

**The Elite American Media's India Agenda: A Study of The New York Times' Coverage of India –
2017 to 2019***

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Abstract: Media bias is not restricted to one type of media or in one location. However, the nature of bias and its origins are different and have different impacts. In this study we consider the role of the elite American media and the role they play in shaping the views of their readers. Using Said's (1978/1991) concept of "orientalism," Inden's (1986, 1990/2000) concept of "hegemonic agents," and Adluri and Bagchee's (2014) work on "occidentalism," we analyze a selection of *The New York Times*' editorials, news reports, and opinion pieces/commentaries (January 2017 to December 2019) on India, Hindus, and Hinduism. The critique here is not only about the use of the authoritative voice in the editorials, reports, and commentaries that dominate the elite American media which circulate representations of Hindus and Hinduism selectively but also of the denial of agency to Hindu individuals. *The New York Times* offers partial representation of events and people, and prejudiced commentaries on Indian government policies, presenting the Bharatiya Janata Party, Hindus, and Hinduism as illiberal, majoritarian, non-secular, and violent.

Key words: *Elite media, The New York Times, India, Hindus, Hinduism, Hindu nationalism, Bharatiya Janata Party*

Media watchers, both lay and academic, have noticed an increase in the coverage of Indian politics and society since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in India in May 2014, with Narendra Modi elected as Prime Minister. The BJP, which translates as "Indian People's Party," has been labeled as a "Hindu nationalist party". The BJP came to power after ten years (2004-2014) of Congress Party rule. As the BJP began to garner public support and romped home to victory in May 2014 the American elite media (for example, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *National Public Radio*) considered the win a serious challenge to and concern for India's wellbeing as well as its commitment to a liberal, secular, and democratic social order. They did so, again, when the BJP returned with a strong majority in 2019 to govern India for another five years. Echoing India's opposition parties, and many of India's English-language newspapers, the elite American media began to characterize the BJP, and its dominant and popular leader, Narendra Modi, as Hindu nationalists, and a threat to democracy (*India Abroad*, May 28, 2019). The BJP was characterized as representing 'majority Hindus' and 'Hindu nationalists,' and as a political movement seeking to dismantle India's 'secular traditions' to marginalize its minorities.

The New York Times (NYT) carried out a sustained campaign against the BJP and Narendra Modi, but more insidiously on Hindu traditions, Hinduism, and Hindus. On the surface, the claim that the fourth estate acts as a check on unbridled government authority, as a watchdog, and as an institution that has the wellbeing of the people in mind makes sense. But as Walter Lippman observed in 1920 about *The New York Times*' reporting on the Bolshevik Revolution, "In the large, the news about Russia is a case of seeing not what was, but what men wished to see" (Luo, 2020).

In a series of articles (March, May, September 10, September 11, September 16, October 15, October 28, 2019) on the popular media outlet, *Medium.com*, Vamsee Juluri, a media and culture studies scholar, began noting the trend in American media of targeting and labeling Hindus as a dangerous majority. He also noted that Hindu icons, deities, philosophy, ways of living and being, and cultural treasures were being misappropriated, mocked, or demonized.

Similarly, Indu Viswanathan, began to note the dominant media narratives about India/Hindus/Hinduism. In one article (September 2019), she noted how NPR's correspondent in India tweeted an abusive anti-Hindu message, and NPR 'responded tepidly'. She posted an online petition about Hindu-Americans' concerns over NPR's reporting which garnered a large response. Analyzing NPR's listeners' responses she found that about 44% of those who signed the petition were concerned about NPR's bias against Hindus, about 25% wanted "fair and balanced reporting on Hinduism and issues related to Hindus," and about 22% of the signatories expressed concerns about "Hinduphobia" in the media.

This author began tracking the American elite media's representation of the BJP in the late 1990s, when the BJP first formed a coalition government in 1998 and was in power till 2004 (Rao, 2003), and began tracking media coverage again after the BJP formed a government in 2014 (Rao, 2018a, 20018b, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d, 2020e). In this study we will analyze *The New York Times*' editorials, opinion pieces, and special reports over three years – from January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2019 -- to consider the following:

1. Whether the material offered to readers were wide-ranging in terms of subject matter
2. Whether the range of materials offered provided alternative perspectives in terms of the range of opinions – giving voice to non-Hindus, Hindus, and neutral observers
3. Whether the material was overtly critical of Hindu concerns and aspirations
4. Whether the material was selectively distilled to mask non-Hindu actors' actions and words and to highlight Hindu actors' actions and words
5. Whether reporters/opinion writers selectively quoted expert/lay sources to project Hindus as bad actors and non-Hindus as good actors
6. Whether language was used to provoke hostility, animus, fear, and hate

We will use Inden's (1990/2000) categories of "descriptive," "commentative," "explanatory," "interpretive," and "hegemonic" accounts which he used in his study of the work of Western Indology scholars (Inden 1990/2000, p. 36-48) to understand the nature of the Western media agenda and style of discourse in describing and representing others. We also use Edward Said's work on "orientalism," and Adluri's work on "occidentalism" (2017) as frameworks to understand the use of language, the slant in the reporting, the will to speak for others, and the choice of commentators by *The New York Times*.

Literature Review

The media can and do set agendas. McCombs and Shaw said so in 1972 pointing out that the "mass media have the ability to transfer the salience of items on their news agendas to the public agenda" (McCombs, 1994, p. 4). But the agenda setting theory had to be tested to show that public priorities lag the media agenda: it was tested by Funkhouser in 1973. Then came the question: who are most influenced by and how are their ideas shaped by the media's agendas? Scholars focused on those who have a high "need for orientation," or whose "index of curiosity" is high. By the 1990s, the old adage that "the media aren't very successful in telling us what to think, but they are stunningly successful in telling us what to think about" (Griffin, Ledbetter & Sparks, 2015) had been discarded and scholars concluded that the media indeed influence the way we think by "framing" -- through the selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration of certain news and views. Also, more importantly, it was discovered that the media "may not only tell us what to think about, they also may tell us how and what to think about, it, and perhaps even what to do about it" (McCombs, 1997, quoted in Griffin, Ledbetter & Sparks, 2015, p. 381).

