility does not determine the public or private nature of a space, some researchers (Roberts et al, 2004) posit that the nature of the study and its level of intrusiveness are better deciding factors. Following this ethical dilemma, evaluating the researchers own identity and anonymity, and its consequential effect on both the participants and the study is also important (Doring, 2002). Hine (2005) opines always disclosing researcher intentions and purpose of the study regardless of keeping their identity anonymous.

Finally, in line with deciding the anonymity of the researcher is figuring out whether to be obtrusive while conducting field work, that is acknowledging the ethnographer's presence in the study both online and offline (Kaur-Gill & Dutta, 2017). Unlike on-site ethnography where the researcher is visible and present, digital ethnography has the absence of a physically present ethnographer, instead they can 'lurk' (Lindlof & Shatzer, 1998; Hine, 2000). Lurking is unobtrusive observation, where social media allows the researcher to observe online updates, and discourses without taking part in them. This ensures creating a boundary between the participants being observed and the researcher. While this can produce a more authentic, real response from the participants while also being faster and simpler (Kozinets, 2002), it does however question the ethicality of it in terms of privacy. On the other hand, some researchers argue that a more collaborative engagement with the participants results in richer and more valuable outcomes. However, deciding on obtrusive or unobtrusive researcher involvement is highly dependent on the nature of the study (Garcia et al., 2009), the research questions, and the sensitivities of the subject. Just as it is vital to acknowledge active and passive ('lurkers') participant behaviours, that may have an influence of final analysis, the ethnographer's own function as a 'lurker' (Hine, 2000) needs to be considered, because an overly passive ethnographer may run the risk of unethically exploiting (Thompson et al., 2021) their participants by failing to declare their research position more visibly.

Journaling and tracking field notes are also a vital part of any ethnographic research work. Virtual ethnography on messaging apps and social media platforms, with its added element of digital data (textual, documents, URL, images, video etc.), has the potential to record "archived data, extracted data, and field note data" (Barbosa & Milan, 2019). One of the many ways to approach this which can be replicated for this thesis is collecting, tracking,

and organising data collected from various interactions with participants such as interviews, online correspondences like email, chats etc. Field note data refers to observation notes journaled by the researchers regularly during participant observation (Ardevol & Gomez-Gomez-Cruz, 2014), like communication practices between members, the kind of interactions, as well as the researchers' self-reflections about their own participation or lack thereof, and its consequences on the study. In this way the researcher can form a 'thick' and rich account of group interactions, and the observations can contextualise interview questions conducted simultaneously with participant observation.

Postill & Pink (2012), outline five practices of the daily routine of an online ethnographer, which are: "catching up, sharing, exploring, interacting and archiving". Here catching up involves keeping up with all the platforms chosen for the study and taking note of the daily developments if any. Sharing refers to the act of 'updating' followers and friends about developments, and Postill & Pink (2012) suggest the researcher engage in this activity. For the purposes of this thesis, sharing will not be practised as the researcher aims to mostly lurk (Lindolf & Shatzer, 1998) and observe behaviours rather than participate. The third practice, exploring, which goes hand in hand with catching up, that requires the researcher to explore tangents that develop out of the platform's already under study which could be in the form of external links posted by pages/users being observed, an event organised online, new people mentioned who play a significant role in the study etc. Interacting is essential to ethnography, requiring the researcher to interact with the participants, either face-to-face for interviews or online to both build a strong tie regularly with them and to discern valuable information for the study. Finally, archiving, another important part of ethnographic research is the practice of journaling field notes, bookmarking important online information, tagging

web content, categorising the daily findings into keywords which can later be used for 'memoing' (Glaser, 1998) and coding larger themes.

