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*Ethnicity, Nationalism,
and Cyberspace*

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North American Hindus, the Sense of History, and the Politics of Internet Diasporism

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Democracy and Authoritarianism in Cyberspace

Nothing has been as much celebrated in our times as the information superhighway. Everyone is agreed that never before has information proliferated so profusely, diminishing as is commonly thought the boundaries and barriers that have held people apart—though many voices have sought to distinguish between “knowledge” and “information,” while others have railed at how the overwhelming surfeit of information has made some people incapable of thinking beyond trivia and the “factoid.” We speak with unreflective ease of the “information revolution,” and in this clichéd expression there is the most unambiguous assertion of confidence in the benign telos of history. Some commentators, alluding to more recent developments such as *e-commerce*, speak even of going “beyond the information revolution,” but there is something of a consensus that the information revolution has been to our age what the Industrial Revolution was to the eighteenth century.¹

The advocates of the information superhighway have been prolific in voicing the view that cyberspace embodies immense revolutionary possibilities for creating democratic polities and enfranchising those communities that have so far existed only at the margins of the tremendous information explosion of recent years. The Internet, so argue its unabashed votaries, creates a polyphony of voices, allows the hitherto silenced to speak,² offers forums for dissenting views, destroys the monopoly of old elites, disperses the sources of information and knowledge, empowers the dispossessed, and assists in the formation of new identities—constituted not only by such obvious markers as race, gender, and ethnicity, but also by religious freedom and sexual orientation, linguistic affiliation, political ideologies, intellectual interests, customs, shared traditions and histories, and hobbies. The “imagined communities” of which Benedict Anderson spoke flower in unprecedented ways on the Internet; the shackles that chained the working classes 150 years after Karl Marx invoked the cry of revolution and urged them to take destiny into their own hands, now seem broken. In the then hip voice of *Mondo 2000*, to quote from the inaugural issue

in 1989, “The cybernet is in place. . . . The old information elites are crumbling. The kids are at the controls. This magazine is about what to do until the *millennium* comes. We’re talking about Total Possibilities. Radical assaults on the limits of biology, gravity and time. The end of artificial Scarcity. The dawn of a new humanism. High-jacking technology for personal empowerment, fun and games.”³ Just when boredom appeared to be the most pressing problem for the affluent West, and the usual sources of entertainment seemed to have exhausted their potential to amuse, the Internet arose to offer a jaded people a new source of enchantment. Cyberspace has restored to the West that ludic element that was once so essential an element of its being, to vanish when confronted with the unrelenting demands—whether upon the family, the workplace, or social institutions—of modernity. Meanwhile, boredom, a disease that is inextricably linked to Western notions of time, is now poised to find its newest victims in the developing world.

The enthusiastic advocates of cyberspace have stretched the case for its allegedly democratic properties much further. The futurist Alvin Toffler and his associates speak of the post-scarcity information civilization as a Third Wave of humankind. If in the First Wave civilization was predominantly agricultural, and the Second Wave ushered in the age of industrial production, in the Third Wave “the central resource—a single phrase broadly encompassing data, information, images, symbols, culture, ideology and values—is actionable knowledge.”⁴ Cyberspace is universal, it is its own ecosystem; it is “inhabited by knowledge, including incorrect ideas, existing in electronic form.”⁵ As one might expect, that perennial American language of the *frontier* is incurably a part of the language of cyberspace enthusiasts: thus, Toffler and his cohorts speak of the “bioelectronic frontier,” which has emerged just as the American dream of the limitless, yet again contracting, frontier seemed doomed to extinction.⁶ The bioelectronic frontier points to the death of that fundamental embodiment of centralized values—namely, the bureaucratic organization of which the government is the supreme instantiation; and consequently cyberspace is the space of unregulated freedom, the logical culmination of the human hunger for liberty from constraints and access to limitless markets. “Cyberspace is the land of knowledge,” write Toffler and his associates, “and the exploration of that land can be a civilization’s truest, highest calling.”⁷ Here, at the frontier of knowledge, one can create one’s own basket of the fruits of wisdom: “Demassification, customization, individuality, freedom—these are the keys to success for Third Wave civilization.” In cyberspace is writ large the continuing story of America’s espousal of the values of individuality over conformity, achievement over consensus, and the celebration of difference—all typified, if only as an instance of the occasional negative excess of American democracy, in the figure of the hacker, a near impossibility in “the more formalized and regulated democracies of Europe and Japan.” If the destiny of the world is to follow the example and leadership of the United States, as Francis Fukuyama and other exponents of the end of history

have repeatedly reminded us, then the values of cyberspace, which are none other than expressions of the American ethos, become the values of the world. Cyberspace confers on humankind a "Magna Carta for the Knowledge Age."⁸

If the conquest of the Americas furnished the Spaniards with a charter for conquest and colonization, the enthusiasts of cyberspace point—five hundred years after the conquistadors first began to leave behind a trail of charred ruins, shattered lives, and decapitated Indians—to the Americas as the site for new forms of resistance to global capitalism, as the originary point from where a truly new world order can be envisioned at the cusp of the millennium. The laboratories and universities of the United States may have seeded the script for the cyberspace revolution, but it was enacted in the relatively remoter areas of Mexico, when the Zapatista National Liberation Army led the people of Chiapas in an insurrection on New Year's Day 1994. Occupying San Cristobal de las Casas and five smaller towns, the Zapatistas declared war against the Mexican government, issued a manifesto of demands, invited foreign observers, monitors, and sympathizers to Chiapas, and initiated an international media campaign to gain support for their cause. Vastly outnumbered by the army and security forces that were rushed to Chiapas within a couple of days of the insurrection, the Zapatistas nonetheless not only held out, forcing the government to the negotiation table, but also introduced a new element in revolutionary warfare. Writing in April 1995, the Mexican foreign minister, José Angel Gurria, doubtless bewildered at the developments of the previous year, noted that "Chiapas . . . is a place where there has not been a shot fired in the last fifteen months. . . . The shots lasted ten days, and ever since the war has been a war of ink, of written word, a war on the Internet."⁹ Subcommandante Marcos, the energetic and mystery-shrouded leader of the Zapatistas, himself remarked that "one space . . . so new that no one thought a guerilla could turn to it, is the information superhighway, the Internet. It was territory not occupied by anybody . . . the problem that distresses Gurria is that he has to fight against an image that he cannot control from Mexico, because the information is simultaneously on all sides."¹⁰ It is this phenomenon, of a war inspired by the battle tactics of Genghis Khan but made possible by the "information revolution," which RAND researcher David Ronfeldt has variously described as "cyberwar" when the conflict takes on a military aspect, and "netwar" when the conflict is at the "societal" level.¹¹ Though from his standpoint the advent of netwar is scarcely to be welcomed, as it poses new threats to American national security, "digital Zapatismo" has gained many voluble adherents,¹² who construe the rhizomatic characteristics of the Internet as the most likely font of new forms of insurrectionary activity.¹³ The advocates of cyberspace do not, however, have the field to themselves. Their critics have constructed a less elaborate, but by no means insignificant, account of the deleterious consequences of the new computer-based information and communication technologies. They are more inclined to describe the information superhighway as a charter for the disenfranchisement of those who are

already underprivileged, authorizing the further polarization of the rich and the poor. The grave inequities between the postindustrial nations and the rest of the world will be further aggravated, and cyberspace, argue its detractors, can only sharpen the boundaries between the haves and the have-nots in the industrializing nations. In even as large a country as India, the largest democracy in the world, only a million people have Internet connections, and they are the ones who already have at their disposal fax, telephone, and other means of communication, just as they are the ones who are privileged to take overseas trips: Net surfers and tourists are two classes of people who largely coincide. It is their views, which are wedded to transforming India in the image of the West and making India into a strong modern nation-state, that predominate among Indian policy makers and are critical in shaping the view of India in the West. It is the agenda of the "Internet elites," if they may be so termed, that dictates the modernization and liberalization of the Indian economy, and it is their interests and ambitions that have led to the emergence of a cellular phone culture, while the greater part of the country remains without reliable ordinary telephone service. The emergence of an internationally renowned software industry even while nearly 50 percent of the Indian population remains mired in poverty is yet another one of the anomalies engendered by the culture of the Internet elites. Their mobility in cyberspace furnishes them with those opportunities that allow them to work within the world of international finance and business; like the elites of the "first world," they are beginning to live in time, and space poses no barriers for them.¹⁴ The time-space compression that cyberspace typifies only works to the advantage of these elites. Cyberspace, then, is yet another mode of self-aggrandizement, and it is calculated, certainly in India and the rest of the "developing" world, to narrow a franchise which was achieved with great struggle.¹⁵

Questions of political economy aside, it has been argued that cyberspace represents a more ominous phase of Western colonialism, the homogenization of knowledge and, in tandem, the elimination of local knowledge systems. Cyberspace stands for the renewed triumph of all those categories of thought by means of which the West has been able to establish its dominance over other parts of the globe. "Western civilization has always been obsessed with new territories to conquer," writes Ziauddin Sardar on cyberspace, and cyberspace is the newest domain that it seeks to colonize.¹⁶ Where the long arm of the colonial state and fascist organizations could not reach, there cyberspace has made inroads; those remote spots that were inaccessible to missionaries and colonial administrators, where the Coke bottle could not be dropped from the air, now enter the stream of globalization. Where before the notion of "place" was displaced by "space" to render local histories indistinct and so pave the way for colonialism,¹⁷ now "space" is regurgitated back into "place," the place from where the browser is guided into unknown domains. Radical dissent—which is only possible with incommensurability and profits from inassimilation into

dominant strands of thought—is brought into the marketplace; and so, dissent itself becomes homogenized, and those very modalities of thought that held out the possibility of ‘interrogating’ received notions arrive in packaged forms. Cyberspace renders complete that colonization that sheer force and military might could not achieve; indeed, while cyberspace may not entirely obviate the necessity of a military-industrial complex, as the immensely technologically driven NATO assault upon Serbia visibly demonstrated, it enlists more hegemonic and insidious categories to eliminate dissent and create new hierarchies. Some critics of cyberspace, even while agreeing with Carlos Fuentes that the Zapatista insurrection was no “Sandinista-Castroite-Marxist-Leninist” rebellion, but rather the first postcommunist and postmodern insurgency,¹⁸ have profound misgivings that anything postmodern, most eminently cyberspace, can be anything other than a sign of imperialism.¹⁹

Though the activists who staged a marvelously disruptive demonstration against the World Trade Organization (WTO) on the occasion of its ministerial meetings in late November 1999 were summoned to Seattle by messages widely dispersed on the Internet,²⁰ it is doubtful that these activists, buoyed by their Internet successes, have reflected sufficiently on the ironic fact that the Internet is avowedly the most expressive realization of that very idea of ‘globalization’ against which they militate. To make the point more sharply, though scattered intellectuals and activists might, say, militate against development as perhaps the most unfortunate idea to afflict humankind, cyberspace is itself intrinsically disposed toward the idea of development, effortlessly hospitable to the idea of limitless growth. Similarly, though proponents of cyberspace speak of its role in creating communities, particularly in societies where the family is presumed to have broken down and where other traditional institutions have been unable to offer the succor that people require in the course of daily life, critics argue that cyberspace trivializes the notion of “community.”

It is the particular feature of real—or, shall we say, grounded—communities that they are born amidst conflict and must thrive amidst conflicting interests: they must perforce accommodate the fat and the slim, the healthy and the diseased, women and men, white and colored, the aged and the young; cybercommunities, contrariwise, are founded on the principle of exclusion, and inclusion in the community is only a mode of signaling someone else’s marginalization. Cybercommunitarians, who have no appetite for pluralism, recognize no community that does not exist to do their own bidding, or that would ask of its members the fulfillment of responsibilities. With the click of a mouse, the community can be shut out. As for the notion that cyberspace heralds the arrival of a post-scarcity civilization, the detractors can only mock at the presumptuousness and hubris of the affluent. True, there is no “scarcity” of information, but it is foolish to confuse information with knowledge, and far more depraved to imagine that knowledge can substitute for wisdom. Put rather plainly, the so-called information revolution seems to be little better than what one writer,

David Shenk, has described as “data smog.”²¹ There is yet the cruel irony that while the advocates of cyberspace work to create the rules governing the post-scarcity information civilization that they inhabit, in many parts of the world a new scarcity has emerged as the grinding reality for the masses. Surprisingly, even when the realization has dawned that starvation, famines, and the shortages of food are political problems, the supposed surfeit of information has done nothing to diminish the supposed scarcity of food.²²

One of the iron rules of cyberspace, suggests Shenk, is that it is intrinsically Republican, or inegalitarian; its most keen enthusiasts are white, upper-class males.²³ There is the obvious consideration that if cyberspace can be deployed to enfranchise marginalized people and communities, it also services the ambitions and designs of racist ideologues, misogynists, anti-Semites, and other white male supremacists. As the recent, ominously massive, compilation in a CD-ROM by the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles of over five hundred websites devoted to white supremacy indubitably suggests, in this matter as in most others, the supporters of racism, fascism, and Nazism have been more diligent in turning to new technologies than those people committed to more democratic and egalitarian forms of politics. Against this, the proponents of cyberspace can point to the mobilization of tribal peoples throughout the world, and the effectiveness of the Internet in yielding a possibly emancipatory Fourth World politics, a worldwide coalition of aboriginal people. But if cyberspace is what its enthusiasts admit—namely, a deregulated and decentralized zone with minimal rules for engagement—those are the very conditions under which the Republican paradise would flourish. Never did presumptive savagery, or the customs of the heathen, prevent a multinational corporation from conducting business. In this paradise, in the name of freedom, all dissenting histories are absorbed, commemorated only as relics of a previous age. Could these be the conditions under which certain histories will predominate, while other histories are erased? And could these be the conditions under which a cyberdiasporic politics of Hinduism has found comfortable refuge and a refurbished home? To ponder how the politics of Hinduism has played itself out in cyberspace, and Hinduism itself gradually merged into what is very nearly its opposite, namely Hindutva politics, it is well to consider first the Indian diasporic presence in the United States.