We know the media set agendas. We do know that the editorials and opinion columns in the left-or right-inclined media do have more specific agendas to get people to think, vote, live in particular ways. In the context of the West and India, for example, there are studies that seek to identify how American national interests were used to frame India during and after the Cold War by American media (Mazumdar, 2020). In this study, however, the focus is on how Western media, and in this instance, *The New York Times* and *NPR* (text reports only and not audio reports), seek to shape their readers' views on India and Hindus especially, and advise, inform, and persuade Indians and Hindus how they should live their lives, vote for which party, who are the villains and who are the 'good guys,' and whose philosophy and worldviews should guide them in their progress toward modernity, prosperity, peace, and the good life. These attempts go beyond 'framing' the BJP, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, or Hindus. They are, we argue, a continuation of the old colonial/imperialist agendas, masked as objective reporting and analysis of the global order.

The MacBride Commission report – *Many Voices, One World* (1980) – and the Hamid Mowlana report for the UNESCO -- *International Flow of Information: A Global Report and Analysis* (1985) – allow us to understand the fascination of the West with the rest (other), and how the uneven flow of information, and unfair, incomplete, and authoritative narratives and analyses of others shape our understanding of the

world. Beyond the study of media, there are studies of academic texts that allow us to go beyond mere consideration of the quantitative news-flow discrepancies and types of news coverage. These analyses of texts help us understand what else might be at play in the descriptions, labeling, and analyses of others.

There have been some studies that focus on biased coverage of certain issues in *The New York Times*. For example, Ghazal Aswad (2019), using a critical discourse analytic method finds that despite the neutral tone in most coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis there was an implicit bias favoring the refugees in the NYT, while in a unique study, also using a critical discourse analytic method, Khazaal and Almiron (2016) considered how *The New York Times* and the Spanish newspaper *El Pais* covered the slaughter of animals for human food. While the Spanish newspaper was found to use crude speciesism, *The New York Times* was more deceptive in masking speciesism. Others have challenged *The New York Times*' claim to be a "newspaper of record" (Zelizer, Park, Gudelunas, 2002). There are, however, very few careful studies about deeply embedded biases that drive the coverage of others in the mainstream American media. We therefore need to look elsewhere, beyond the communication/media field, to find the theoretical frameworks and methodological tools to understand certain facets of media bias.

Analyses and depictions of others have been shaped by the Christian worldview, as some scholars have argued. Rao (2020e) points out that Balagangadhara's (1994) work "explores more fully the conceptualization of religion in the West, and how such conceptualization shaped the West's characterization of Hindu/Indian traditions, beliefs, and behaviors". Balagangadhara's (2012) builds on his initial work to argue that colonial consciousness pervades not just colonial scholarship and commentary on India but also modern descriptions of India. We can argue that these descriptions and characterization are selective and applied consistently and programmatically only to the "Hindu" and to "Hinduism" (which are themselves colonial labels/monikers for self-avowed labels) who/which are pluralistic in their understanding and depiction of the world and ways to seek release from the mundane world. Hindus do not swear by a "book," they do not have a single prophet, and they are not "monotheistic". Combining serious philosophical inquiry into the nature of being and the world with local practices of faith and ritual, "Hinduism" has both fascinated the West, and has been a target of demonizing by the West. Colonial ways of describing India/Hindus persist to this day, Balagangadhara points out, tracing this to the Christian theological understanding of "heathen religions". As Balagangadhara points out, the current social sciences sustain "orientalism" because they assume that what the West/social scientists experience of the other is veridical, authentic, scrupulous, and scientific. Such training changes the way Indians themselves have begun to look at their experiences. What we fail to understand is that this "modern/Western/colonial" enterprise is built upon 1500 years of Christian theological constructions/beliefs and the varieties of secularized projects that it has incubated and influenced.

The discourse of "orientalism" (Said, 1978/1991) can help us understand *The New York Times*' representations of the Indian government, Hindus, and 'Hindu nationalism'. In this instance, the reference to "Hindu nationalism" is never in the context of other nationalisms, identities, and aspirations: for example, readers are not told what other nationalisms – Muslim nationalism, Christian nationalism, secular nationalism, Gandhian nationalism, Nehruvian nationalism, Marxist/Communist internationalism and Balkanism are at play in the Indian context, and why or how "Hindu nationalism" is a problem and other nationalisms, attempts at "breaking India" (Malhotra, Neelakandan, 2012) are salutary. According to Said, hegemony is an indispensable concept for understanding cultural life in the industrial West, and it is this hegemony, "or rather the result of cultural hegemony at work, that gives Orientalism its strength and durability" (p. 7). Interpreting constructed representations in the mainstream media through the lens of orientalist discourse thus becomes a way of challenging Western constructions of Indian governments and public policies. It also helps us uncover how, through a certain stance and nuance in language and representation, Western media may be engaged in a discursive practice that perpetuates the power of the West over the "Orient". Therefore, using orientalist discourse as a guiding framework can help us understand whether social and political power are inscribed in the editorials and reports by American media elites.