3.2.2. Ethics of digital ethnography

As Myers West (2017) points out instant messaging apps are '(private) public spheres', the dual nature of it making them prime research areas to investigate the political discourses established on them which are facilitated easier due to the secrecy and privacy it guarantees. Privacy and end-to-end encryption on instant messaging apps were recent developments after growing concern about state sanctioned data collection and snooping by governments and other agencies who benefit from vital chat data. The 'end' refers to the 'endpoint', that is, the client device, which prevents the hosting server or other intercepting third party from snooping and accessing chat content (Barbosa & Milan, 2019). Due to this the ethical considerations for such research are higher, more nuanced, and require a subjective approach based on the research subject and questions. In addition to the privacy they provide, they are both a social phenomenon and a tool that fosters political participation making ethics even more important.

Barbosa & Milan, (2019) highlight the need to move beyond only consent as the basic regulatory procedure for ethnographic studies on online mediums, especially web chat apps. They outline ethical parameters that include taking into keen consideration the research medium and the ecosystem surrounding the medium; leaning into full transparency of the researcher and their role in the study while equally strongly anonymising the participants involved in the study. Barbosa & Milan (2019) recorded their first methodological challenge, which was questioning "how to develop a creative approach to digital ethnography that did

not harm or interfere with the interactions among chat members?" The steps taken by the researcher for their study can be applied and replicated for the purposes of this thesis as well. Firstly, ensuring a formal personal introduction of both the ethnographer and the research purpose, including research questions and scope are thoroughly explained to the first point of contact- presumption here being they will be the admin/ moderator of either WhatsApp groups, Facebook groups (public/private), online pages that also function offline in the form of events, meetings, and/or conferences. After initial introductions are established and permission for being admitted into their group is granted, the ethnographer will be required to announce their role in the study and research purpose. Upon acceptance from group members, the researcher may 'lurk' until either new group members are added, or a considerable time has passed, to remind other participants about the ongoing research. Regular consent throughout the period of ethnographic data being collected is necessary for ethical transparency.

Barbosa and Milan (2019) lay out an ethics checklist for researchers to peruse before embarking on a digital ethnography on instant messaging and social media platforms. The four basic themes to consider are "relevance, risk, power and accountability" (Milan, 2014). In that order*, relevance* of the nature of the research and its subjects, as well as the utility of the results of the research must be clarified. *Risk*- questioning the potential harm of the study especially on the participants involved. *Power* reminds researchers to acknowledge the unbalanced power dynamics between them and their participants, and the consequences of this of the data collected as well as final analysis, because 'the gaze' is an objectified social position, which privileges "a researcher's interpretation and representation that is embedded

in power and control" (Thompson et al., 2021). Finally, *accountability* ensures research participants are informed during the process of the study.

Barbosa & Milan (2019) reinforce the principle that one time consent before the beginning of the research is an "outdated" approach that fails to encapsulate consent thoroughly. They suggest an alternative of consent being an "ongoing negotiation and exchange", which aims to do more than just informing and educating about the research rather to fulfil the need to be flexible and evolve with the research. Non-negotiable ethical propositions are establishing the nature of the research and the ecosystem it serves to create and exist in; a transparent research agenda to safeguard participant trust; full anonymisation of participants especially when research topics such as this thesis deal with contentious and vulnerable topics like politics.

For the methodology outlined for this study, the researcher must follow the above parameters. They must make their research aims and objects transparent with the participants and acquire consent from every participant involved whether that be an interviewee or a member of a WhatsApp group. However, as Twitter data is available within public domain for research purposes, it will not be necessary to disclose any research information or get consent from members of Twitter who engage with tweets. When part of a WhatsApp group, although the researcher will be a passive 'lurker' of all the interactions within the group, they must constantly reveal their presence and the purpose of them being in the group to any new members added to the group.

