

India's Social-Media Lynch Mobs | Project Syndicate

By Shashi Tharoor

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Shashi Tharoor uses the recent social media attacks on India's Bharatiya Janatya Party (BJP) minister Sushma Swaraj to denounce the party's communication strategy. He connects BJP's online tactics to hate speech, disinformation campaigns, and violence.

Social-media platforms are often criticized for their susceptibility to toxic dialogue and vicious attacks. It is a problem that India knows well. Just ask External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, whose recent vilification by members and supporters of her own ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is a case in point.

[...]

Over the last decade, the BJP has cultivated an army of cyber warriors to propagate its message of Hindu chauvinism, contempt for minorities, and hyper-nationalism, including through ferocious attacks on political opponents. This process began when the BJP was in opposition, and its point of view was supposedly being marginalized in the mainstream media. By the time the BJP took power in 2014, social media "trolls" had become vital foot soldiers in its political campaigns.

[...]

Social media, by nature, rewards speed and sensationalism, not verification and caution. Even when the truth does come out, it rarely makes it as far as fast as the lie did. There is no easy solution: a wave of regulation could open the way for censorship of free expression on other media. But, now that one of the BJP's own has become a victim of the monster the party created, maybe it will recognize that there is a problem.

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