Working within this framework of "orientalist discourse," and focusing his analysis on the West's understanding and representations of India, Inden (1990/2000) argues that the discourse constructed by "hegemonic agents" -- those writers and institutions who dominate public discussions about others – "not

simply in a constraining or coercive sense, but also in the sense that they have been accorded positions of leadership” (p. 36) -- is a kind of universalizing discourse produced in complex polities by persons and institutions who claim to speak with authority. Inden’s work is in turn based on Collingwood (1956), Gramsci (1971), and Foucault’s (1973, 1976, 1977) works. It can be contended that *The New York Times*, which proclaims that it disseminates all the news fit to print, and whose regular readers include almost all of America’s political and academic elite, claims more significant “authority” than other institutions.

Inden argues that hegemonic agents not only seem successful in speaking for their own special interests but also for others, including “workers, the masses, middle America, the taxpayer, consumer” (p. 36) or any other group because these groups themselves are complicit in the process of such discourse production. They are complicit in the sense that they tend to accept the premises of such discourse. Inden further contends that whether in nineteenth century Europe or present-day America such hegemonic agents have offered “some metaphor-plated essence -- rationality, the individual, the free market, the welfare state,” (p. 36) which presents itself as a form of knowledge that is both different from, and superior to, the knowledge that others (e.g., Orientals/Indians/Hindus) have of themselves. *The New York Times* therefore assumes it speaks for Indians and for Indian interests. That some Indians have joined in the colonialist project of *The New York Times* is not a surprise because western discourse has become a “universalizing” discourse, especially to those who were colonized and were trained by the colonizers in their methods of inquiry – considered scientific, universal, and empirical.

According to Inden, any genuine critique of orientalism does not just revolve around the question of prejudice or bias, or of a lack of objectivity or empathy but should penetrate “the emotional minefield surrounding scholarship on Others” (p. 38). Inden also draws our attention to the analyst’s attempts to order the world of the observed, the world of the “other,” the Hindu, the Indian. He posits that these analyses tend to be “monistic, to concentrate on one sort of ‘cause’ or ‘factor’ to the exclusion of others” (p. 42). He argues that such representations are also almost invariably reductionist. This insight of Inden into orientalist, specifically Indological discourse also enables us to re-read the texts and headlines fashioned by the editors and reporters of *The New York Times*.

Situated at the nexus of Said’s seminal theory of orientalist discourse, and Inden’s analysis of the role of orientalist and hegemonic discourse in “imagining India,” we focus on the headlines in most instances, but also in the sub-headings and abstracts for a selected set of editorials, opinion pieces, and news reports appearing in *The New York Times*. This selection is limited not because we want to cherry-pick examples to make our case, but because there are just too many of them to include in this limited space.

These representations and discourses not only identify the “other” in the hegemonic world order but may also have the potential to inform policy with regard to the “other” (Chang, 1989). We can also argue that by using an authoritative voice in the editorials and reporting, *The New York Times* tends to dominate and is read by those who make policy or by those in academia who are themselves involved in shaping readers’ perception of the Hindu “other”. As Dreher (2020) writes: “You might not care what the Times thinks about anything, but what is published in its pages, and what is not allowed to be published, matters in a way that is hard to overstate. The main direction of any society is set by its elites. The overwhelming majority of Americans will never read a word in the Times. But those who do read it, and take their cues from it, are the people who run this country.”

Inden argues that hegemonic texts “appear to speak for, and to, not only the interests of the rulers but also those of the ruled.... The hegemonic text is an instrument not simply for browbeating those who demur but also for exercising a positive intellectual and moral leadership.... We need not assume that a hegemonic text is primarily designed or has the effect of maintaining the dominance of one class over another. *Hegemonic texts are just as often as not used by fractions of the ruled against one another and are often taken as positions by the ruled among themselves around which to rally*” (p. 43) (italics added). So, *The New York Times* is quoted selectively by Indian and Indian American groups and news media to argue their own position on different matters, or by Western academics and interlocutors who seek to speak for the “oppressed” or “minorities” in India.

The other theoretical framework we can use to study *The New York Times*' India representations is "Occidentalism" that Adluri and Bagchee (2014) have observed, analyzed, and presented in the *Nay Science*. Speaking about the work of German and other Western Indologists, Adluri (July 2017) characterizes Western Indologists' work as indicative of "a partial and flawed positivism (that) was a cover for the projection and imposition of different strains of Protestant theologizing, Eurocentrism and also various kinds of racialized and even racist thought," and that the scientism of Western Indologists and racism are linked, Rao (2020e) points out. Adluri (July 2017) says that "Indologists enact this discrimination (of the Indian other) not because they are vulgar racists -- obviously, they think they are cultured, enlightened and cosmopolitan -- but because their authority depends on it". Recalling his interactions with German Indologists, Adluri (July 2017) says: "Meeting Indologists was a wake-up call. I saw behind the façade and beheld racism, supremacism and chauvinism," and adds, "We saw how Indologists had constituted a knowledge domain, introduced verification techniques and distributed authority between those who could speak and those condemned to be silent observers, the subjects on whose bodies they played games of truth and power".

What Adluri has observed, in his study of Indology and Western Indologists, especially German Indologists, is that these scholars are involved in the project of performing "autopsies on the ethical spinal cord of living cultures" (as Deleuze says in another context, and quoted by Adluri) using their tools fashioned in the foundries of "scientism". Rao (2020e) argues that this may be even more pertinent in our understanding of the India project of *The New York Times*. Adluri's (July, 2017) observations about German Indologists reading Indian/Hindu texts is apropos: "In their quest to prove Indian texts monstrous, false, and debased, the Indologists forgot this basic qualification. They advocated a historicist approach, being aware it would frustrate the texts' ability to address the reader. From their perspective, this was essential. They wanted to insert themselves between the reader and the text. Having historicized the texts, they could claim the reader needed their expertise to decode the texts' historical layers and lay them bare in their primitivity". If we replace Hindu texts with *The New York Times* commentaries on Hindu belief, Hindu life, Hindu goals, Hindu aspirations, and Hindu concerns, we can understand how some modern Western media outlets are doing work similar to the German/Western Indologists work on Hindu texts, commenting on and specifically seeking to reshape Indian lives, policies, and realities, Rao (2020e) points out.