Talip et al's (2016) investigation on Twitter communities formed by IT professionals used online ethnography and interviews to collect data. By using this methodology, the researchers were able to understand the "norms and culture of the participants along with

patterns of behaviours", combined with interviews it added valuable information grounds of the virtual environment through the perspective and experience of the participants. Interviewees were the same as the users from whom the Twitter data were collected. Talip et al. (2016) research reflects the aforementioned need for digital ethnography to detect 'information behaviours'- "which are observable actions of the participants. They describe it as "the totality of human behaviours with reference to information, including unintentional or passive behaviours (glimpsing or encountering information), as well as purposive behaviours that do not involve seeking, such as actively avoiding information". Therefore, an ethnographic approach to online data collection is a holistic methodology. Talip et al (2016) also define *information experience* obtained from interviews which provide "an in-depth knowledge of the participant' thoughts, feelings, and motivations… it is the way in which people experience or derive meaning when they engage with information within their everyday lives". Applied to this thesis both information behaviour and information experience give a holistic understanding to support analysis and meaning making of the data collected from Twitter, and WhatsApp, as well as any offline consequences of online activities.

3.3 Methodology: UK's Indian Diaspora

UK has 19.05 million twitter users as of October 2021 (Shepherd, 2022) of which the Indian diaspora is 1.5 million (iGlobal Desk, 2022), further around 49.02% are Hindu Indians. With over 450-500 million active users, WhatsApp is the leading digital application used for communication in India since its launch in 2010 (News18, 2020). These stats show the large Hindu Indian diaspora in the UK, and this thesis focuses on them to study their political social media presence.

Research has been widely conducted on audience response and usage of social media for news discourses on a rather individualistic level where their participation on news platforms were studied. Since most of the research has been conducted on audience participation on already existing official pages, this thesis focuses on audience-built spaces within social media that encourage discourses leaning toward certain ideologies- in this case, the Hindutva ideology. These spaces present themselves in the form of pages created on either Twitter or Facebook, that promote specific messages focusing on Hindutva principles, or posts in support of the current Indian ruling government. These online spaces may also take form as public or private groups on these aforementioned platforms; spaces that encapsulate a community relationship between its members, organising both online and offline events to mobilise and discuss their shared values and goals. For the purposes of this research data will be scraped from pre-selected Twitter pages.

Groups, pages, profiles, and organisations active during and after 2019 to present times must be identified. This timeline allows to streamline political activities after the previous election, and more recently efforts to push Hindutva ideology for the upcoming 2024 elections. The three-year timeline focuses on Twitter groups and/or individual user account, that have either been formed in the last three years, or have existed previously, but are still actively posting message boards, holding online discussions with their members or other social media users, and holding offline events simultaneously on a more offline space.

Around 2 Twitter accounts must be identified, which take part in extensive online discussions around topics and updates about either BJP or the Hindutva ideology. These accounts may also promote offline events and have a well-established board of members overseeing the groups online and offline activities. The members and the organisation's other

participants will be subjects to ethnographic participant observation and interviews. Few accounts to consider are proposed below, if/when more communities, or online users are discovered during the ethnographic process depending on the relevance and time they may be considered for observation and interviews. These accounts are recommended as the have a large following, and update their pages regularly, sometimes even on the daily. They also are noted to advertise offline events their followers can attend, which makes acquiring interview candidates possible from the pool of followers of these pages. It is also likely that moderators of these pages may be admins of private WhatsApp groups which provides a starting point for contacts into that realm. The accounts are as below:

- *@Hindu Forum of Britain*
- *@Insight UK*

The research questions for this thesis although divided under two main questions and several sub questions, they need to be understood as one umbrella question which aims to investigate the motivation of the users, their online habits, as well as the consequences of these on offline events and behaviours on a larger scale such as, in this case, political involvement. The two questions are intertwined and fluid in the sense that they are mutually reliant on each other to explain and justify research data and finally their analysis. In light of this understanding, digital ethnography paired with in-depth interviews are the right methodology to apply to this study. Surveys, semi-structured interviews, empirical data collection using coding tools, and a simple discourse analysis of online data such as tweets, comments, and posts are insufficient in studying nuanced (Garcia et al., 2009) human motivations, behaviours, and actions especially for political reasons on an extremely complex platform like social media and instant messaging apps. Hence, the idea is that theories,

hypotheses, insights, and final conclusions must emerge from observations so that they are grounded on observed experiences.