The Post-Industrial Vedic Diaspora: Hindus in the United States

More than 1.3 million Indians reside in the United States, and of these the preponderant number are Hindus. Most Indians have done exceedingly well for themselves in, to appropriate the Biblical metaphor of a people who are the very embodiment of a diasporic sensibility, the land ‘flowing with milk and honey’ (Exodus 3:8); numerous studies have established that their per capita income is among the highest of any racial or ethnic group in the United States, and for some years they were the most affluent community.²⁴ Almost everywhere

in the professions, Indians are well represented, and in some they have created an enviable niche for themselves. Though they make up less than 0.8 percent of the American population, as far back as the early 1990s they comprised 5 percent of the investment bankers and financial consultants on Wall Street. Their contribution to the sciences and engineering is even more formidable, perhaps even overwhelming; and it has become something of a cliché, at least among Indians, to speak of Silicon Valley as though it were a part of an Indian landscape. In middle-class homes in India, particularly where English is routinely spoken, it is not uncommon to find parents anticipating and even planning a future for their children not merely in Silicon Plateau (the new name for the "garden city" of Bangalore, where the software explosion in India took place a few years ago), but in Silicon Valley.²⁵ It may not even be long before Indians, like a previous generation of first-time visitors from Bombay and Calcutta to London who saw in the metropole a copy of their home town, might start thinking of Silicon Valley as the Bangalore (or Hyderabad, if future trends may be predicted) of the West Coast. In the crucible of this culture of Silicon Valley and Plateau, Indians have even generated their own postmodern and cyberdiasporic jokes: thus, the Hindi film villain Ajit, around whom an entire industry of jokes has developed, commands his henchman Robert to render extinct the life of the hero by placing him in a "microprocessor," so that he can die "byte by byte."²⁶ From these manifold computer companies a sizable number of Indians have moved into venture capital, in a spirit that is perhaps reminiscent of the entrepreneurship, trading acumen, and financial ambitions of earlier generations of Indian traders and businessmen who once dominated the Indian Ocean trading networks. Finally, in the domain of medicine, where over 4 percent of the doctors are estimated to be of Indian origin, a similar tale of Indian success is easily told, and the strength of an organization such as the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin can be gauged by the fact that its 1995 annual meeting was addressed by no lesser a luminary—however disgraced—than President Bill Clinton.²⁷

Along with some other Asian Americans, Indian Americans are often characterized as a model minority; and yet they construe themselves as "invisible." In the United States, the Sinic element has always predominated over the Indic in the understanding of what was meant by "Asian," and the presence of the Chinese and the Japanese antedates the presence of Indians by one generation. The Asian American, in the imagination of the white American, is an oriental figure of Mongoloid features; and Asian Americans themselves, viewed as a whole, appear to have been largely indifferent, except very recently, to claims that Indian Americans should be accommodated under that rubric. Nor is "Indian" very useful as a marker of identity, since that is liable to render the Indian into a specimen of a Native American tribe. It is only a very slight exaggeration to suggest that from "India" one easily moves on to "Indiana," a rather more familiar terrain to Americans, though no one, if optimism be allowed, ought to think

of India as similarly nondescript as its near namesake. Nor, in the matter of color, is the Indian easily positioned. In the early part of the century, Indians (or "Hindoos" as they were then called, regardless of their religious faith) endeavored to be treated as whites;²⁸ in more recent years, when affirmative action was more warmly received than it is in the present political climate, Indians strove to be considered nonwhite, a minority people. In Britain, they are lumped with 'black' people; in South Africa under apartheid, Indians were distinguished from white, black, and colored people. This apprehension of 'invisibility' is compounded by other psychological and cultural factors, far too numerous for any detailed consideration at present. Suffice to note that since India has for some time been "the largest most unimportant country in the world,"²⁹ Indians in the United States fear that this stigma is attached to their own persons; and since South Asia has historically been the only home of Hindus, with the exception of Hindu communities that as far back as a millennium ago came to be established in Bali, Java, and some other parts of Southeast Asia, Indians do not doubt that India is condemned to oblivion, unless of course Hinduism can somehow be construed as a threat to the Stars and Stripes. I suspect that at times devout Hindus, whose piety is in no way incompatible with a barely concealed interest in wanting the emergence of a powerful Indian nation-state, have wanted nothing more than that India should turn staunchly communist, or into a hotbed of 'Islamic fundamentalism': their anxieties about invisibility would certainly disappear. India might then even be the beneficiary of the kind of monumental aid that was pumped into Pakistan when neighboring Afghanistan came under Soviet influence. Such is the Hinduism of some Hindus that even communism can be construed as a form of Hinduism: not only are Hindu deities multiarmed, but Hinduism can be fruitfully and ecumenically multipronged.

However acute the problems Indians Americans appear to have in nominating themselves and in allowing themselves to be named, they indubitably belong as well, or so one might think, to a postindustrial civilization. In several respects, the Cold War climate was propitious for Indians desirous of settling in the United States. As the principal political and economic power, the United States was bound to spend increased amounts on research and development to retain its edge in military technology, aerospace engineering, telecommunications, medical research, and "big science." The American military, notwithstanding the conclusion of the Cold War, has continued to display a monstrous and insatiable appetite for new and ever more sophisticated hardware, and with the exponential growth of the computer industry over the last decade, the need for professionals with backgrounds in science, engineering, computers, and medicine has persisted. In Indians, American universities, industries, scientific organizations, and other public and private enterprises found a people who, while proficient in English, also had the requisite skills and professional training. Thus, unlike Indians in many parts of the globe where their presence arose from circumstances of indentured servitude, or the labor shortages in

the aftermath of World War II, Indians in the United States are predominantly professionals, playing a critical role in shaping a post-scarcity, postindustrial information civilization. It is only very recently that they have thought their professional services, which have earned them considerable affluence, also entitled them to some measure of political influence and thereby to lessen that invisibility, the fear of which shadows every successful Indian American. Indeed, it endlessly rankled these successful Indian American professionals that Pakistan and Pakistani Americans were, as they perceived, more successful lobbyists on Capitol Hill; and the reverse suffered by Pakistan in 1999, when the United States unequivocally condemned Pakistani adventurism in the Himalayan heights of Kargil, was assessed by professional Indians, who waged a tremendous and ultimately successful campaign to have Congress pass a resolution condemning Pakistan's abrogation of the Line of Control as the first sign of the political influence that they feel they can rightfully exercise among American lawmakers.³⁰ It is these same professional Indian Hindus who, now mindful of the strength of their numbers, their professional standing in society, and the power of the Internet, orchestrated with success a campaign to have Warner Brothers, producers of Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*, delete from the film verses from the Hindu scripture *Bhagavad Gita* that had been inserted in the midst of an orgy scene.³¹

The postindustrial civilization of North American Hindus is also, if a paradox may be entertained; a Vedic civilization. Its conception of India, as I argue later, is largely derived from the texts and practices of remote antiquity, which supposedly furnish us with a vision of Hinduism in its pristine state. There are indubitably those Hindus who, without the least trace of humor or irony, fervently argue that there is virtually no scientific advancement that was not already anticipated in the Vedas or other ancient Hindu texts, and that in the visions of Indian seers are to be found the blueprints for rocket science, satellites, and the supersonic jet fighters of our times. The very term *stealth fighters* seems to evoke subliminal memories among the unamused Hindus of awe-inspiring and magical weapons wielded—often treacherously, as if by stealth—by Brahma, Vishnu, or Shiva, usually with incalculable and devastating effect. These Hindus are dedicated to the proposition that the highest truths of Hinduism are easily reconciled with the highest truths of science, and that the ancient seers and nuclear physicists have intuited the same ultimate reality. These Hindus point to Robert Oppenheimer's famous invocation, at the precise moment of the first nuclear test, of a passage from the *Bhagavad Gita*, or to the interest that the most eminent physicists, such as Albert Einstein and Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar, have taken in Indian philosophical thought.

However, this is scarcely the most substantive sense in which the Hindu diaspora in the United States is a harbinger of Vedic civilization. Though in Uttar Pradesh a dalit woman,³² who not long ago would have been resigned to having herself viewed as part of a collective of "untouchables," rose a few years ago to become the chief minister of the state, a position only second to that of the prime

minister in any traditional reckoning of Indian political fortunes in the electoral age, in the Vedic Diaspora of Hindus such an outcome is considered to be well beyond the ken of contemplation. It defies their sense of Hindu hierarchies that a lower-caste person, and a woman at that, could be elevated to such eminence. To gain an inkling of what this Vedic civilization of diasporic Hindus looks like, one has only to consider the activities of the Saiva Siddhanta Church in the northern California town of Concord. A few years ago, the *pujari*, or priest, of this temple placed a rope about ten feet away from the deity, and strung a sign on it that loudly proclaimed, "Vegetarians only beyond this point." At a slightly greater distance, another rope was strung across the room, and the sign on this advised the worshippers, "Hindu clothing only beyond this point."³³ Numerous devotees suddenly found themselves out in the cold, denied *darshan* [that is, the gaze, and thus the blessing] of their deity, condemned to be pariahs. While it is true that this particular Hindu institution is headed by an American swami who is based in Hawaii—where a magnificent Hindu temple is being constructed according to the stipulations of the ancient *shilpasastras*, or Hindu temple-architecture manuals—its following consists largely of Indian Hindus.³⁴ Though Marxist scholarship has, with reasonable certainty, established that the ancient Aryans were beef-eaters,³⁵ and this continues to be at least a matter of debate in India, among Hindus in the United States it is an article of faith to suppose that vegetarianism has been critical to Vedic civilization from the outset. On "Hindu clothing," the innovation here is a reversion to the practice, common among the most orthodox Hindu temples in South India, whereby men must shed themselves of leather products and stitched clothes before entering the temple and drape a *dhoti* around them. It is well to argue that one must come before God unstitched and untethered, but the Hindus in the United States show every tendency to adopt the literalism that is so characteristically an American trait.

To suggest that the Hindu diaspora in the United States aspires to be Vedic is to point to the manner in which Hindu devotees here have developed an ossified conception of their faith, frozen in time. Though "homeland" Hinduism continues to evolve, and deities are born and die, and the faith acquires new resonances while shedding some of its older emphases, the Hinduism of its Indian American devotees, one can reasonably maintain, displays the most retrograde features. Certainly, as far as I am aware, there is nothing to suggest that Hinduism in the United States has jettisoned some of the rituals that accompany the faith in India; quite to the contrary, as even a cursory examination of *India-West*, a California-based newspaper with a circulation of twenty thousand suggests, the Hindus here have embraced forms of worship pursued by only the most dedicated Hindus in India. The religion pages of the weekly newspaper are full of announcements about various obscure *pujas*, (acts of religious worship) many conducted to celebrate rites or in honor of one or more deity, when these particular *pujas* are scarcely celebrated by any but the most orthodox Hindus in India itself. Whether in the political, cultural, or psychosocial domain, the

Hinduism of North American Hindus can in no manner be viewed as a "lighter" form of the faith.

Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to argue that Hinduism in the United States has been transformed, to a degree that is not merely unhealthy but politically undesirable, into what is known as Hindutva, a Hinduism stripped to its imagined essences, and purportedly reinvigorated by arming it with attributes commonly thought to belong to the more "masculine" faiths of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. It is no accident, I might note parenthetically, that relations between India and Israel, which is seen by admiring proponents of militant Hinduism as a no-nonsense masculine state that knows how to deal with terrorists, secessionists, and disgruntled rebels, have improved vastly over the last two years that the Bharatiya Janata Party, which openly advocates Hindu rule in India, has been in political power. While the rise of militant Hinduism in India is a phenomenon too well-known and well-documented to require any elaborate discussion, it merits discussion, that the consolidation of identity around the notion of highly differentiated religious communities, a process that was first set in motion by the colonial state in the nineteenth century, began to acquire ominous overtones around the mid-1980s. With the increasing turn to history—among a people typically characterized in colonial discourses as devoid of the historical sensibility—as a mode of living with the present and acquitting oneself for the tasks of citizenship, Hindus began to think of the wrongs, as they thought, committed against them by Muslim invaders. The burden of a cruel past, in which they had been reduced to subjection, and their faith trampled upon by those 'foreigners' who had acquired political power, began to weigh heavily upon them; and the colonial argument—that the Hindus were a supine people incapable of defending their own interests—left its impression upon them.

The sense of grievance among Hindus began to crystallize further when the government was seen as pandering to the economic and cultural demands of minority communities, particularly Muslims, from the grossest political calculations. Militant Hindus speak disparagingly of Indian secularism, and proclaim that the Indian state is wedded to "pseudo-secularism"; the minorities are said to be the beneficiaries of government largesse, and certain Hindus, belonging to a community that accounts for about 78 percent of India's population, complain of how they have been reduced to a minority in their own country. Drawing upon the writings of Veer Savarkar, Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, and other Hindu ideologues who defined India as the eternal land of the Hindus and insisted that the "blood of Hindus" streamed through everyone born in the motherland (*janmabhoomi*), the advocates of a renewed Hindu militancy have endeavored to turn India—to deploy Islamic terminology—into the land of the "pure and the faithful." Muslims and exponents of other faiths are asked to understand that they are Hindus, and they are enjoined to return to the bosom; and as for those who unremittingly cling to their faith, they must perforce understand, so argue militant Hindus, that they live in India at the pleasure of

the Hindus. While loudly declaring themselves to be tolerant of other faiths, in keeping with the idea that Hinduism has been an intrinsically pluralistic religion, these Hindutvavadis or militant exponents of Hinduism have sought to shape their faith in the image of those very other faiths that they decry. Consequently, both Islam and Christianity are seen as displaying an admirable unity and rationality not stricken by the effeminacy, devotional excess, or the needless multiplicity—whether in the arena of deities, or sources of doctrinal authority—that are construed as having crippled Hinduism. The militant Hindus have no greater desire than to turn Hinduism into a more masculine faith, more vigorous and uncompromising in the defense of its devotees; and the destruction of the Babri Masjid in December, 1992, was the most visible sign of that ferocious intent.³⁶ Thus has Hinduism, in their hands, become Hindutva ideology.