The representations of the "other" in the elite Western media are interesting to study not only because they help explain the role of media in creating hegemonic discourse, but also because it helps us understand the role of representations in identity formation in the political space. For example, by constantly identifying the BJP as a "Hindu Nationalist Party," or supporters of the BJP as "right wing Hindu nationalists" the media creates a binary which implies that every Indian citizen who voted for the BJP or who is sympathetic to even a part of its political ideology is a Hindu nationalist, regardless of whether he or she is a Hindu or a nationalist, however defined. Opposed to this constructed identity is the identity of all those others who did not vote for the BJP -- who apparently are not "Hindu nationalists" regardless of their religious, political, and ideological beliefs. These representations tend to over-simplify and reduce the complex identities of citizens of the largest democracy in the world to fit into essentialized categories. For example, as will be seen in the analysis here, a simplistically constructed binary of "Congress Party is secular" and "BJP is Hindu nationalist" does not pay attention to the layered reality of Indian society, politics, and nation. Additionally, we can argue that owing to the power residing in the authoritative voice of elite Western media, such simplistic representations only lead to further fragmentation and possible polarization in the societies that these narratives "cover".

Without acknowledging the challenges India faces, some Western correspondents have displayed open hostility in reporting about and on India. For example, Barbara Crossette of *The New York Times*, who was New Delhi bureau chief from August 1988 to July 1991, wrote extremely critical pieces on Indian customs and mores (Gopikrishna, 2000). Crossette's book on India (1993), for example, offers this introduction: "India is a relatively unknown nation to the rest of the world, trapped in its own self-absorption, suspicious of the outside world, unwilling to interact as a nation among nations". Crossette's replacement, John Burns was also criticized as biased and uninformed (Dhume, 1998). Dhume chided *The New York Times* by saying, "Any publication, even one as respected as the *Times*, can be forgiven the

occasional slip-up. But mistakes on this scale reveal a deeper malaise. Simply put, Mr. Burns does not have a grasp of elementary Indian history and politics”.

As Rao (2003) pointed out to a report in an Indian-American newspaper, the *News India Times* (Parekh, 2000), that took the *New York Times* to task for highlighting India’s poverty while reporting about the Indian television game show, *Kaun Banega Crorepati* (*Who will become a Millionaire?*): “It is not objectionable to write about poverty in India. It exists. It is a problem. It is one of the great, unfulfilled promises of Independent India. In this instance, however, writing about the hit TV show through India’s slums was unnecessary”.

A headline in *The New York Times* (March 23, 1999) exemplifies the bias against Hindus/Hinduism. The headline reads: “*Shiva vs. Jesus: Hindus Burn Homes of Christians*”. The provocative headline, approved at different levels of editors at the newspaper, cannot be imagined in the context of news reports about other religions and religious groups. Would, for example, the *NYT* use any of the headlines below for reports of actual incidents?

- Mohammed vs. Jesus: Muslims slit Christians’ throats
- Jesus vs. Yahweh: Christian Slaughters Jews in Pittsburgh Synagogue
- Mohammed vs. Parvati: Muslims rape Hindu women

Methodology/Data

This is a preliminary study. We have not operationalized Inden’s categories of orientalist accounts and have not sought any inter-coder reliability for labeling the headlines as descriptive, commentative, explanatory/interpretive, and hegemonic. The data for this project comes through a search of *The New York Times*’ archives using the ProQuest database. Search terms were “India, Hindu,” “India, Muslim,” and “India, Christian”. Table 1 below offers the number of items generated using the specific terms. We will use Inden’s categories of orientalist accounts to identify the nature of the headlines/leads:

- Descriptive: Accounts which claim to “represent the thoughts and acts of Indians to the reader” (Inden, p. 38), “re-presenting them as distorted portrayals of reality” (p. 39).
- Commentative: Aspects of an account characterizing the thoughts and acts of Indians. Inden says that the most narrowly descriptive account includes a framing commentary.
- Explanatory/Interpretive: Secondary revision of descriptive accounts which make the supposed “strange and incoherent seem rational or normal,” usually offering one sort of “cause or factor” to the exclusion of others (p. 42).
- Hegemonic: Texts that “appear to speak for, and to, not only the interests of the rulers but also those of the ruled...” (p. 43), and “one that is published... by a prestigious and authoritative press...” (p. 44).

Table 1: ProQuest Database Search – NYT

Year	India, Hindu	India, Muslim	India, Christian
January 1 to December 31, 2017	333	485	140
January 1 to December 31, 2018	308	356	171
January 1 to December 31, 2019	537	618	231

We present three lists of tables based on the search terms “India, Hindu” because using the search terms “India, Muslim” generated about the same set of items as in the “India, Hindu” search. We also present three tables listing the items that were elicited based on the “India, Christian” search terms.

As reporters/commentators/editors construct certain representations of individuals, peoples, groups, and events over a period, these representations become part of the political and cultural discourse

about those individuals, peoples, groups, and events. We have identified the nature of the headlines/leads using Inden’s categories of ‘descriptive, commentative, interpretive, explanatory, and hegemonic’ texts.