Due to the fluid nature of the research question, the data collected will reflect this fluidity with ideas, concepts and theories forming during data collection, hence building prior hypothesis and assuming certain results are not ideal. Therefore, data analysis for evolving data such as these need to be more organic and adaptable, and a technique that checks this criterion is the 'constructive grounded theory" (Charmaz, 2006). Ideas and concepts that emerge during the course of the study are tagged or *memo-ed,* where. Memoing is way of sorting developing codes and categories for regular comparison. This method helps "theorising write-up of ideas about substantive codes and their theoretically coded relationships as they emerge during coding, collecting and analysing data, and during memoing" (Glaser, 1998). Codes will be decided and applied manually without the use of external tools, themes will be categorised, and new concepts shall be recognised. Final stage of analysis will entail comparing the themes derived from both online data and interview data, providing an in-depth understanding and answer to the research questions proposed.

Data observed and collected on social media will date back to May of 2019 leading up to the time of data collection. Online activities will be routinely checked until the period of data collection mentioned in the research time plan. May 2019 is a significant year for data collections and observation as the general elections which saw BJP win majority in India ceased on the 19th of May, hence choosing to observe online activities after the election leading up to the present would mean studying events of one political term, as the next general election is set to be held before May of 2024. 2019 was also the year large mass protests were held in India as a result of the announcement of the Citizenship Amendment

Act (CAA, later turned into a Bill). These protests had a high volume of online activities from both the right-wing voters and left wing. The influential power of both the BJP IT cells producing misinformation and propaganda consent, as well as anti-BJP voters using the online platforms to mobilise and voice their dissent was evident during this protest. Several news articles, studies, and scholarly commentaries have been recorded on the use of social media and instant messaging platforms as a result of the CAA, however what is lacking is the study of responses from the Indian diaspora around the world, especially BJP supporting diaspora. This thesis intends to highlight this within the scope of its study on the UK's Indian diaspora.

Owing to the vast timeline proposed in this paper, it would be ideal to select at the most three major case studies, which can then be followed on the social media platforms. Data can be collected specific to these events, in order to narrow down the collected data. The aforementioned CAA in 2019 was a significant events both in India and within the diaspora and thus makes for a relevant case study. Similarly, the first farmers protest in 2020-2021 saw huge support within the diaspora, especially in the UK with organised protests for and against in the counties capital as well as Indian diaspora heavy cities. As the protests resurface now in 2024, this is an apropos case study. A third case study to be considered is the abrogation of Article 370 on December 2023 where the supreme court of Indian revoked Jammu and Kashmir's special status (Kashyap & Spandana, 2023). A case with intense historical relevance, it triggered major reactions from Indian communities around the world and thus makes for appropriate case study.

CONCLUSION

In 1986 Calhoun suggested that growing reliance on computer technology for communication with “distant others” could undermine the “vitality of public life in so-called real communities or play a role in their economic and social fragmentation”. Today we see that the reality has panned out far different from Calhoun’s predictions. ‘Computer technologies and real public life are heavily reliant on each other, merging and combining their elements now more than ever, with events online either replicating offline, or being influential on each other. Today, a very specific component of the internet, namely social media is being used to create pockets of discussions between millions of users who are capable of receiving the same information at the same time and engage is an online discourse that has the power to influence change on a much higher political scale. Similar to the power people have over higher power through social media, this applies vice versa. Institutional agencies use the dispersive power of social media to gather support. Studies conducted on such messages on social media by politicians and alike shine light on the persuasive techniques used to coerce masses into following their cause.