Among Hindus in the United States, the Hindutvavadis appeared to have gained ascendancy. Though Hindus in the United States are just as fragmented and dispersed as anywhere else, their organizations torn apart by common rifts over ethnic and linguistic affiliations or other anxieties about their "identity," over the last few years they have shown signs of being able to cohere together, carried forth by pride in those features of Indian civilization that are seen as specially emblematic of Hindu tradition and culture. Indeed, they have collapsed the distinction between *Indian* and *Hindu*, and some might also be inclined to altogether jettison the category *Indian*. One of the most prominent of the Hindutva ideologues, Ashok Singhal, the general-secretary of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), an organization set up to perform the cultural work of Hinduism and make it into a religion with a worldwide presence, has written that "the Hindu *Rashtra* can only be a state where there must be Hindu churches and Hindu mosques, for Hinduism is not a religion. It is the collective experience of thousands of individuals[,] unlike Christianity and Islam which are experiences of single individuals. In Hindu India, every one has to call himself a Hindu."³⁷ The RamJanmabhoomi movement, leading to the destruction of the aforementioned Babri Masjid, received considerable support from Hindus settled overseas, and the funding of Hindu institutions, temples, and other purportedly 'charitable' enterprise by nonresident Indian (NRI) Hindus, particularly those from the United States, can be established beyond doubt.³⁸ Strikingly, though in the aftermath of the destruction of the mosque nearly two thousand Indians were killed in Hindu-Muslim riots, the Hindus in Southern California, describing themselves as "concerned NRIs," could think of no more reasoned intervention than to take out an advertisement in the *Indian Express*, one of the largest English-language daily newspapers in India, deploring the government's short-lived ban of "nationalistic [Hindutva] organizations" and urging their "brothers and sisters in India" to aim at the "restoration of common sets of values and laws based on the 6,000 year heritage."³⁹ As if in anticipation of questions about their entitlement to intervene in the politics of the homeland, they argued that "of the one million NRI's living in the United States,

over 900,000 call Bharat [India] as [*sic*] their Mother. Hindus have only one place (other than Nepal) to call home. Their roots are in Bharat."⁴⁰

If in India the clarion call of militant Hindus is that "another Pakistan" must at all costs be avoided, in the United States they insist that their children be spared the evils and excesses of American culture (which Indians seldom consider to *be* culture), and be exposed to the incontestable virtues of Hindu civilization. In the United States, where proximity to the Muslim can be avoided, and views about the fanaticism of Islam are seen as receiving the endorsement of the wider culture, Vedic India appears in illumined glory as the opposite of all that is evil. An extraordinary, but by no means atypical, illustration of the besieged Indian-American Hindu mentality at work can be seen in a book published recently by the Federation of Hindu Associations (FHA), a Los Angeles-based organization, of which over ten thousand copies were distributed free at the November 1999 Diwali *mela*, or celebrations in the Indian neighborhoods of Cerritos and Artesia. Entitled *Bhagwan's Call for Dharma Raksha, or God's Appeal for the Protection of the [Hindu] Faith*, this book purports to set out the facts about the truly destructive nature of Islam and the unique innocence of Hinduism. Over the course of "The Last (1000) Dreadful Years," the Hindu readers are reminded, "We have lost more than half of our Vedic land"; "Crores [tens of millions] of Hindus were converted to Islam and other religions"; "Thousands of our temples were demolished"; "Temples of Hindus, some of whom [*sic*] like Mathura and Kashi, are half temple-half mosque, indicating destruction by the invaders and establishment of their mosques," stand forth as signs of the humiliation of Hindus; and "The % of non-Hindus in India increased dramatically whereas Hindus continued family planning."⁴¹ Hindus are reminded that merely because their forefathers survived the genocidal onslaught of Muslims and other invaders, they should not be complaisant, thinking that Hinduism "will anyhow survive"; and they are asked to reflect on the ominous fact that, "by all calculations" given the Muslim's alarming propensity to breed hordes of children, "Hindus could become [a] minority in [the] very near future." Consequently, Hindus are enjoined to engage in "Dharma Raksha," the protection of the faith, so that:

- Rigid religions may not harm this flexible way of Hindus.
- Revelations may not harm this philosophical religion of Hindus.
- Fanatics may not destroy the compassionate Hindus.
- Narrow-minded many not spoil the broad-minded Hindus.
- Theocracies may not destroy the secular & democratic Hindus.
- There is at least one Vedic land.
- Cultural experience, known as Hindutva, may not go waste.⁴²

The alarming susceptibility of NRI Hindus in the US to resurgent Hinduism is nowhere more clearly exemplified than in their admiration for the most

intolerant Hindus to have gained public eminence in India over the last few years. In 1994 the FHA took it upon itself to institute a new award, called the Hindu of the Year Award, which was then promptly conferred upon Bal Thackeray and Sadhvi Rithambara. The citation accompanying the award commended Thackeray (an avid admirer of Hitler who has acquired immense notoriety for his part in instituting pogroms against Muslims in Maharashtra) and Rithambara (whose shrill rantings against the *yavanas* (foreigners) have left many wounded and trembling) for their role in, of all things, "the creation and preservation of Hinduism."⁴³ The FHA could well have pondered on the longevity of an ancient faith, and wondered how such a faith has fared so well in the absence of such defenders in the past; rather, in the following year, the award was bestowed upon Uma Bharati, who summons Hindu men to arms with the observation that Hindus want no cut-up (partitioned) nation any more than they want cut-up (circumcised) men in their midst.⁴⁴ The speeches of Uma Bharati and Sadhavi Rithambara, whom Hindutvavadis doubtless see as modern-day Durgas, wielders of that immense feminine energy that in Hindu theology is seen as generating the universe and undoing the wrongs that even the Hindu male gods are incapable of arresting, are so incendiary that they have been subjected to repeated bans in India.

What, then, is this postindustrial civilization of diasporic Hindus, particularly those settled in the United States and the "advanced" West? Hindu communities in the United States appear to know the contours and meaning of Hinduism better than do Hindus in India, and these diasporic Hindus can routinely invoke Indian civilization with a self-assurance that, in an Indian in India, would at once provoke mockery and consternation. Far removed as these Hindus are from the lived practices of the faith, their Hinduism is ossified; equally distanced in their adopted country from the cultural life and political aspirations of black people, Hispanics, and other racial or ethnic minorities, and often xenophobically proud of the allegedly unique spiritual qualities of their own Hindu traditions, one wonders if their sense of the moral community is not inadequate. Most trenchantly, Indian-American Hindus have taken to cyberspace to press forth their own claims about the nature of Hindu civilization, and they have been unrelenting in their attempt to give shape to a new Hindu history. This history, which aggressively sets itself against the long trajectory of colonial histories, the "pseudo-secular" agenda of the Indian state, the secularism of the Indian left, the nefarious designs of the Pakistani state, the Western contempt for Hindu culture, and the intellectual pusillanimity and moral cowardice of the Indian academy, furnishes a point of entry into debates about the political uses of cyberspace just as it suggests that the battle for contending versions of history, which had appeared to reach its acme in the debate surrounding the Babri Masjid, will surely intensify as it is played upon new turfs in the homeland and the diaspora alike.

Cyberdiasporic Hindu Militancy and Revisionist Indian Histories

It is perhaps apposite that the North American proponents of Hindutva, as well as revisionist Hindu historians, should have found the Internet an agreeable avenue for the propagation of their worldview. More than any other religion, Hinduism is a decentered and deregulated faith, and in this it appears akin to cyberspace. It has no one prophet or savior, nor are Hindus agreed upon the authority of a single text. Only in the older Indian diaspora created by indentured labor, such as in Fiji and Trinidad, did a single text—namely Tulsidas's *Ramacaritmanas*—become supremely authoritative, and here, too, for reasons that had to do with the cultural, political, and economic characteristics of the migration, its point of origin mainly in the Gangetic plains where Tulsidas's devotional book was deeply revered, the illiteracy of the laborers, and so on. Moreover, if Trinidad or Fiji Hindus even for a moment thought they had become the people of the book, their distinctly second-class status in these societies was enough to disabuse them of that far-fetched notion. Hinduism not only has multiple sources of doctrinal authority, it is polycentric. Varanasi (Benares) is not to Hinduism what Mecca and Medina are to Islam, and the pilgrimage sites of Hindus are almost as numerous as their deities. While for Muslims the pilgrimage to Mecca can be nothing other than a literal visit to Mecca, for Hindus the sacred river Ganga can be fully re-created by mixing Ganga *jal* in any body of water.⁴⁵ The circumambulation around any number of temples or sacred lakes could, for a Hindu, stand in place of the circumambulation around the Kaaba; even Hinduism's most sacred sites are largely places of myth rather than history.

In the language of the cybernetic postmodernists, one could say that Hinduism is rhizomatic, with multiple points of origin, intersection, and dispersal. If the modular form for Netwar conforms to what one early analyst described as "a segmented, polycentric, ideologically integrated network" (SPIN), where "segmented" means "cellular, composed of many different groups," and "polycentric," "many different leaders or centers of direction,"⁴⁶ then Hinduism most certainly inhabits those very properties that characterize cybernetworks. In a manner of speaking, Hinduism even makes the bead *spin*; and if "electronic civil disobedience" consists in "swarming" and "flooding" the websites of the foe, popular Hinduism displays a similar tendency to create an immense sensory overload and swarm one's sensibilities. Hinduism and the Internet, one might conclude, were happily made for each other; even the millions of websites evoke the "330 millions gods and goddesses" of Hinduism.⁴⁷ The Internet, it could also be argued, is a particularly happy medium for those who construe themselves as members of a diaspora, or who have what might be termed *diasporic sensibilities*. Though the Indian diaspora is much smaller than the Chinese or African diasporas, it has perhaps a greater geographic reach, and is represented in virtually every country of the world: in the clichéd saying, the two things that are found everywhere in the world are "a potato" and "a Sikh." Through cyberspace, Hindus have

found a new awareness of themselves as part of what they now imagine is a global religion, and nothing could be more calculated to augment Hindu pride than the perception that Hinduism is on the verge of arriving as a "world religion," to take its place alongside Islam, Christianity, and even Buddhism. Though the adherents of Hinduism are still overwhelmingly confined to the subcontinent, what Arjun Appadurai has called "the globalization of Hinduism" was evidently on witness in 1995 when the news spread that *murtis*, or images of Ganesh, the elephant-headed God, had been seen drinking prodigious amounts of milk in Hindu temples; and so from Delhi and Bombay this news was rapidly flashed to Leeds, London, Leicester, Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, and elsewhere.⁴⁸ Reflecting on the "milk miracle" of September 1995, one long-time scholar of the Hindu overseas population observed that a "South Asian religious diaspora was now linked through advanced global telecommunications."⁴⁹

Moving to more mundane considerations, it is an empirical observation that in the United States many professional Indians, and particularly Hindus, earn their living in the computer and software industries, and they take readily to the culture of the Internet. It is not in the least coincidental that a preponderant number of the people associated with what may be termed Hindutva websites owe their livelihood to computer industries or are drawn from the hard sciences, and that their Hinduism is without those soft and porous edges that gave the religion its historically amorphous and ecumenical form. Significantly, very few professional historians, if any, contribute to these websites, which is hardly to say that the expertise of professional historians is reliable. Judging from recent events in India, such as the endeavor to reduce professional historical associations—the Indian Historical Records Commission being a case in point—to mouthpieces of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which correspondingly perform the cultural and political work of the militant Hinduism whose militaristic expression is found in the cadres of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), one might feel relieved that Hindutva websites are largely amateurish undertakings, however much scientific credibility their creators might attach to such enterprises. While no complete sociological profile of the people who labor on such websites—whether in a technical capacity or by way of providing substantive content—is available, typically they are male graduate students from middle-class backgrounds, drawn evidently to revisionist histories of India; they are also the ones who contribute most frequently to various listservs and bulletin boards, such as *alt.hindu* and *soc.culture.indian*.

Though the subjects on which the most substantial contributions to the websites are made vary considerably, the webmasters and their associates are united in their resolve to offer radically altered accounts of even the most common verities of Indian history. Thus, while it is generally agreed that the Mughal emperor Akbar (reigned 1556–1605) was, especially for his times, a just ruler, whose policies of tolerance were conducive to the expansion of his empire and the good of

his subjects, and who is said to have introduced elements of Hinduism into his own practices of worship and even the culture of the court, in Hindutva websites he appears as a "tyrannical monarch"; not unexpectedly, then, Aurangzeb (reigned 1658–1707), who has always been disliked by Hindu historians as a sworn enemy of the Hindus and breaker of idols, is viewed as entirely beyond the pale. The Taj Mahal, which no serious historian doubts was built at the orders of Shah Jahan (reigned 1628–1658), is transformed into a Hindu monument by the name of Tejomahalay, as though its history as one of the finest examples of Mughal architecture is wholly inconsequential, a malicious invention of Muslim-loving Hindus. Lest these revisionisms be considered merely arbitrary and anomalous, the systematic patterning behind these rewritings is also evidenced by the attempt to argue, for example, that the Aryans, far from having migrated to India, originated there.⁵⁰

Turning to a lengthier consideration of these websites, they weave their own intricate web of links, conspiracies, and nodal points: at one moment one is at one website, and at another moment at another. Even Krishna, who by his *leela* or divine magical play could be among several *gopis* (lovers) simultaneously, might have found his match in the World Wide Web; he might have gazed with awe at rhizomatic Hindutvaness at its propagandistic best. Among the most remarkable and most comprehensive of the sites are those created by the VHP and students who have constituted themselves into the Global Hindu Electronic Network (GHEN). Links take the surfer to such sites as hindunet, the Hindu Vivek Kendra, and the various articles culled from the archives of *Hinduism Today*, a glossy magazine published by the white *sadhu* (mendicant) who, as previously mentioned, is constructing a lavish temple amidst the rich tropical green of Hawaii's Kauai island. There are links to other spiritual matters of interest to nonresident Hindus, such as the teachings of Swami Chinmayananda,⁵¹ whose associations with the VHP have been explored by scholars at some length, and to comparatively more esoteric sites on Indian philosophy, devotional literature, the legends of gods and goddesses, and the like. The importance attached to cyberspace communication and politics and the nonresident Hindu factor is, incidentally, nowhere better illustrated than in the fact that the BJP, which used to shout itself hoarse over *swadeshi* (self-reliance) and is nauseatingly jingoistic, locates its website in the United States, as does the paramilitary RSS.⁵²

GHEN is sponsored by the Hindu Students Council, and the astuteness of its creators, no less than their zeal and ardor, can be gauged by the fact that it had developed into the most comprehensive site on Hindutva philosophy and aggressive Hindu nationalism at least six years ago, when such work in cyberspace was in its infancy. GHEN was the recipient in 1996 of an award from *IWAY*, then one of the leading Internet magazines, for the "Best Web Page Award" in the religious category, and one of GHEN's members described himself as pleased that the world was finally "taking cognizance of the most important movement in this century, 'The Hindutva Movement.'"⁵³ The home page takes

one into predictable categories, namely "Introductions," "Scriptures," "Temples," "Organizations," "Latest News," and the bulletin board alt.hindu; another link opens what is called the "Hindu Universe" and is graced by the sign of *aum*, which believing Hindus describe as the primal sound that stands for the Supreme Godhead, and this in turn leads to pages on five categories, enumerated as follows: "Latest News from Bharat (India)," "Kashmir," "Terrorism in Bharat (India)," "Hindutva: Nationalist Ideology," and "Shri Ramjanmabhoomi Movement." Each page, in turn, furnishes links to a dozen or more related articles: the aspiration to be comprehensive, and to leave the surfer with an impression that neutrality is being maintained, is suggested by the characterization of each page as a "reference center."