Table 2: Sample Headlines – *The New York Times* – January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2017

Date Published	Headline	Editorial/Op-ed/Report
Jan 9, 2017	Narendra Modi’s Crackdown on Civil Society in India (Commentative) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> His government is choking the finances of civil society groups working with the most vulnerable Indians. (Explanatory/Interpretive) 	Op-ed by Rohini Mohan
Apr 05, 2017	Hindu Cow Vigilantes in Rajasthan, India, Beat Muslim to Death (Descriptive/Commentative) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A mob of about 200 vigilantes surrounded six vehicles carrying cattle and pulled out five men, apparently Muslim, an official said. (Descriptive/Commentative) 	Report by Suhasini Raj
Apr 17, 2017	Anatomy of a lynching <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A mentality of mob violence has overtaken India. (Hegemonic) 	Op-ed by Aatish Taseer
Apr 24, 2017	India’s New Face (Commentative/Interpretive) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> India’s Hindu nationalists are pushing hard to turn the country into an exclusionary Hindu nation. (Hegemonic) 	Op-ed by Hartosh Singh Bal
June 29, 2017	Toll from Vigilante Mobs Rises, and India Begins to Recoil (Descriptive/Commentative) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As thousands turned out for protests against rising violence toward Muslims and lower-caste Indians, many wondered: How did we get here? (Hegemonic) 	Report by Ellen Barry
Aug 17, 2017	India’s Muslims and the Price of Partition (Descriptive/Commentative) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> India’s Muslim population has begun to fear that the anxieties of the Muslims who fought for the creation of Pakistan could be coming true. (Hegemonic) 	Op-ed by Ajaz Ashraf
Dec 08, 2017	His Defense of Hindus Was to Kill a Muslim and Post the Video (Commentative/Explanatory) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Video of the pickax killing — and the killer’s rants about Muslim men who lure Hindu girls — spread across India, reopening sectarian wounds. (Hegemonic) 	Report by Jeffrey Gettleman, Suhasini Raj

In the list above, the following words and phrases are predominant: “Hindu,” “Hindu nationalists,” “Hindu cow vigilantes,” “Hindu group,” “Hindu revival,” “Hindu coalition,” “Hindu cleric,” and all of them are offered in harsh/negative terms. Christians and Muslims, when they get mention, are portrayed as victims of Hindu violence, Hindu nationalist agendas, and Hindu aggression.

In the Indian Constitution, Article 19 guarantees freedom of speech and expression as one of six essential freedoms. However, freedom of speech and expression is subject to restrictions under subclause (2), whereby this freedom can be restricted for reasons of protecting the “sovereignty and integrity of the nation, the security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, preserving decency, preserving morality, in relation to contempt of court, defamation, or incitement to an offence”. The India media have a self-imposed rule, therefore, to preserve “public order” and will not mention the religious identities of people involved in rioting, criminal acts, etc. However, Western media reporters are under no

such constraints and therefore deliberately break that rule but do so only to blame Hindus, deflect blame on Muslims and Christians, and present Muslims and Christians as victims.

Table 3: Sample Headlines – *The New York Times* – January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2018

Date Published	Headline	Editorial/Op-ed/Report
July 21, 2018	Far-Right Politics in India’s Year of the Lynch Mob (Hegemonic)	Report, by Jeffrey Gettleman, Hari Kumar
July 29, 2018	Baba Ramdev’s Holy War (Commentative/Hegemonic) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Indian swami helped bring Hindu nationalists to power as he built his multibillion-dollar business empire. But is his pious traditionalism a mask for darker forces? (Interpretive/Hegemonic) 	Article, by Robert Worth
September 21, 2018	India Rejects Fast Divorces for Muslims (Descriptive) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> India has criminalized a centuries-old practice in which Muslim men could instantly divorce their wives, a step that has polarized political parties over how deeply the government should become involved in marital and religious issues. (Hegemonic) 	Report by Kai Schultz

In the list above there is a deliberate play on words in the headline “Baba Ramdev’s Holy War,” where the Abrahamic concept of holy wars (Fine, 2015) has been foisted on Hindus and a Hindu yoga master who made yoga popular by bringing it to the Indian masses.

In the news item on the Indian Parliament’s action to ban the practice of the “triple talaq” – where a Muslim man can divorce his wife by simply saying ‘talaq’ thrice, and convey that even over the phone or through email – which most Muslim nations have already banned, has been presented in the *NYT* report to imply that Hindus and the BJP have interfered in Muslim civil law, Muslim practices, and Muslim lives.

Table 4: Sample Headlines – *The New York Times* – January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2019

Date Published	Headline	Editorial/Op-ed/Report
Apr 11, 2019	Under Modi, a Hindu Nationalist Surge Has Further Divided India (Commentative, Hegemonic) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Hindu right has never been so enfranchised at every level of power. Now, with another term likely for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, minorities are worried. (Hegemonic) 	Report by Jeffrey Gettleman, Kai Schultz, Suhasini Raj, Hari Kumar
Apr 17, 2019	Modi’s Campaign of Fear and Prejudice (Commentative) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> India’s prime minister is seeking re-election by stoking fear among the Hindu majority of the potential dangers posed by the country’s Muslims and Pakistan. (Interpretive/Hegemonic) 	Op-ed by Hartosh Singh Bal
May 17, 2019	They Peddle Myths and Call It History (Commentative) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> India’s governing party rewrites the country’s history to justify its Hindu nationalist ideology. (Commentative/Hegemonic) 	Op-ed by Romila Thapar
May 21, 2019	The Rise of Modi: India’s Rightward Turn (Commentative) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India has been criticized for stoking religious and social tensions with his polarizing brand of Hindu nationalism. He’s now poised for re-election. (Commentative/Hegemonic) 	Editorial