Using social media to rally people for a cause existed from the inception of social media itself, from actors to non-profits to eventually governments turned to social networking platforms to market their views and gain the support of millions. Social media’s persistent relevancy and its increased use in people’s everyday lives allows messaging on social media to percolate and remain entrenched in people’s minds. A quotidian emphasise of ideologies whether that be right-wing or left-wing, is possible by using social media as a tool of information production and distribution. Combined with an active IT cell that has the sole

agenda of spreading misinformation, the BJP has successfully misused social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook to effectively mobilise both Indians in India and overseas Indians (Chopra, 2019). In 2008 Barack Obama's presidential campaign in the US was one of its kind at the time to utilise social media to engage with and leverage their campaign ideologies in order to recruit more support for their party, as well as fundraise, and counterattack smear campaigns (Thompson, 2011). These spaces are also not free from polarisation, with binary polarities abundant and extremist behaviour rising as a direct result of messaging through social media. The 2008 US presidential election was the earliest political event to have a large social media engagement, where Facebook allowed its users to share their political beliefs, opinions, and campaign. Similar studies were also carried out for the 2012 US presidential election between Obama and Romney (Barclay et al, 2014), and the same results acquired support on its platform. These studies highlighted that social media has a vital academic research tool to gauge public sentiments, user attitudes, and to make predictions about future political phenomena.

Conclusions drawn from these can provide new understandings of long-distance activism, their motivations and the incentives that drive them to react to politics from their homeland. Finally, to summarise, the objective of this thesis is to explore the new dimensions of the theory of diaspora- digital diaspora. Although not a recent development, the digital aspect of diaspora politics seems to be heightened in the recent past due to the global move toward populist governments. Nationalistic governments tend to encourage spread of their propagandas and ideologies through communication technologies. This has been made more accessible and spatially vast through digital technologies made possible by the internet. Thus, this thesis is an attempt at understanding the motives and incentives that social media

provide for UK's India diaspora. The ways in which they form their national identity and how much control the Indian government has in spreading nationalism to non-residents Indians through social networking platforms.

The Hindutva ideology, which forms the foundation of the BJP's political agenda, is characterized by a belief in the cultural and historical significance of Hindu civilization in India. It envisions India as a Hindu nation and seeks to promote Hindu values and principles in all aspects of life, including education, development, the environment, and industry (Malji, 2021). Hindutva has increasingly shaped domestic and foreign policy since then, providing the ruling party with ideological legitimacy to govern and formulate policies that align with a substantial portion of the population who embrace and uphold Hindutva (Rafique, 2021). This transformation into an influential social and political movement can be attributed to factors such as electoral success, collaboration with diverse social groups beyond its traditional support base, and consensus on economic liberalization amidst globalisations. However, it is important to note that this evolution has also led Hindutva to become a vehicle for power-seeking tendencies and cultural assertiveness, wherein in present day context, since BJP assumed power in 2014, Hindutva has become synonymous with India – shaping both domestic and foreign policy. Under the Hindutva umbrella lies a political ideology driven by an insatiable lust for power rather than genuine cultural preservation or inclusivity (Alam et al., 2022) (Saleem, 2021) (Sahgal, 2021).

Whereas for some forming an Indian identity may mean following certain rituals, and traditions while for others it might manifest as simply having Indian lineage. However, how this plays out within a diaspora is the focus of the research outlined in this thesis. Existing literature delves into the specific theories about diaspora identity, examining their

implications and contributions to understanding the experiences of diaspora individuals. Some scholars argue for the privileging of movement or territorial migration as a defining characteristic of diaspora identity while others highlight the importance of understanding diaspora as a social process that constantly reshapes and remakes identities. Additionally, scholars highlight the role of cultural practices and production in shaping diaspora identity, as well as the influence of memories of homeland left behind and experiences of displacement on diaspora identity (Kim, 2019). Using the online platform Twitter and the private messaging application WhatsApp, researchers can apply digital ethnography combined with semi-structured interviews to gain valuable data and derive insight into the motivations, incentives, and behaviours of the Indian diaspora in UK toward maintaining and identifying with their homeland especially through the lens of the Hindutva ideology.

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