Though the page on Kashmir offers a Hindu perspective on the rebellion that has been taking place in that valley over the last few years; highlights the suffering of Kashmiri Pandits (Brahmins); and reiterates the role of Pakistan in aiding and abetting the rebellion, it is the manner in which Kashmir is assimilated into the "Hindu universe" that is deserving of comment.⁵⁴ The assumption is that one can ignore the largely Muslim population of the state, and presumably the Buddhists of the Ladakh region of Kashmir are construed as belonging to the Hindu fold; and while there is undoubtedly a Saivite (Hindu) substratum as well, the positioning of Kashmir within a "Hindu universe" betrays an acute anxiety about the reality of Kashmir as a composite culture and the eventual disposition of what is generally termed the "Kashmir problem." Moreover, though Kashmir is recognized as a matter of jurisdiction for the Indian nation-state, its transposition into a Hindu universe signifies the ease with which "India" can effortlessly be elided into "Hindu," maneuver that is repeatedly encountered in Hindutva websites.⁵⁵ Similar sleights of hand are visible throughout the GHEN site. Thus, in the "Shree Ramjanmabhoomi Reference Center" page, which like much of GHEN offers an array of articles culled from Indian newspapers, in this case about the dispute over the Babri Masjid, it is quite baldly stated that the "Ramjanmabhoomi movement is carried out by hundreds of millions of Hindus in Bharat (India)."⁵⁶ Far too many studies have already established that the movement leading to the destruction of the mosque drew its membership from precisely those elements of society from which the BJP, RSS, and VHP draw their support—namely, the trading castes, the petite bourgeoisie, and small-town dwellers.⁵⁷ The destruction of the Babri Masjid itself was an affair orchestrated to the extreme, and as with many riots that require careful engineering, volunteers had to be drawn upon from the outside.⁵⁸ It is also an indubitable fact that there are millions of Hindus in Bharat, and that Rama is one of the principal deities, particularly in the so-called cow belt in north India; yet this does not inescapably lead to the logic that the preponderant number of Hindus put their weight behind the movement, or that the millions of Rama *bhaktas* (devotees) can be safely described as adherents of the movement.

If GHEN shares something ominous in common with Hindutva websites, it is the deliberate attempt to obfuscate the distinction between Hinduism and Hindutva. Swami Vivekananda, to take one instance, becomes in their histories an exponent of Hindutva ideology, not an advocate of a mere Hinduism; and this, perhaps, receives some credence from the circumstances surrounding the life of Vivekananda, who, as the sole representative of Hinduism at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, can be described as playing a not inconsiderable role in furnishing Hinduism something of a place on the world stage.⁵⁹ Though Hindutvavadis do not care much for Gandhi—finding it fit even to dismiss him as something of a *hijra* (eunuch) and father of Pakistan, or even for Vivekananda's own spiritual master Ramakrishna, whose spirituality they admire but whose androgyny poses something of a problem to their own sense of masculinity—they have ferociously struggled to claim Vivekananda as one of their own. For some years now, even within the Ramakrishna Mission, it has been apparent that Vivekananda has been gaining more prominence, and when he began to be championed in Rajiv Gandhi's India as a model for Indian youth, it became imperative for the VHP and its friends to declare themselves as the true inheritors of Vivekananda's legacy. In Hindu communities, from Port of Spain to Chicago, it is the image of Vivekananda that looms large over the landscapes that Hindus inhabit.⁶⁰ He is seen, in the first instance, as the prophet who energized the Indian nation, urged his brethren to social action, critiqued the devotional excess of the faith (what he would have made of his master, one cannot say), strove to make Hinduism a more rational and masculine religion, and won Hinduism its first devotees in the West. It is Vivekananda's stridency and proselytizing that, doubtless, make him an attractive feature to Hindutva advocates, who are prone to take the view that Hindus have, for too long of their history, remained a pacific and tolerant people upon whom others trod none too gently. "The message has reached far and wide throughout the world," states Ashok Singhal, the general-secretary of the VHP, "that the Hindu will no more be subdued. Eventually the world at large will come to the conclusion that after all now they have to deal with a Hindu India."⁶¹

Judging from GHEN's Swami Vivekananda Study Center," which presents the RSS as the fulfillment of Vivekananda's ideas, the Swami was a militant Hindutvavadi who desired "the conquest of the whole world by the Hindu race."⁶² If Argentina is nothing other than "Arjuna town," where Arjuna—one of the five Pandava heroes who in the *Mahabharata* are condemned to spend thirteen years in exile—went for the year that he was enjoined to remain incognito; if Denmark, rich in dairy products, is none other than "Dhenu Marg," the cow pathway; if the "Red Indians" are the signposts for the advance of an Indian civilization in remote antiquity; and if Vivekananda's own name, "Vive! Canada," is a ringing testimony to his reach over the world, then surely it is not too far-fetched to imagine that Vivekananda desired the worldwide supremacy of the Hindu race.⁶³ His militancy is highlighted with his observation that the

Bhagavad Gita, which Gandhi would interpret as a text counseling nonviolent resistance, would be better understood with the "biceps," by "strong men with muscles of steel and nerves of iron inside of which dwells a mind of the same material as that of which the thunderbolt is made."⁶⁴ Yet in their haste to turn Vivekananda into the apostle of Hindutva, the defender of the faith, the VHP and its allies appear to have forgotten his admonition to others who would dare to be the guardians of Hinduism. Once, on a visit to Kashmir, Vivekananda felt pained at seeing the ruins of temples and the idols of Hindu deities scattered around the country. Approaching the goddess with anger and trepidation, Vivekananda bowed before her, and asked in an anguished tone, "Mother, why did you permit this desecration?" Vivekananda reports that Kali whispered to him, "What is it to you if the invaders broke my images? Why do you trouble yourself over it? Do you protect me, or do I protect you?"⁶⁵

Evidently, if one is to consider the rather gargantuan website of VHP-America, the Hindutva advocates, quite oblivious to Vivekananda's teachings, dwell on the ruins of temples and the Muslim hatred of idolaters. No one who has looked at the VHP site can fail to be impressed by the fact that its home page, which takes surfers to GHEN's "Hindu Universe," to a list of temples in the United States, and other activities of interest to Hindus, also takes readers to the "History of Hindu Temples," which in turn features a section on "Temple Destruction." Though readers can rejoice in the presence of monumental temple complexes as varied as Angkor Wat and Hampi, the engagement with the history of destroyed temples appears to be more intense; the destruction of Somnath evokes greater passion than the dancing stones of Belur, Halebid, Konarak, and other temples. Here, again, the cue may have come from Vivekananda, who reminded his countrymen and women that their "forefathers underwent everything boldly, even death itself, but preserved their religion. Temple after temple was broken down by foreign conquerors, but no sooner had the wave passed than the spire of the temple rose again."⁶⁶ If the valiant Hindu woman, by the very act of choosing self-immolation (*jauhar*) and immortality rather than the ignominy of sexual violation by the Muslim invader, bore in negation the mark of the Muslim upon her body, so the Hindu temple carried the history of regenerative violations: "Mark how the temples bear the marks of a hundred attacks and a hundred regenerations, continually destroyed and continually springing out of the ruins, rejuvenated and as strong as ever! That is the national life current."⁶⁷

Vivekananda had, however, asked the Hindu to look to his own resources, and to consider what weaknesses in Indian society, and in particular in the Hindu social structure, made the country vulnerable to invasion and attack. For the Hindutvavadi in the diaspora, the alterity of the Muslim—the "Indian Muslim" is something of an anomaly from that perspective, because the Muslim in India is never sufficiently Indian, and as a Muslim he is seen as having promised his loyalty to the *qaum*, the worldwide community of Muslims—is

paradoxically the sine qua non of Hindu identity and history. Sometimes the expression of Hindu identity is expressed by waging a virulent attack on Islam, as in the website, located in the United States, that takes its name from the Sanskrit phrase "*Satyameva Jayate*" ("The Truth Alone Triumphs"), which is the national motto of sovereign India.⁶⁸ Though viewers are invited to send e-mail to a person carrying a Muslim name, Zulfikar, the website is almost certainly operated by a Hindu. The site is linked to the home page of a "Vedic astrologer,"⁶⁹ and the remarks about Islam and its prophet are so slanderous that it is nearly inconceivable that any Muslim, howsoever much an unbeliever, would have dared to be so foolishly offensive. Four of the twenty articles, all unsigned, available on this website purport to establish that Muhammad was the "Prophet of Terror," two document Islam's supposed worldwide network of terrorism, and some others venture into descriptions of Islam as a religion of lust, murder, rape, and genocide. Attempting to unmask the "sadistic cruel nature of Prophet Mohammed," the author argues that "Mohammed was in fact a terrorist, criminal and murderer whose entire life was based on victimizing innocents and indulging in mindless violence, carnage and massacre."⁷⁰ The author alleges that the Prophet's sexual appetite for young boys and beautiful virgins could never be satiated; he enticed the Arabs with sex slaves and booty, and "to please the homosexuals among his followers he promised them pre-pubescent boys in Paradise."⁷¹

More often, the Hindutva notion of history comes wrapped around a tale of Hindu innocence, and more precisely the tale of the destruction of Hindu temples. This is quite transparent in the *Satyameva Jayate* website, where four of the twenty articles are devoted to an enumeration of the "Destruction of Hindu Temples by Muslims." The very sense of history, by no means unique to Hindutvavadis, is marked by violence, wars, and technological achievements: historians have become habituated to speaking of World War I, World War II, the Vietnam War, and the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971 as "watersheds,"⁷² and it is this language that is absorbed into Hindutva websites, where the "watersheds" are those periodic invasions of India that led to the destruction of Hindu temples. What remains evokes no sense of history; the present is always transcendental, and is less easily hitched to the anguished sense of a past where one was wronged—and all this is not in keeping with the VHP's ideological interests, which are to transform Hinduism, viewed by Hindutvavadis as having been wrongly condemned as a form of myth-making, into a religion of history. No Hindutvavadi is prepared to countenance the observation that the particular genius of Hinduism may lie in none other than its mythicity, and the ire expressed at the recent website inaugurated by the "Indian Express," www.hindumythology.com, suggests how far militant Hinduism remains captive to the mode of historical thinking.⁷³

The historical sensibility has, fortunately, from a civilizational standpoint, never been a marked feature of Indian thinking; indeed, it is a commonplace

to argue that the historical sense was severely underdeveloped in ancient India, and the view of Jawaharlal Nehru, not only India's first prime minister but a man with a distinctly historical sensibility whose *Discovery of India* still serves as one of the better introductions to Indian history, may be taken as representative. He writes, "Unlike the Greeks, and unlike the Chinese and the Arabs, Indians in the past were not historians. This was very unfortunate and it has made it difficult for us now to fix dates or make up an accurate chronology. Events run into each other, overlap and produce an enormous confusion. . . . the ignoring of history had evil consequences which we pursue still. It produced a vagueness of outlook, a divorce from life as it is, a credulity, a woolliness of the mind where fact was concerned."⁷⁴ A number of scholars have attempted, in an overdetermined reaction to save India from the orientalist structures of thought,⁷⁵ to provide a more complex scenario of India's engagement with historical thinking, but they have been less attentive to Nehru's observation that "this lack of historical sense did not affect the masses . . . they built up their view of the past from the traditional accounts and myth and story that were handed to them from generation to generation. This imagined history and mixture of fact and legend became widely known and gave to the people a strong and abiding cultural background."⁷⁶ But the attack on the Indian Express website, by those who purport to speak for Hindu civilization, displays precisely this profound anxiety that Hinduism should in no manner be construed as a religion of myth, an unscientific and unhistorical enterprise; and even the slight nuances of Nehru's view are lost in the Hindutvavadi's unabashed celebration of the historical mode. Notably, it is only the destruction of temples that, in the VHP's mistaken view, serves to distinguish Hinduism from other faiths: it is what renders the Hindus singularly into victims, and gives them a history they otherwise are said to lack.