May 23, 2019	How Narendra Modi Seduced India With Envy and Hate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The prime minister has won re-election on a tide of violence, fake news and resentment. (Commentative/Hegemonic) 	Op-ed by Pankaj Mishra
Jun 10, 2019	Indian Court Convicts 6 Hindus in Rape and Murder of Muslim Girl, 8 (Commentative)	Report by Kai Schultz
Jun 25, 2019	Forced to Chant Hindu Slogans, Muslim Man is Beaten to Death in India (Also published as ‘Lynch Mob in India Forces Muslim to Chant Hindu Slogans’) (Commentative/Explanatory)	Report by Suhasini Raj, Rod Nordland
Aug 08, 2019	India Tempts Fate in Kashmir (Hegemonic) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Indian government's decision to revoke the semiautonomous status of Kashmir, accompanied by a huge security clampdown, is dangerous and wrong. Bloodshed is all but certain, and tension with Pakistan will soar. (Hegemonic) 	Editorial
Sep 11, 2019	Why Is India Making Its Own People Stateless? (Hegemonic) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Modi government will stop at nothing, it seems, to repress the country's Muslims. (Hegemonic) 	Op-ed by K Anis Ahmed (Publisher of the Dhaka Tribune)

The predominant discourse in the editorials, reports, and op-eds is not only negative but singularly focuses on Hindus as perpetrators, and others as victims. The editorials label, demonize, and scold, and no nuance and no space is offered for India's peculiar situation of being splintered into three in 1947. Pakistan's Hindus in 1947 made up about 20 percent of the population (Shringla, 2019). At present they are less than two percent and shrinking fast. Muslims make up 96.28% of the Pakistani population now. Bangladesh (East Pakistan, in 1947) had a 30 percent Hindu population in 1947, about 22 percent in 1951, and Hindus have now shrunk to about eight percent. Bangladesh is at present 91 percent majority Muslim. India and Pakistan have gone to war four times, and Pakistan's leaders have vowed to defeat India, even if it took a thousand years (Hameed, 2017).

What is not evident in any of the editorials or opinion pieces is that Pakistan is hostile to India, and Bangladesh has allowed its people to drive out millions of Hindus – brutalizing them, robbing them of their land, and destroying their temples and homes (Hindu American Foundation, 2017). Saudi Arabia and rich Middle East (Gulf) countries have poured billions into India to build mosques and Islamic schools (*madrasas*), threatening India's stability (Pandya, 2018), and Saudi funded extremist Islam is the hothouse for breeding terrorists, spreading hate through textbooks, and radicalizing local Muslims (Pandith, 2015).

Similarly, in none of the editorials or opinion pieces is there any mention of the fact that India's Hindu majority are denied the rights that India's minorities are offered. Hindus cannot run their own religious institutions, nor their schools, while Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, and every other group in India that claims minority status can (Sai Deepak, 2020). It would be unimaginable that Christians in the U.S. would be deprived the right to manage their churches or run their own schools but Muslims, Hindus, and Jews were given the right to manage their own places of worship and manage their schools, or that whatever is collected in churches as offerings by parishioners is redirected by the government to help religious minorities (Jha, 2018).

Finally, in the series of editorials and commentaries on Kashmir is there any mention that Article 370 of the Indian Constitution was a 'temporary provision' which granted *special autonomous status* to Jammu & Kashmir. In the Valley of Kashmir Muslims are in the majority. Muslims "cleansed" 350,000 Hindus out of the Valley in the late 1980s. These Hindus are now 'refugees' in India (Pandita, 2013). Northeast India, over the past one hundred years, and especially over the last few decades have turned majority Christian (Hazarika, 1983; Sinha, 2015). Hundreds of millions of dollars are pumped into India by oil-rich Muslim countries each year (Nanjappa, 2015), and evangelical churches in the West like the US Charity "Gospel for Asia" sent to its Indian affiliate Ayana Charitable Trust more than \$110 million (Jain,

2017). The *NYT* reports, commentaries, and editorials do not offer the diversity of voices which could offer balance and perspectives on these fractious matters.

Table 5: Sample Headlines – *The New York Times* – January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2017; Search terms: India, Christian; Number of items: 140

Date Published	Headline	Editorial/Op-ed/Report
Mar 07, 2017	Major Christian Charity is Closing India Operations Amid a Crackdown (Descriptive/Commentative) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The group, Compassion International, which runs a ‘sponsor a child’ program, is leaving India after 48 years amid pressure from the Modi government. (Descriptive/Interpretive) 	Report by Ellen Barry and Suhasini Raj
Apr 09, 2017	Christians in India face a Backlash (Commentative/Hegemonic)	Report by Suhasini Raj and Nida Najjar
Dec 24, 2017	‘We are afraid of Christmas’: Tensions Dampen Holiday in India (Commentative/Explanatory) (Also published with the headline: ‘In India, Cultural Divide Stifles Spirit of Christmas’) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Christmas is becoming big business in India, where it has a cosmopolitan appeal to people of many faiths. But far-right Hindu groups have put the holiday in their cross hairs. (Explanatory/Hegemonic) 	Report by Kai Schultz and Suhasini Raj

Table 6: Sample Headlines – *The New York Times* – January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2018; Search terms: India, Christian; Number of items: 171

Date Published	Headline	Editorial/Op-ed/Report
Nov 22, 2018	Sentinelese Tribe that Killed American has a History of Guarding its Isolation	Report by Kai Schultz, Hari Kumar, and Jeffrey Gettleman
Nov 23, 2018	A Man’s Last Letter before being Killed on a Forbidden Island	Report by Jeffrey Gettleman, Hari Kumar, and Kai Schultz
Nov 24, 2018	Retrieving Body of Missionary Killed on Remote Island is a Struggle	Report by Jeffrey Gettleman, Hari Kumar, and Kai Schultz
Nov 30, 2018	John Chau aced Missionary Boot Camp. Reality Proved a Harsher Test.	Report by Jeffrey Gettleman, Kai Schultz, Ayesha Venkataraman, and Hari Kumar
Dec 02, 2018	American’s Death Revives Evangelical Debate over Extreme Missionary Work	Article by Megan Specia

Table 7: Sample Headlines – *The New York Times* – January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2019 Search terms: India, Christian; Number of items: 231