GHEN's home page on Hindu temples disavows any interest in "the politicization of temples and the[ir] history" but nonetheless avers that "those who do not learn from history are condemned to relive it."⁷⁷ Should there be any doubt as to what history might be in store for those obdurate Hindus who do not comprehend the evil genius and mental psyche of the Muslim, a page reminds readers of "what happened" to Hindu temples. The "Moslem behavior pattern as recorded by Moslem historians of medieval India," we are told, furnishes a decisive account of the murderous activities of "Islamized invaders." Why these "invaders" are represented as "Islamized" rather than "Islamic" is not certain, but it is surely not for the charitable reason that they were not true Muslims, who had merely the veneer of Islam around them. One Islamic chronicle after another, it is maintained, documents the hatred of the invaders for the faith of the infidels, their contempt for idols, and their destruction of the idolater's temples. (This is doubtless the case, though the author of the webpage scarcely understands that these chronicles betray a characteristic tendency of the oppressors to leave behind an archive, even an exaggerated one, of their own ill-doings.) The invading Muslims, in brief, engaged in "mass slaughter of people

not only during war" but after they had "emerged victorious"; they captured noncombatants and sold them throughout the Islamic world, thus rendering a free people into slavery and violating the convention whereby civilians are spared the retributions due to soldiers; they engaged in "forcible conversion to Islam of people who were in no position to resist," and stripped those who could not be so converted of their citizenship, turning them into "zimmis," or noncitizens; and on these "zimmis" they imposed "inhuman disabilities," appropriating their wealth and "holding in contempt all their institutions and expressions," cultural, religious, and social.⁷⁸ In this narrative, which seeks to etch in bold the "magnitude of Muslim Atrocities," (a webpage derived from yet another site that calls itself the "Library of Hindu History"),⁷⁹ it becomes wholly unnecessary to consider the politics of conquest, and a vocabulary inherited from modern institutional practices and political theories is introduced as the benchmark by which the conduct of Muslim invaders is to be judged. What, for instance, was the theory of "citizenship" in pre-Muslim India, and was there any notion of "rights," a term that everywhere is of relatively recent vintage? In that paradise called Aryavarta, the land of the Aryas or Hindus before Islam rudely entered into the scene, who conferred "citizenship" on whom, by what criteria, and with what consequences?

Not unexpectedly, the destruction of Hindu temples by Aurangzeb—who for Hindus has been iconic of Muslim barbarity since the colonial histories of the eighteenth century began enumerating the despotic tendencies of Islam—is enumerated at great length, but far more significant is the clustering together, on this home page, of tales of the destruction or appropriation of Hindu temples throughout the subcontinent and into the far-flung parts of the Indian diaspora. If one were to ask what makes the Indian diaspora *Indian*, if not the ubiquitousness of the commercial Hindi film, the enthroning of "Bharat Natyam" as the quintessential dance form of India which every young Indian woman must embrace, or the emergence of tandoori chicken as a metonym for Indian cuisine, then to the VHP it is the poignant desecration of Hindu temples in varied landscapes throughout the world.⁸⁰ A ruined or discarded temple is the sure sign of a Hindu presence; it is the only living evidence of a diaspora extending to antiquity: it is the reminder that everywhere Hindus, who (in the Hindutvavadi view) knew nothing of the ways of the world and the evil intent of monotheistic religions, have suffered the same fate. Screams one headline on hindunet, "600 Hindu Temples Destroyed/Damaged in Pakistan and Bangladesh!" and from there we jump to another headline drawn from the archives of *Hinduism Today*: "Fiji Temple Burned." For the one mosque destroyed by Hindus in Ayodhya—a destruction that is never fully conceded, since the Hindus chose to repossess what in truth had always been theirs—there were a dozen temples that the Muslims swiftly desecrated in Britain by way of revenge. Who else, the Hindutvavadi asks, writes that history?⁸¹ Etymology—the science of comparative linguistics, itself reborn in the crucible of eighteenth-century theories of race

and human origins—and destroyed temples *together* give the Hindutvavadis the universal history they have always desired. "Hindu Kush means Hindu Slaughter," Shrinandan Vyas reminds us in an article on the Internet, for it is in the mountain range of Eastern Afghanistan that goes by the name Hindu Kush that the first, and still unacknowledged, "genocide" of Hindus took place.⁸² "Genocide" strikes Hindutvavadis as the apposite term, especially on websites, where the visceral effect is critical, to describe the cruel fate suffered by peaceful Hindus at the hand of Muslim barbarians. There is always the hope that the world will look upon the Hindu as it does upon the Jew, as a specimen of a race that must continually stave off the threat of extinction, and that has more than once been dealt a terrible death. Hindutvavadis deplore the "fact" that the world does not know of the many holocausts perpetrated by the Muslims, and the Kashmir Information Network on the web accords a prominent place on its site to the "AUSCHWITZ IN KASHMIR," highlighting with pictures the "atrocities on Kashmiris by Pakistan-trained terrorists."⁸³

I have given a mere inkling of the Hindu histories that dominate on the Internet, and in conclusion it merits reiteration that the very proclivity to argue in the language of the historian shows how far the diasporic proponents of Hindutva have abandoned the language of Hinduism for the epistemological imperatives of modernity and the nation-state. Nothing resonates as strongly as their desire to strip Hinduism of myth, of its ahistoricist sensibilities, and to impose on the understanding of Hinduism and the Indian past alike the structures of a purportedly scientific history. The Hindutva historians have, in all these matters, embraced the methods of their adversaries: thus, nearly every lengthy article pretends to carry with it the paraphernalia of scholarship, and many are prefaced with a summary of the sources marshaled to construct the argument. "All the Encyclopaedias and National Geographic agree," writes Vyas at the outset of his aforementioned piece on the Hindu holocaust, "that the Hindu Kush is a place of Hindu genocide (similar to Dakau [*sic*] and Auschwitz). All the references are given. Please feel free to verify them." Typically, as in the article on "The Destruction of the Hindu Temples by Muslims, Part IV," found on the Satyameva Jayate website, no page numbers are ever furnished, nor are titles of works enumerated; nonetheless, a tone of authority is sought and injected by the note placed at the end: "Works of Arun Shourie, Harsh Narain, Jay Dubashi, and Sita Ram Goel have been used in this article."⁸⁴ The mention of "references" imparts a scholarly note to the piece, and the invitation to employ the verifiability hypothesis suggests the detachment of the scientist, the objectivity of the social scientist who has no ambition but the discernment of truth, and the scrupulousness of the investigator. I hasten to add that this is not atypical: the unattributed article, "The Real Akbar, The (not) so Great," is likewise based on a number of sources, though their worthiness as specimens of authoritative scholarship can be construed from the great affection that Hindutva historians

have developed for Will Durant. "The world famous historian, Will Durant has written in his *Story of Civilisation*," writes Rajiv Varma in his Internet article on Muslim atrocities, that "the Mohammedan conquest of India was probably the bloodiest story in history."⁸⁵ The West be damned, but when the occasion demands, the authority of even its mediocre historians is construed as unimpeachable.

From their concerted endeavors to impart a precise historical specificity to the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, as evidenced by the laborious efforts at reconstructing the chronology of the events depicted in the epics and turning the principal characters into live historical figures who were the Moses, Abraham, Isaac, and Christ of Hinduism,⁸⁶ to the onslaught on the generally accepted theory of an Aryan migration to India—an onslaught at first headed, it is no accident, by an Indian aerospace engineer, who is described as valiantly having temporarily set aside his career in the interest of exposing the largest "hoax" in human history⁸⁷—the Hindutvavadis have signified their attachment to historical discourses. The critics of Hindutva who dwell on it as a form of religious fanaticism and fundamentalism, doubtless with political ambitions, may be obfuscating a great deal more than they reveal in their analyses. That is not only because the Hindutvavadis are the least of the Hindus that one is likely to encounter; even their religiosity has something in it of mercantilism and the secular ethos of the marketplace. Historical discourses are preeminently the discourses of the nation,⁸⁸ and the Internet, which has something in common with the historical archive, making it intrinsically hospitable to the modernist sensibility of the historian, is poised to become the ground on which the advocates of Hindutva will stage their revisionist histories. Whether cyberspace is Republican is a matter on which I shall defer judgment; but it is poised, alarmingly, to become a Hindutva domain, considering that there are scarcely any websites that offer competing narratives.⁸⁹ "*Dharmakshetre, kurukshetre*" ("on the field of dharma, righteousness; on the field of the Kurus, the clan that is said to have given birth to Bharat or India"), says the Bhagavad Gita in its opening line, but today this might well be "*dharmaksetre, cyberksetre*." If the computer scientist-historian types who inhabit Silicon Valley, and their diasporic brethren, have it their way, Hinduism will become that very "world historical religion" they have craved to see, and Hindutva history will be the most tangible product of the wave of globalization over which they preside from their diasporic vantagepoint.

Postscript: Los Angeles, August 2002

In the few years since this essay was first written and published, a number of phenomena have, it appears to me, conspired to lend renewed urgency to some of my observations and findings. In India, as elsewhere in the world, the Internet has witnessed a remarkable explosion, though some of the loose talk about computers entering every village, which the technocratic and political elites who dream about India's ascendancy to great power status indulge in, is premature

and even comical to those aware of the pitiful shortcomings in basic infrastructural facilities throughout the country. Bangalore, and increasingly Hyderabad and Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum), may well be home to India's large "manpower" of computer software specialists, many of whom are women, but any other kind of development, such as assured supplies of water and electricity, have been slow to reach these cities. Few urban elites have had time to think of villages; indeed, the village, even while it has ruralized the country's urban landscapes, is rapidly disappearing as the locus of imagination and ethical thinking. But middle-class families in the metropolitan areas, a substantial number of which have some close relative settled in the United States, Britain, or Canada, have found the Internet of incalculable benefit in keeping two generations "connected" across the oceans. What remains "disconnected," or what is disavowed—a more mythic conception of Hinduism, complex traditions of hospitality, a more open reading of the past as well as the future—in the recent synergy on display between North American Hindus and many middle-class and professional Hindus in India itself is less often noticed.

The recent killings in Gujarat, however, provide the most poignant and alarming point of entry into the discussions, around which much of my essay has revolved, on the Indian diaspora, the politics of the Internet in diasporic communities, the Internet as a contested political terrain, and the Internet and the World Wide Web as domains friendly to Hindu militancy. There have been communal riots in India before, and most certainly in Gujarat and its capital, Ahmedabad; but the recent anti-Muslim violence, following the initial perpetration of an attack by a Muslim crowd upon a train carrying Hindu militants,⁹⁰ has gone far beyond any previous "riot," and not only because it has claimed 2,000 lives, displaced another 200,000 people, and lasted several months. The vast bulk of the fatalities have been Muslim, and even commentators noted for their restraint agree that a pogrom was instituted against the Muslims, who (in Gujarat, at least) have doubtless been reduced to second-class citizens in the country of their birth. Rarely have communal killings extended so far into the countryside, and just as infrequently have they been so orchestrated, so macabre and theatrical in their demonstrativeness, so indicative of a deep-seated hatred for the Muslim. That all this should have happened in Gujarat has struck some people, even those apprised of the state's recent bloody past and its enrollment, so to speak, in the ranks of the Hindu Right, as surprising and wholly unexpected. Gujarat, after all, has done well for itself: the poverty rate in the state is 22 percent, in comparison to 55 percent in India as a whole, the per capita income in 2000 was twice that of most other states; and economic growth has been steady. Gujarat is one of India's most "developed" states. The cherished theories of those who believe that education and industrialization are calculated to erode religious bigotry, communal passion, and the propensity toward violence lie in tatters. Gujarat is also the land of Mohandas Gandhi—the "Father of the Nation," the greatest son of the soil—and, beyond him, of Narasimha Mehta,

the medieval *bhakta* (devotional poet) whose *bhajan* on what makes a person a true Vaishnava, a morally enlightened being, has endeared him to millions across the country over the last few centuries. How, then, could genocide take place in the land of Gandhi?⁹¹

If Gujarat, one of four Indian states governed by the right wing Bharatiya Janata Party, which advocates Hindu militancy, is unusually prosperous, it has also generated the most affluent diaspora of any Indian community. There are at least 2 million, and perhaps as many as 3 million, Gujaratis living outside India, and they almost certainly account for a greater portion of the 16 to 20 million diasporic Indians than any other community.⁹² Perhaps as many as a third of the 1.8 million Indians residing in the United States are Gujaratis, and one has only to scan the community pages of Indian-American newspapers to come to an awareness of the ubiquitousness of the Gujarati presence in Indian diasporic life, extending from the Patel Brothers's grocery stores to the largely Gujarati-dominated jewelry showrooms found in abundance in the little Indias of the large American metropolises. The Gujarati Literary Academy estimated the number of Gujaratis in Britain in 2000 to be "well over half a million,"⁹³ and Rajdeep Sardesai has suggested that there are 1.7 million Kutchis (from Kutch, a region of Gujarat) overseas, not to mention other Gujaratis, particularly those from Ahmedabad.⁹⁴ Yet only the mere skeleton of a tale can be hung on these numbers, for the story of the Gujarati diaspora is doubtless one of the great untold narratives of the last millennium. Gujarati traders were among the most active members of the Indian Ocean trading system, and over time they became renowned for their entrepreneurial spirit, commercial networks, and business acumen. Moreover, as Ashutosh Varshney has recently speculated, "the Gujarati diaspora in the United States, Britain and Africa is fabulously wealthy . . . A lot of the new Gujarati wealth, at home and abroad, has gone to Hindu nationalist organizations."⁹⁵ Even in continental Europe, where the presence of Indians is not so marked, Gujaratis have carved out niches for themselves, cornering—to take one instance—the diamond business in Antwerp.