Date Published	Headline	Editorial/Op-ed/Report
Feb 10, 2019	Nun’s Charge of Rapes by a Bishop Shocks India	Report by Maria Abi-Habib and Suhasini Raj
Apr 21, 2019	Religious Minorities Across Asia Suffer Amid Surge in Sectarian Politics	Report by Hannah Beech, Dharisha Bastians, and Kai Schultz

In the three lists above we have a sample of the articles and editorials that *NYT* has published about the status of Christians in India. As Rao (2020d) has noted, in 2017 the focus of the reports was mostly on the presumed threats to the Christian minority, and where Christians in India were reported as afraid of celebrating Christmas. Rao (2020d) had pointed out that the *NYT* has not published reports about the billions of dollars poured into India over the past few decades by American and West European church groups, NGOs, and activists to encourage conversion of Hindus to Christianity. The Joshua Project, whose avowed goal is to make the world Christian, is not shy about its plans for India (Bhattacharjee, 2018), but *The New York Times* has not shown a light on these activities, and how these ‘church planting’ activities and sustained campaigns of converting India’s Hindus have led to conflicts and skirmishes across families, communities, and regions in India.

Rao (2020d) reported that in 2018, *NYT*’s reporters were focused on the killing of John Chau, an American Christian missionary, who went out into the remote, protected Sentinelese Islands, where some of India’s tribes live, and was killed by the Sentinelese. The *NYT* offered its readers thirteen reports/analyses/letters to the editor, including this request by the editors on the foolhardy mission of John Chau: “Have you worked as a missionary? We want to hear from you” (November 26, 2018). Rao (2020d) argued that the Sentinelese tribes have had no contact with the “outside” world, and even one contact by an outsider could result in the decimation of the small population because of any disease or viruses carried by the visitor. The John Chau story was reported over five days by five reporters and/or correspondents for *The New York Times*. The excessive coverage by *NYT* reporters/editors of this incident is indicative of the implicit racism and religious supremacism where the proselytism of Christians continues to get top-billing despite the debilitating and devastating effects of such proselytizing recorded over centuries, including at the beginning stages of proselytism (Nixey, 2018).

In 2019 the *NYT* published reports about the terrorist attacks carried out by Muslims in Sri Lanka. In a commentary published on April 21, 2019, listed above, even though Muslim groups bombed churches in Sri Lanka killing 259 people, the lead paragraph is about “vulnerabilities of religious minorities” in India. No such bombings of churches have been reported in India, though there have appeared a variety of “fake news items” about “attacks on churches” in India, fabricated by and circulated in Christian pamphlets and publications in India, and around the world (Weisner, 2020; Zee News, 2015).

‘Cow Vigilantism’

Among the headlines listed above are five (April 5, 2017; April 17, 2017; June 29, 2017; July 21, 2018; June 25, 2019) that refer to “Hindu vigilantes” who “lynched” Muslims because they were either transporting cattle to the slaughterhouses or because they were allegedly caught with beef in their kitchens. A quick search of *The New York Times*’ archives using the search terms – “India,” “lynching” (from May 2014, when the BJP won the first general election with Modi as leader to December 2019 when Modi led the BJP again to victory) revealed these interesting set of numbers: May 01 to December 31, 2014 – 6 records; January 01 to December 31, 2015 – 15 records; January 01 to December 31 2016 – 5 records; January 01 to December 31, 2017 – 19 records; January 01 to December 31, 2018 – 30 records; and January 01 to December 31, 2019 – 42 records. As India began preparing for elections, we see how the *NYT* ratcheted up its coverage of these so-called “lynchings” in 2018 and 2019. However, media scholar/observer Juluri (2019) points this out:

Western news media has also completely ignored the killing of several Hindus, including Dalit Hindus, by Muslim criminals and lynch mobs in recent years, even while promoting a fear campaign about an alleged Hindu ‘cow vigilante’ epidemic in India based on dubious data provided by a supposed research outfit that has now actually ceased operations presumably because of its inability to justify its false claims any longer.

The term “lynching” has gained coinage over the past few years in India to highlight mob violence, whereas “lynching” in the American context had/has a particular, centuries-old, horrific, community if not state-sanctioned vigilante action by Whites against Blacks, with the latter hanged from trees, dragged down streets, shot at willfully, raped, and brutalised (Ore, 2019). Using that term in the Indian context where punishment is meted out to anyone the village/community residents suspect – of child kidnappings, killing

of a child/person/cow in a traffic accident, witchcraft, cattle theft, etc. -- does not equate to American-style racial “lynching”. Therefore, the term “lynching” that is used specifically in the instance of Hindus beating up Muslims for cattle theft is new and deliberate.

The selective data collected and distributed by sources in India and consumed by Western media has been documented by Sharma (2018), and the silence of both Indian media (English) and Western media about attacks by Muslims on Hindus has been tweeted by an Indian academic, Prof. Anand Ranganathan, who lists 250 incidents in which Muslims attacked Hindus – individual attacks, mob rampages, rapes, burning and destruction of temples, destruction of property and business -- over a period of two years – 2017-2018.

In May 2018, the Indian Ambassador to the US, Navtej Sarna, told reporters that the “American mainstream media continue to present an inaccurate portrait of India, overplaying stories about caste and dowry issues and overlooking the bigger picture”. He said little had changed in the attitudes of and reporting by American media despite his four-year effort as India’s minister of press and information at the Indian Embassy in Washington, D.C. (Haniffa, 2018).