The most obvious questions arising from the above considerations are what relationship the Gujarati diaspora might have had to the anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat and, furthermore, what place, if any, the Internet occupies in the interstices of that nexus. In my original essay I was perhaps not sufficiently attentive to the subnational groups that comprise the Indian polity and the Indian diaspora, and consequently failed to reflect on whether certain Indian communities, such as the Gujaratis, are more hospitable—than Bengalis, Malayalis, Tamilians, Punjabis—to Hindu militancy, more inclined to assist in Hinduism's transformation from a religious and mythic language to a historical one that crafts, at the same time, a modernist historical sensibility of injured Hindu subjectivity. What is the political culture of diasporic Gujaratis, and what is their version of Gujarati, Hindu, and Indian culture? Though the violence in Gujarat is attributed by some to the extraordinary political presence of the Hindu Right

in that state, and the political leadership of Gujarat has shown every inclination to treat Muslims as though they were hated foreigners, the role of the Gujarati diaspora in abetting the rise of the Hindu Right has not come under sustained scholarly scrutiny. The rise of the BJP to political ascendancy in India in the late 1980s occurred around the time when the Indian community in the United States began to register substantial growth and show increasing self-confidence. Little empirical work has been done on the money trail that is widely alleged to exist between the VHP-America and other organizations committed to Hindu rejuvenation and supremacy in the United States, Britain, and elsewhere, and like organizations in Gujarat and elsewhere in India,⁹⁶ but no one doubts that some of the immense wealth generated by overseas Gujaratis has gone to support Hindu militancy in Gujarat.⁹⁷

Whatever the precise financial transactions that bind VHP-America and like organizations to the motherland, Gujarat has also occupied a peculiar iconic place in the transformation of Hinduism to Hindutva. Following independence in 1947, K. M. Munshi, a Gujarati writer and politician with a huge public following, endeavored to have the famous Temple of Somnath rebuilt by the Indian government. Munshi largely introduced the historical novel—a genre that has too often served the interests of those who wish to have historical credibility attached to their narratives without the accountability that the notion of historical truth demands—into the repertoire of Gujarati literature; and, not surprisingly, his historical novel on Somnath was immensely popular. This temple was sacked, with allegedly colossal loss of life, by Mahmud of Ghazni around 1000 C.E. on one of his many raids into India, and its destruction, which British writers did everything to keep etched in Hindu memory, came to be described by some nationalist Hindus as a lasting symbol of Islam's perfidy and the forced submission of Hindus to Muslim rule. It is from Somnath that L. K. Advani, another Gujarati who is the present home minister in the Indian government and the architect of the Hindutva triumph, launched what might justly be described as the contemporary phase of Indian politics in 1989 when he set out on a *rath yatra* (pilgrimage by chariot) to raise awareness among Hindus of historical wrongs said to have been perpetrated upon them by Muslims. The sensibility that he displays is the one most frequently encountered, as I have suggested in my essay, among the mainly middle-class and professional Hindus settled in the United States.

To gauge the strength of the diasporic Gujarati community, it is enough to consider that when a powerful earthquake struck the state in January 2001, wiping out entire towns and villages and leaving behind casualties in excess of 20,000 people, millions of dollars were raised in a few days to aid and rehabilitate victims and the families of the deceased. The mobilization of the Gujarati diaspora was, as many Indians conceded, an extraordinary and inspirational sight to behold. Almost nothing was as effective as the Internet in apprising the worldwide Gujarati community of the news from Gujarat, transmitting appeals

for assistance, and collecting money and aid in kind. In 1999, by way of contrast, a supercyclone struck the eastern state of Orissa, killing tens of thousands, immersing nearly half of the impoverished state under water. Yet the tragedy of Orissa barely made the news, and even the government of India, which is responsive to the pressures of ethnic and linguistic groups, reluctantly furnished to the people of Orissa, who are poorly represented in the diaspora, a fraction of the aid that was given to Gujarat.⁹⁸ There is an Internet divide, as well, between Gujarat and Orissa: the telecommunications facilities of Orissa are woefully inadequate, and many fewer Oriyas utilized e-mail to relate harrowing tales of life under water. One can only adhere to the view that the Internet is somehow an equalizer if one is prepared to overlook its political economy.

It may be premature to speculate on the precise ways in which the Internet has been brought to bear upon the killings in Gujarat. If the word *riot* had not been less apt where the vast bulk of the killing was perpetrated by members of one community while the victims were largely drawn from another faith, it would not have been an excess to describe Gujarat 2002 as India's first TV riot. Nonetheless, Gujarat's orgy of violence may not inaccurately be described as India's first media killings: independent television stations provided extensive coverage and graphic pictures of arson, looting, and mutilated corpses. There are also reliable reports of the extensive and macabre use of cell phones: hooligans, and even their political bosses, apparently positioned themselves at vital nodal points in Ahmedabad, and by cell phone directed the killers and arsonists to those areas where, in their estimation, the mayhem existed at dangerously low levels. There have been reports that Muslims in more affluent communities who found themselves unable to leave their houses for risk to their lives, and whose urgent calls to the police for protection went unheeded, frantically logged on to the Internet in an attempt to reach friends, alert newspapers, and even, as it were, leave behind a record of their desperate will to survive.

Communal violence is indubitably a characteristic aspect of the social and political life of contemporary India, but one of the numerous ways in which Gujarat 2002 stands apart is the deep level of outrage experienced by many Indians, at home and in the diaspora, at the profound violation of all norms of humanity. It would be an enormous stretch to speak of the "emancipatory" possibilities of the Internet at this juncture, but entire websites came up, within days after the massacres began, to document the death and destruction in Gujarat, to help expose the politicians whose patronage gave succor to rapists, murderers, and arsonists, and to energize people to action.⁹⁹ It is not unreasonable to suggest that the institution of the pogrom coincided not accidentally with Israel's incursion into the West Bank, and that the advocates of Hindu militancy rightly surmised that events in Palestine would overshadow the slaughter of Muslims in India; and yet, they may well have underestimated the degree to which the Internet can be rendered serviceable as a vehicle for the promotion of human rights and to bring perpetrators of crimes to justice. However inadequate the

coverage of anti-Muslim violence in India around the world, diasporic Indians, and their allies in progressive movements across the United States, stumbled upon compelling and irrefutable evidence on the Internet of the carnage in Gujarat even as state officials denied the extent of the violence and, when this line of defense could no longer be sustained, raised the specter of "normalcy."

In less than three months after the killings began in late February, both international organizations—Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International among them—and domestic nongovernmental organizations—had made available on the Internet a dozen or more authoritative reports of the killings, which made it impossible for the governments of Gujarat and India to furnish their own narratives as the only ones that could lay claim to the truth.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, as allegations of ties between Hindu militants in India and significant portions of the large Hindu communities in the United States and Britain began to surface, the Internet became a rallying point for nonresident Indians (NRIs) alarmed at hearing that the violence in Gujarat was being conducted with the active moral and financial assistance of affluent Indians based overseas who themselves did not have to live with the frightful consequences of violence. On the website Rediff.com, which commands the attention of the greater bulk of the Indian diasporic audience, the former director of the Reserve Bank of India, I. G. Patel, himself a NRI Gujarati, was quoted pleading with NRIs that they ought "not to donate money to spread hatred in India, neither to the VHP nor to Islamic fundamentalists. . . . Don't give it to people who propagate violence."¹⁰¹ Emboldened by the increasing outrage expressed the world over at the events in Gujarat, a coalition of Indian organizations took out an ad in printed newspapers of the diasporic Indian American community and on the Internet warning unsuspecting Indians that their donations were being funneled to extremist organizations: "Did Our Generosity Fund the Carnage in Gujarat?"¹⁰²

As I have, however, been at some pains to argue in this essay, there is ample reason to think that the Internet has not merely been utilized more effectively by Hindutvavadis, but that as a space somewhat akin to the hotel lobby, where stories may be exchanged and rumors are stoked, it has been hospitable to those who wish to argue in the language of scientific history but are not prepared to be subject to those standards of accountability that are generally the norm in academic narratives. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that Gujarat has also been the occasion for a spurt of activity on Hindutva websites, and that the Hindutva presence on the net is taking on the same gargantuan and dispersed characteristics that one associates with Hinduism. The sites I explored in my essay, those of GHEN [Global Hindu Electronic Network] and VHP, among others, have become more ambitious and attentive to contemporary politics, but in the intervening years the Bajrang Dal, a paramilitary organization that prides itself on the defense of the Hindu nation, has since put up a website that is most expressive of the latest phase of Hindu militancy. Thus, at HinduUnity.org, there is no expression of remorse at the killings of Muslims, but rather a paean

only to those fifty-eight Hindus whose death in the train at the hands of people whose identity still remains to be determined, apparently prompted Hindus to abandon their meekness and create a climate of total fear. Aggressiveness, a militarized conception of Hindu society, and extreme intolerance of the Muslim are proudly displayed as the three characteristics of a rejuvenated Hinduism. On the home page, viewers are greeted by the icon of a growling tiger, followed by news snippets pointing to Muslim perfidy and the Islamic conspiracy to silence competing faiths. Inflammatory "news" items—"Urgent! Forceful Conversion of Two Minor Hindu Girls to Islam"—are followed by updates on al-Qaeda and Muslim militancy in Kashmir, choice quotations from the Qu'ran that purport to show that Islam can envision only death for "idolaters" (for instance, chapter 9, verse 5), and an impressive array of articles and links that serve no purpose but to persuade Hindus that Islam seeks worldwide domination and thus to encourage Hindus to an aggressive defense of the "motherland."

For North American Hindus, in particular, HinduUnity.org holds out the example of Jewish history as a template for discerning Hindus who wish to comprehend how they might profit from their own brutalized past. Scarcely cognizant of the fact that in Israel the term *holocausts* is never used in the plural, since only "the Holocaust" is recognized, Bajrang Dal activists welcome viewers to the "Hindu Holocaust Museum." Here it is argued that painful as the Jewish Holocaust was, it can be viewed as "an extremely effective trigger for Jewish society to actively go about organising itself, to the extent that it may be argued that the Holocaust has, in fact, been the main trigger for the subsequent consolidation of the Jewish community, and its resultant respect amongst the international community." "Where," the page asks in an evidently anguished and puzzled tone, "is the Hindu Holocaust Museum?" Under this page, Hindus are offered a capsule "History of the Jews," an evident example—and admonishment—to Hindus who seem incapable of uniting themselves even in the cause of self-preservation. And since the very idea of a "Hindu Holocaust" might seem somewhat bizarre to an innocent surfer, the page is graced by a quotation from François Gautier, *Le Figaro's* correspondent in India over the last three decades: "The massacres perpetrated by Muslims in India are unparalleled in history, bigger than the holocaust of the Jews by the Nazis; or the massacre of the Armenians by the Turks; more extensive even than the slaughter of the South American native populations by the invading Spanish and Portuguese."¹⁰³ The Jew, at least, can make something from his suffering; he is able to enlist the discourses of science and history in documenting the past and making it work productively for him, to the point where he can claim a monopoly over suffering, but does the Hindu have a similar will to survival and power? If museums are nearly the temples of advanced polities, does it not behoove Hindus to make a similar spectacle of their oppression under Muslims?

The Jewish example is followed so far that, in a related website, "Welcome to the World of Hindu Holocaust," August 14, the day that marks the vivisection of

India and the creation (from the Hindutva perspective) of the theocratic Muslim state of Pakistan, is designated "Hindu Holocaust Day," and the slogan, "Lest we forget . . ." is splashed across the screen.¹⁰⁴ The "Hindu Holocaust down the Timeline," which opens out to the chamber of horrors—detailed pages on the genocide of Hindus under "medieval Jehadi barbarism," during the partition of India, and under the generals in East Pakistan, to name only three periods of history—need not be enumerated at length: suffice to reiterate the point I first advanced in my essay, that Hindutvavadis are heavily invested in "history" as the authentic sign of the modern. It is the Hindu's own estrangement from his past—an estrangement produced by the confluence of the triumph of the ahistoric mode in Indian thinking, the long years of submission under Muslim rule, and the malicious falsification of history by the British—that makes him rootless and an eternal victim, a pawn rather than a subject of history. Though much has been said in the literature about the Internet as a space for the circulation of rumors and conspiratorial theories, by far the greater consideration that researchers and scholars will have to ponder over is whether the Internet will not lead to a further entrenchment of the historical mode of argumentation, and what consequences that may have in shrinking the space of the imaginary in diasporic communities.

In my essay, I had advanced the idea of an Indian/Hindu diaspora that extends far beyond the fifteen to twenty million Hindus living overseas to include those "resident non-Indians," perhaps as many as two hundred million of them, who, though they may make their home in Bangalore, Mumbai, or Delhi, already imagine themselves as part of the North American Hindu community. Sustained perusal of Hindutva literature and websites, in particular, now leads me to advance a yet more radical thesis—namely, that from the Hindutva perspective, nearly the entire Hindu population of some eight hundred million, barring those few millions who are "awakened" to the militant defense of their homeland, displays the characteristics of diasporic people—people living without a true awareness of their past, in exile from history, barely in touch with themselves. The vanguard of true Hindus—the Hindutvavadis who are the footsoldiers of the VHP, the RSS, the Bajrang Dal, the Shiv Sena, the Bharatiya Janata Party, and other similar political and paramilitary organizations, as well as the supporters of Hindu militancy in the purportedly secular societies of the West who are conversant with the critical and indispensable discourses of science, history, and management—are thus charged with shepherding errant Hindus to their new home in the "Hindu Rashtra," the Nation of Hindus. Let us recall what is commonly forgotten: that the notion of the diaspora has, historically speaking, entailed the idea of the return to the homeland. Curiously, those whom we customarily imagine as diasporic Hindus, and especially North American Hindus, are already emblazoned in Hindutva thinking as less diasporic, indeed as comfortably housed in the faith from which their countrymen and countrywomen in India are still largely exiled.