Conclusion:

This is a preliminary empirical study. We set out to ask what the elite American media’s India agenda was, and whether they offered a range of material, both descriptive and commentative (to use Inden’s terms) to their readers that offered a more complete and variegated picture of India, especially in matters of religion and religious identity, and political affiliation. Inden has argued that the manner in which the West continues to present India is in the form of “imperial knowledges” and “...universalizing discourses, the world-constituting cosmologies, ontologies, and epistemologies, produced in those complex polities at their upper reaches by those persons and institutions who claim to speak with authority” (p. 36). Inden, in the context that he reads Western texts on India, points out that these hegemonic agents “almost invariably offer(ed)... some metaphor-plated essence...” (p. 36) of the other, and thus we find in the headlines and leads a large amount of text that can be categorized as hegemonic, interpretive, and explanatory. The reports and commentaries in *The New York Times* over the three year period – 2017-2019 – do resemble the discourse of the old “orientalists” and presented as “a form of knowledge that is both different from, and superior to, the knowledges that the Orientals have of themselves” (p. 37). The “new” Western media proffered discourse, with seals of approval by others in authority in Western institutions, is learned and practiced by many of the Westernised/Anglicised “Orientals” themselves, who hold positions of power on their home turf, and who are then anointed as specialists by their Western colleagues and interlocutors, and whose work is labeled “rational, logical, scientific, realistic, and objective” (Inden, p. 37).

The New York Times seeks to balance its opinion page commentary by giving space to rightwing/conservative columnists. However, in their coverage of India on the op-ed pages, no space is offered to those who have a different story to tell about India, Hindus, Hinduism, and the threats that India faces from monopolistic/monotheistic religions and from dangerous neighbors who seek to destroy India “by a thousand cuts” (Chellaney, 2006). *The New York Times* does offer stories on India that are “benign” – the ones about Indian food, or a dance review, or a spice mix or a cake inspired by India. But these too are offered with a caste, politics, or religion veneer as media scholar Juluri (September 16, 2019) points out:

Hinduism and Hindu identity are evoked... as a cause or centrally relevant issue in stories about Indian soldiers’ funerals, the timing of a US political appointment, a musician’s experience of racism in Myanmar, farmers’ poverty, death due to smoke inhalation in Nepal, and the rape and murder of a child.... Why is an indigenous cultural tradition (broadly calling itself Hinduism) sought to be portrayed as the *cause*, or at least an ‘angle,’ in so many stories that deal with violence, depravity, and oppression? Conversely... why is there a profound omission of reports about the same community being demonized here as victims of violence, depravity, and oppression?

Inden (1986) makes a keen observation about Western Indologists and how they have robbed Hindus/Indians of agency and ignored their ability or will to act as individuals. Every aspect of

Indian/Hindu life is sought to be circumscribed by “caste” and human agency is “substantialized” by caste. That the *NYT* reports and commentaries seek to understand and report Indian events through this kind of substantialization has led to the deliberate and sustained targeting of Hindus and Hinduism. Inden (1986) says of Western Indology: “It has committed Indology, largely descended from British empiricism and utilitarianism, to a curious and contradictory mixture of societalism, in which Indian actions are attributed to social groups -- caste, village, linguistic region, religion, and joint family -- because there are no individuals in India, and individualism, in which Indians' acts are attributed to bad motives” (p. 403). Paraphrasing Said, Inden, in his later work (1990/2000), therefore concludes: “A genuine critique of Orientalism does *not* revolve around the question of prejudice or bias, of the like or dislike of the people and cultures..., or of a lack either of objectivity or of empathy. Emotions, attitudes, and values are, to be sure, an important part of orientalist discourse, but they are not coterminous with the structure of ideas that constitutes orientalism or with the relationship of dominance embedded in the structure” (p. 38).

We have sought to highlight the consistently slanted, biased, and tendentious reporting using the theoretical lenses offered in “orientalism” and “occidentalism” to understand how the American/Western media’s hegemonic discourse helps in the manufacturing of a “new” India akin to that of the “old” India of orientalists’ imagination and reading. As Inden suggests, “Any serious criticism of orientalist discourse in the many variant forms it has taken spatially and temporally must not be content simply to rectify ‘attitudes’ toward the Other. It must also penetrate the emotional minefield surrounding scholarship on Others. And it must directly confront the central question of knowledge and its multiple relations to power in orientalist representations of Asians” (p. 38).

The representations of the “Other” in the elite Western media are interesting to study not only because they help explain the role of media in manufacturing hegemonic discourse, but also because it helps us understand the role of representations in identity formation in the political space. For example, by constantly identifying the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as a “Hindu Nationalist Party,” or supporters of the BJP as “right wing Hindu nationalists,” *The New York Times* creates a binary which implies that every Indian citizen who voted for the BJP, or who is sympathetic to even a part of its political ideology is a Hindu nationalist, regardless of whether he or she is a Hindu or a nationalist. These representations tend to over-simplify and reduce the complex identities of citizens of the largest democracy in the world into essentialized categories.

No simple, essentialist, reductionist representation by media can do justice to the complexities of national and cultural narratives. In their attempts at proscribing, circumscribing, or slanting such narratives, Western media are involved in an exercise similar to the construction of India by Western Indologists. We cannot fully comprehend modern Western media narratives of ‘others’ via theoretical frameworks like “framing,” or consider these media reports as mere indications of a Western liberal bias. There is, as the old adage goes, more to this than meets the eye, and we therefore need new tools to understand such narratives. We hope this study is heuristic and enables other scholars to use the theoretical lenses we have offered to do more careful studies of Western media reporting of and commentaries on others, and how powerful media houses like *The New York Times* may have become ideological mills, as Bari Weiss (Saad, July 14, 2020) who resigned from the *NYT*, complained, saying “Stories are chosen and told in a way to satisfy the narrowest of audiences, rather than to allow a curious public to read about the world and then draw their own conclusions.” But scholars who have studied orientalist and occidentalist discourse have other concerns about such discourse-manufacturing agendas, and we need therefore new lenses to study how certain “others” – like Hindus, and their concerns, inclinations, lives – are described, framed, stereotyped, depicted and characterized.

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