Notes

1. Peter F. Drucker, "Beyond the Information Revolution," *Atlantic Monthly*, October 1999, 47–57. I am grateful to my former research assistant, Ashok Hegde, for his help with library work, and to David Palumbo-Liu, Khachig Tololyan, Rachel Lee, Yossi Shain, and Jim Wilgten for their comments on earlier versions of this paper.
2. As an instance, one might adduce the report of how the homeless in the greater Los Angeles area have taken to the Internet, nursing not only e-commerce ambitions, but creating a new home for themselves. Apparently, according to this report, librarians in Los Angeles and elsewhere report that on some days, as many as 75 percent of the free Internet terminals in public libraries are being used by the homeless. See Greg Miller, "Cyberspace Comes to Skid Row," *Los Angeles Times*, (November 18, 1999), A1, A20–21.
3. *Mondo 2000*, no. 1 (1989): 11. *Mondo 2000* ceased to be in print a few years ago, but similar clichés about the Internet as a radically new space for the articulation of freedom and for humanity's reconnection with the idea of enchantment continue to proliferate down to the present day. We are given assurance that information wants and struggles to be free, that information knows no boundaries or constraints. *Mondo's* disappearance barely a few years after its emergence makes its own point: the web, far from constituting a radical departure from the sociological arrangements of American society, only expands geometrically upon the idea of obsolescence that has been so characteristic a feature of the American polity and economy.
4. Esther Dyson, George Gilder, Jay Keyworth, and Alvin Toffler, "A Magna Carta for the Knowledge Age," *New Perspectives Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (Fall 1994), 28.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, 31–32. Even a cursory reading of the literature leaves one with the inescapable feeling that though the hacker is viewed as a dangerous figure who is liable to crack open the computer files of the Pentagon and compromise the national security of the United States, he is simultaneously a widely admired figure. The daredevil in him taunts not only bureaucrats at the Pentagon, the sleuths of the U.S. Justice Department, and the managers of complex financial and banking systems, but even computer scientists and the software specialists of Silicon Valley. He is the Jesse James and Billy the Kid of the late twentieth century: however regrettable his violation of, and disrespect for, the law, he is that maverick, entrepreneur, and lone ranger who stands forth as an American icon. The political biography of the hacker remains to be written. For a preliminary consideration of "hacktivism," see Amy Harmon, "'Hacktivists' of All Persuasions Take Their Struggle to the Web," *New York Times* (October 31, 1998); a more detailed reading is furnished in Dorothy E. Denning, "Activism, Hacktivism, and Cyberterrorism: The Internet As a Tool for Influencing Foreign Policy," online at <<http://www.nautilus.org/info-policy/workshop/papers/denning.html>>.
9. José Angel Gurria, from a speech reported by Rodolfo Montes, "Chiapas Is a War of Ink and Internet," *Reforma* April 26, 1995, and quoted in David Ronfeldt, John Arquilla, Graham E. Fuller, and Melissa Fuller, *The Zapatista Social Netwar in Mexico* (Santa Monica: RAND, for the United States Army, 1998), 4.
10. Subcomandante Marcos, cited in Ronfeldt et al., *The Zapatista Social Netwar*, 70. Writing from a perspective wholly sympathetic to the Zapatistas, Harry Cleaver remarked, in a notable study on their deployment of the Internet, that "through their ability to extend their political reach via modern computer networks the Zapatistas have woven a new electronic fabric of struggle to carry their revolution throughout Mexico and around the world." See his "The Zapatistas and the Electronic Fabric of Struggle," online at: <<http://www.eco.utexas.edu/faculty/Cleaver/zaps.html>>.
11. Ronfeldt et al., *The Zapatista Social Netwar*, 8; see also John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, *Cyberwar Is Coming!* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1996), reprinted from *Comparative Strategy* 12 (1993): 141–65. For the earliest articulation of Internet warfare, see David Ronfeldt, *Cyberocracy, Cyberspace, and Cyberology: Political Effects of the Information Revolution* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1991).
12. See Ricardo Dominguez, "Digital Zapatismo" (1998), online at <<http://www.nyu.edu/projects/wary/DigZap.html>>.
13. As is now well known, the term *rhizomes* made its first appearance in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). "Rhizomatic" thinking, which is nonlinear, anarchic, nomadic, deterritorialized, multiplicitous, and so on, is differentiated from "arborescent" thinking, which is linear, hierarchic, sedentary, territorialized, binary, and homogeneous and has characterized the scientific thought of the modern West. It is a commonplace in leftist Internet circles to celebrate the work of Deleuze and Guattari as the theoretical platform for a radical Internet-based insurrectionary democracy. For the most extended Internet expression of these sentiments, see Stefan Wray, "Rhizomes, Nomads, and Resistant Internet Use," (July 7, 1998), online at <<http://www.nyu.edu/projects/wray/RhizNom.html>>.
14. See Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 88. To speak of Indian elites as finally learning to "live in time" is not to echo the clichéd Orientalist expressions of Indians (especially Hindus) as outside time, or the supposed Indian propensity to conceive of time as "cyclical" rather than "linear," but rather to point to the manner in which clock-time has begun to impose its tyranny on a people who have lived with pluralistic conceptions of time. In India, as elsewhere, the American idiom "time is money" has begun to alter the frameworks of social relations. For a brief consideration of the cultural histories of time, see Vinay Lal, "The Politics of Time at the Cusp of the Millennium," *Humanscape* 6, no. 12 (December 1999): 5–12.
15. For an unraveling of the term *franchise* see Vivian Sobchack, "Democratic Franchise and the Electronic Frontier," in Ziauddin Sardar and Jerome R. Ravetz, eds., *Cyberfutures: Culture and Politics on the Information Superhighway* (London: Pluto Press, 1996), 77–89.
16. Ziauddin Sardar, "alt.civilizations.faq: Cyberspace As the Darker Side of the West," in Sardar and Ravetz, eds., *Cyberfutures*, 15.
17. On the distinction between "place" and "space" see Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990).
18. Carlos Fuentes, "Chiapas: Latin America's First Post-Communist Rebellion," *New Perspectives Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (spring 1994): 56.
19. For a withering critique of postmodernism's pretensions, see Ziauddin Sardar, *Postmodernism and the Other: The New Imperialism of Western Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 1998).
20. Greg Miller, "Internet Fueled Global Interest in Disruptions," *Los Angeles Times* (December 2, 1999), A24. Mike Dolan, field director for Public Citizens' Global Trade Watch, one of the principal groups that orchestrated the demonstrations against WTO, is reported as saying, "The Internet has become the latest greatest arrow in our quiver of social activism. . . the Internet benefits us more than the corporate and government elites we're fighting." Among the websites launched to combat the WTO, are <www.seattle99.org>, <www.agitprop.org>, <www.globalizethis.org>, and <www.gatt.org>.
21. David Shenk, *Data Smog: Surviving the Information Glut* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997).

22. Amartya Sen, undoubtedly the world's leading authority on famines, has more than once made the empirical observation that no modern democracy has ever been afflicted by famine. In the course of the last fifty years, the people who have had to face famine have all been victims of authoritarian or despotic regimes, as the examples of the Soviet Union under Josef Stalin, China under Mao Zedong, or contemporary Somalia unequivocally suggest. See Sen, *Poverty and Famines* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981); and Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, eds., *Hunger and Public Action*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).
23. No doubt, as with colonization of untamed territories and what were termed "wastelands," the women will—to put it provocatively—follow men. It can be argued that the Internet might possibly furnish women with a way of bypassing patriarchal institutions and social practices, and enable them to forge their own democratic communities, but as of the moment this is an open question.
24. The 1990 census placed the average household income of Indian Americans at \$60,903, above that of Japanese-Americans and Chinese-Americans. I have seen them described as the most affluent ethnic community in the United States; other studies place them below whites and Jews; and yet others describe them as the community with the largest household income. This problem is commonly encountered, since researchers draw upon different databases; but what is transparent is that Indian Americans are well-placed in American society.
25. On the development of the software industry in Bangalore, see Salim Lakha, "Growth of Computer Software Industry in India," *Economic and Political Weekly* (January 6, 1990), John Stremmler, "Bangalore: India's Silicon City," *Monthly Review* (November 1996); Richard Heeks, *India's Software Industry: State Policy, Liberalisation, and Industrial Development* (New Delhi: Sage, 1996); and Monica Prasad, "International Capital on 'Silicon Plateau': Work and Control in India's Computer Industry," *Social Forces* 77, no. 2 (December 1998), 429–52, especially 434–37. A less scholarly, but engaging, account is offered by Richard Rapaport, "Bangalore: Western Technology Giants?" *Wired* 4, no. 2 (February 1996), 109–14, 164–70.
26. In the Hindi version of the joke, Ajit asks Robert to place the hero in "liquid oxygen": liquid won't let him live, and oxygen won't let him die. It doesn't only sound absurd—it is.
27. For a recent profile of the Indian American community, see Karen Leonard, *The South Asian Americans* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997).
28. Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Penguin, 1989), 294–314.
29. I owe this humorous and not inaccurate formulation to my ethnomusicologist friend Daniel Neuman.
30. John Lancaster, "Activism Boosts India's Fortunes: Politically Vocal Immigrants Help Tilt Policy in Washington," *Washington Post* (October 9, 1999), A1.
31. A message demanding that Warner Brothers issue an apology to Hindus and the film be altered was circulated on the Internet by American Hindus against Defamation (AHAD), a group convened by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad-America, whose activities are discussed below at greater length. AHAD's letter to Warner Brothers on August 3, 1999 stated that "We, American Hindus Against Defamation are baffled, disgusted and annoyed by the use of the *shloka* [verse], and fail to understand your intent and the relevance of its usage." On a subsequent occasion, AHAD warned Warner Brothers that the "billion strong Hindu community around the world" would not remain a "silent spectator to the humiliation of its religious beliefs and scriptures." See the message of August 21, 1999 circulated by Devant, <devant@tstt.net.tt>.
32. The dalits were formerly referred to as "untouchables"; they are the outcasts of the Indian society, the "wretched of the earth" who make their living as scavengers, sweepers, tanners, landless laborers, or pursuing other jobs that most caste Hindus consider polluting.

33. Viji Sundaram, "Diet, Dress Code Enrage Hindu Worshippers," *India-West* (March 31, 1995), A1, A12.
34. It is important to mention this, as some people may argue that American or white Hindus are more likely to adopt the orthodox versions of the faith than Indian Hindus in the United States. White Sikhs, for instance, are known to be more rigidly observant of the symbols and practices of their faith than are Indian Sikhs.
35. R. S. Sharma, *In Defence of "Ancient India."* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1978), 20–21.
36. See Vinay Lal, "The Discourse of History and the Crisis at Ayodhya: Reflections on the Production of Knowledge, Freedom, and the Future of India," *Emergences* 5–6 (1993–94), 4–44.
37. Ashok Singhal, quoted in Vishwa Hindu Parishad of Chicago (VHP), *Seventeenth Annual Calendar* (Chicago: VHP, 1995).
38. One could point to the financial activities of the World Hindu Council, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), or the support lavished upon the Hawaii-based newspaper *Hinduism Today*, which is devoted to diasporic Hinduism, by the Hindu Heritage Endowment. See also A. Rogers, "India Seeks Financial Help from Overseas Indians," *Traces World News Digest* 3 (July–September 1998), online at <http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk>.
39. *Indian Express*, (January 16, 1993), various city editions; the ad was reprinted in *India-West*, (February 12, 1993). It is heartening to note that a group of people describing themselves as "Indian Citizens in India" placed an ad in the same newspapers (*Indian Express*, January 26, 1993 and *India-West*, February 12, 1993) questioning the political and ethical propriety of nonresident Hindus: "Is it not presumptuous of the Indians who left 'mother Bharat' and caused a severe brain drain to dictate how we Indians, who remained behind should run our country?" There was no ban on Hindutva organizations, but the rumor took on a life of its own—as indeed rumors do.
40. *Indian Express*, January 16, 1993.
41. Federation of Hindu Associations (FHA), *Bhagwan's Call for Dharma Raksha* [including the publication *Hinduism Simplified*] (Diamond Bar, CA: FHA, [1999?]).
42. Ibid.
43. See the letter, protesting the award, by Vinay Lal et al. in *India-West*, (June 23, 1995), 5.
44. See Sudhir Kakar, *The Colours of Violence* (Delhi: Viking, 1995), 197–214, for the analysis of a similar speech by Sadhvi Ritambhara.
45. See Julius Lipner, "Ancient Banyan: An Inquiry into the Meaning of 'Hinduness,'" *Religious Studies* 32 (1996): 109–26. Among observing Hindus, it is widely believed that the water (*jal*) of the Ganga is sacred, and dying persons are often given a sip of this water to provide them solace and ease their passage into the next life. This Ganga *jal* is sometimes stored in a bottle at home.
46. See Luther P. Gerlach, "Protest Movements and the Construction of Risk," in B. B. Johnson and V. T. Covello, eds., *The Social Construction of Risk* (Boston: D. Reidel, 1987), 115, as cited in Ronfeldt et al., *The Zapatista Social Netwar*, 114.
47. On "swarming" and "flooding," see Ronfeldt, et al., *The Zapatista Social Netwar*, but also Stefan Wray, "Transforming Luddite Resistance into Virtual Luddite Resistance: Weaving a World Wide Web of Electronic Civil Disobedience," (April 7, 1998), online at <http://www.nyu.edu/projects/wray/luddite.html>. Needless to say, 330 million is merely a conventional number, but the concern by diasporic Hindus that this subjects Hinduism to mockery is once again amply witnessed in *Bhagwan's Call for Dharma Raksha* and scores of other like publications. In a section under "Hinduism Simplified," this "problem" of "millions Gods" [*sic*] is described as "lots of misunderstandings," and later, in a portion entitled "What Hinduism Is Not?" it is averred that "Hinduism is not a religion of 330 million Gods. In fact, it is monotheistic polytheism" (n.p.).

48. Arjun Appadurai, "Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology," in Richard G. Fox, ed., *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Publications, 1991), 202.
49. Steven Vertovec, "Three Meanings of 'Diaspora,' Exemplified among South Asian Religions," *Diaspora* 6, no. 3 (1997): 281.
50. All these instances are drawn from the "Library of Hindu History," which can be found online at <http://www.vhp.org/hindu_history>.
51. See <<http://www.tezcat.com/~hnaik/chinmaya.html>>.
52. See <<http://www.bjp.org>> and <<http://www.rss.org>>.
53. "Award Recipient," *India-West* (March 15, 1996), C20.
54. See <<http://rbhatnagar.csm.uc.edu:8080/kashmir/html>>. Over four dozen articles are linked to the page.
55. See <http://hindunet.org/srh_home/1997_12/0040.html> for an article, reproduced from the *Times of India* (December 22, 1997), by Srichand P. Hinduja entitled "All Indians are Hindus."
56. See <<http://rbhatnagar.csm.uc.edu:8080/ramjanmabhoomi.html>>.
57. A partial profile of the membership of the RSS and the supporters of Hindutva can be found in Tapan Bose et al., *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*, Tracts for the Times No. 1 (Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993).
58. See Ashis Nandy et al., *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of the Self* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).
59. Narendra Nath Datta (1863–1902), better known as Swami Vivekananda, was the chief disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, a renowned Bengali mystic who is often seen as one of the supreme embodiments of Indian spirituality. Vivekananda established the Ramakrishna Mission, and so introduced not only a new monastic order but also a set of charitable institutions, such as schools and hospitals, that are still active in India today. He took the teachings of Hinduism to the West, propagated a more integral version of the faith, and urged the youth to work toward a "new India." Though his master, Sri Ramakrishna, could become delirious with devotion to Kali, Vivekananda is said to have attached more importance to social work and intellectual discrimination as modes of apprehending the divine.
60. Large statues of Vivekananda have been installed recently in both Trinidad and Chicago.
61. See <http://www.hindunet.org/vivekananda/as_interview>.
62. Ibid.
63. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad of the United States has embraced an expansionist program for the Indian nation-state. One of its recent publications cites, with evident approval, the cherished hope of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) that the "next century will surely [be] the Hindu century," and should this sound implausible, readers are reminded that after the "Mahabharatha War, our culture spread to China, Japan and [the] Americas. The Red Indians of America are the descendants of Hindus who went there some 4000 years ago." These are the words of K. S. Sudharshan, Sat Sarkaryavah (Joint General Secretary) of the RSS, quoted in VHP of Chicago, *Fourteenth Anniversary Calendar* (Chicago: VHP, 1992), 1.
64. See <http://www.hindunet.org/vivekananda/as_interview>.
65. The episode is discussed in Ramachandra Gandhi, *Sita's Kitchen: A Testimony of Faith and Inquiry* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1992), 10. The discussion by Rajni Bakshi, *The Dispute over Swami Vivekananda's Legacy: A Warning and an Opportunity* (Mapusa, Goa: The Other India Press, 1994), is of some use.
66. Swami Vivekananda, "The Future of India," in *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 8 vols. (Mayavati, India: Advaita Ashram, 1964), 3:289.
67. Ibid.
68. See <<http://www.flex.com/~jai/satyamevjayate>>.
69. See <http://members.aol.com/_ht_a/_jyotishi/index.html>.

70. "Prophet of Terror and the Religion of Peace—Part I," online at <<http://www.flex.com/~jai/satyamevjayate/mohwar1.html>>. Part III is available at <<http://www.flex.com/~jai/satyamevjayate/mohwar3.html>>.
71. "The X-Rated Paradise of Islam," online at <<http://www.flex.com/~jai/satyamevjayate/heaven.html>>.
72. An impressive website, designed from the standpoint of Indian nationalism, is devoted to the 1971 war of "liberation" that led to the defeat of Pakistan and the creation of the new sovereign state of Bangladesh; see <<http://www.freeindia.org/1971war>>.
73. See the e-mail message by Aditi Chaturvedi, October 17, 1999, available from <devant@tstt.net.tt>, entitled "Undermining Hinduism by Labeling it As Mythology," which begins, "Last month Indian Express inaugurated their new site on Hinduism and contemptuously titled it 'www.hindumythology.com'. The title of course is a not so subtle reflection of the regard that Indian Express has for Hindu beliefs. The implicit suggestion is clearly motivated by a negative approach towards Hinduism. Obviously many Hindus on the net are not very happy at having their spiritual beliefs termed as 'mythology' [emphasis added]." I by no means wish to convey the impression that myths do not on occasion create their own oppressions, but secularists and their "fundamentalist" foes are united in their aversion for myth, and it is the consensus behind history as a form of knowledge that has barely been investigated or critiqued.
74. Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (Calcutta: Signet Press, 1946; reprint Delhi: Oxford University Press/Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1982), 102.
75. Among the more naive of such attempts to furnish Indians with a historical sensibility is Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994); among the more complex efforts to contest the colonial charge that Indians were insensitive to historical thinking is the influential work by Nicholas Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987; 2d ed., paperback, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992). It is possible to agree with the orientalist reading that Indians did not produce a historical literature; but that cannot be taken as signifying one's consent with the proposition that this was a "lack" as such. The ahistoricity of the Indian sensibility remains one of the most attractive features of Indian civilization.
76. Nehru, *Discovery of India*, 102.
77. "History of Hindu Temples," online at <<http://www.vhp.org>>.
78. See <http://www.hindunet.org/alt_hindu/1994/msg00658.html>.
79. Rajiv Varma, "The Magnitude of Muslim Atrocities" and "Destruction of Hindu Temples by Aurangzeb," online at <http://www.hindunet.org/hindu_history>.
80. Though there are many Indian cuisines, they have been reduced to north Indian tandoori food in the diaspora; similarly, there are several dance forms—Kathak, Odissi, Bharat Natyam, and Manipuri, among others. Bharat Natyam, literally "the dance of India," reigns supreme among diasporic Indian women (or rather, their parents). Ironically, as much recent scholarship has established, Bharat Natyam, seen in the diaspora as an embodiment of the timeless cultural traditions of an ancient civilization, is not unreasonably described as an "invented tradition," and in its present form it was essentially revived in the early twentieth century. Scholars of the Indian diaspora have not been sufficiently attentive to these kinds of considerations, just as they have studiously ignored the place of the commercial Hindi cinema in the diaspora. Far too much attention has been lavished on Gurinder Chadha, Hanif Kureishi, Mira Nair, and Deepa Mehta, though Indian families show comparatively little interest in their films. Indeed, these films point to an emerging history of the Indian diaspora as consumption for advocates of multiculturalism; meanwhile, in Indonesia, Fiji, Mauritius, Canada, Guyana, the United States, and elsewhere, the popular Hindi film continues to provide the Indian population, and often the "locals," with some clues about the mythic structuring of their civilization.

81. See <<http://www.hindunet.org/alt.hindu/1994/msg00365.html>> (no longer available as of December 2002) and <http://www.spiritweb.org/HinduismToday/94-08-Fiji_Temple_Burned.html>.
82. See <http://www.hindunet.org/hindu_history/modern/hindu_kush.html>.
83. See <<http://jammu-kashmir.org/KIN/Atrocities/index.html>>.
84. See <<http://www.flex.com/~jai/satyamevjayate/temples4.html>>.
85. See <http://www.hindunet.org/hindu_history/modern/moghal_atro.html>.
86. The following articles, by Dr. P. V. Vartak and others, in the "Library of Hindu History" are useful: "Mahabharata: A Myth of Reality"; "The Mahabharat Chronology"; "Mahabharat: An Astronomical Proof from the Bhagavat Puraan"; "The Scientific Dating of the Mahabharat War"; and "Astronomical Dating of the Ramayan." All can be found online at <http://www.hindunet.org/hindu_history>. The attempt in each case, wholly unsuccessful, is to provide a firm date for events described in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Why this might be important for Hindutvavadis can be understood from the fact that the earliest firm (or nearly firm) dates that can be furnished for ancient Indian history relate to the lives of the Buddha (founder of Buddhism) and Mahavira (founder of Jainism), both of whom signaled their dissent from Hinduism in the sixth century B.C.E. The mythicity of Hinduism was never much of an embarrassment to Hindus until the nineteenth century, and the ascendancy of history, alongside the emergence of the nation-state, has greatly accelerated the process in the period after independence. An engaging perspective on these questions, focusing on the Tamils and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka, is to be found in E. Valentine Daniel, *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropology of Violence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); see also Lal, "The Discourse of History," and Vinay Lal, "History and the Possibilities of Emancipation: Some Lessons from India," *Historiography of Civilizations*; special issues of *Journal of the Indian Council for Philosophical Research*, June 1996, 95–137.
87. Aryan Invasion Theory Links can be found online at <http://www.hindunet.org/hindu_history/ancient/aryan/aryan_link.html>. See also the lengthy article by David Frawley, "The Myth of the Aryan Invasion of India," which claims that the Aryans dispersed from India to the rest of the world, online at <<http://www.spiritweb.org/Spirit/myth-of-invasion.html>>. Frawley and Keonraad Elst, whose support of Hindutva history and politics is unequivocal, are widely cited in Hindutva histories; for all their nationalism, Hindutvavadis still crave recognition by the white man.
88. Lal, "The Discourse of History," 4–44; Lal, "History and the Possibilities of Emancipation," 95–137; and Vinay Lal, "History and Politics," in Philip Oldenburg and Marshall Bouton, eds., *India Briefing* (New York: M. E. Sharpe for the Asia Society, 1999).
89. My own website, MANAS <<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/southasia>>, provides a comprehensive view of some segments of Indian history and culture, and is epistemologically resistant to the dominant paradigms, since it is animated largely by a civilizational view of India that is deeply informed by Gandhian and neo-Gandhian strains, as well as by a politics that strives for the ecological plurality of knowledges. One other small exception is the Forum of the Indian Left, a New York-based organization, which hosts four or five articles on Indian history on its website; see <http://www.foil.org/history>. Websites devoted to contemporary politics that offer alternative perspectives are much more numerous.
90. A forensic report, published by the Gujarat state's own laboratory in July 2002, now even makes it possible to question the received account according to which a large Muslim mob set fire to two wagons of a train carrying Hindu militants and their families returning from Ayodhya. For more information on the forensic report, see, online, <<http://www.milligazette.com/Archives/15072002/1507200250.htm>>.
91. This question is asked in very much the same idiom that people wonder how the culture that produced Beethoven, Bach, Schiller, Schubert, and Goethe could comfortably house Nazism. Apropos this, Benjamin's observation steers us to more nuanced thinking: "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism." See Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannab Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1969), 256.
92. The diasporic Gujarati community is serviced by many websites and portals in Gujarati itself—see <Gujarati.indiainfo.com>—but the role of the Internet in keeping the community stitched has not so far been the subject of any English-language scholarly work.
93. See <<http://www.gla.org.uk/nxtev.htm>>.
94. Rajdeep Sardesai, "The Disaster Divide," available at <www.indian-express.com/ie/daily/20010205/ian05028.html>. A new organization of people of Gujarati origin, the Vishwa Gujarati Samaj, or World Gujarati Association, is utilizing the Internet to link members of the diaspora (see <www.evishwagujarati.net>) and states only that "more than a million persons of Gujarati origin live abroad." See <<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2002/20001009/login/main5.htm>>.
95. Ashutosh Varshney, "Doomed from Within," *Newsweek* (international edition), March 18, 2002, online at <<http://www.umich.edu/~iinet/iisite/media/03-18-02-Newsweek-AVarshney.htm>>. Nihal Singh has suggested that "significant characteristics of this [Gujarati] diaspora, grouped under the generic acronym of NRI (Non-resident Indian), have proved hospitable to the seeds planted by the RSS," a paramilitary association that was implicated in the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948 and has ever since held aloft the banner of Hindu supremacy. See N. Singh, "A Millstone round India's Neck," online at: <<http://www.khaleejtimes.co.ae/nihal.htm>>.
96. One partial exception is Biju Mathew, "Byte-Sized Nationalism: Mapping the Hindu Right in the United States," *Rethinking Marxism* 12, no. 3 (2000), 108–28, though even here the empirical data is somewhat slim. Gautam Appa, writing of Hindu organizations in Britain, states that "the contribution of these British organizations (VHP UK, HSS) to the work of the Sangh Parivar in India in terms of fund raising is not insignificant. According to the charity commissioner's records, the two main charities associated with VHP (UK) and the HSS [Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, the international equivalent of the RSS] had collected nearly one million pounds in the last financial year. It is common knowledge that a large chunk of the overt and covert collection ends up in India in the hands of the Sangh Parivar." See Appa, "Gujarat Carnage—the Non Resident Indians (NRI) perspective" (30 May 2002), online at <<http://www.onlinevolunteers.org/gujarat/news/articles/appa.htm>>.
97. Nor should this be surprising: similar transfers of money on a large scale to the Irish Republican Army (IRA) by Irish Americans until recent years have been heavily documented, and the Tamil insurgency in Sri Lanka is largely fuelled by donations from diasporic Tamilian Sri Lankaos. In many respects, from their sophisticated use of the Net to their advocacy of suicide bombings long before the present wave of Palestinian suicide bombings brought this matter to the attention of the world, the Tamil Tigers have established the paradigms for late modernity's insurrectionary warfare.
98. Sardesai, "The Disaster Divide."
99. See, for instance, <<http://www.onlinevolunteers.org/gujarat/index.htm>> and <<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/GujaratDevelopment>>. Existing websites have added significant sections on Gujarat: see, for instance, <www.sabrang.com>, <www.mnet.fr/aiindex>, and <www.ektaonline.org/cac/index.htm>.
100. Among the more notable of these reports are Human Rights Watch, *We Have No Orders to Save You*; Peoples' Union for Democratic Rights, *Maaro, Kaapo, Baaro: State, Society and Communalism in Gujarat*; and reports by Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust (SAHMAT), various women's organizations, and the National Human Rights Commission. These reports can be accessed through a number of sites,

principally <www.onlinevolunteers.org/gujarat/reports/index.htm>. The website of the People's Union for Civil Liberties is also of use; see <www.pucl.org/reports/gujarat-index.htm>.

101. See <www.rediff.com>, archived message of May 13, 2002.

102. See <www.ektaonline.org/cac/actions/gujarat/nriad.htm>.

103. See <www.hinduunity.org>, link under "Hindu Holocaust Museum." Gautier's popularity among Hindus, even in the United States, may be gauged from the fact that he has been on a lecture tour of the United States organized by the Hindu Students Council, the youth wing of the VHP.

104. See <www.geocities.com/hindoo_humanist/>.

5

Reimagining the Community: Information Technology and Web-based Chinese Language Networks in North America

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As part of the information-centered technological revolution that started in the late twentieth century, the Internet has not only transformed our culture and society in terms of networking, but has also challenged our traditional concepts of identity and community that were geographically conceived and historically constructed. According to the UCLA Internet Report, "Surveying the Digital Future," released in November 2001, "the Internet is now a mainstream activity in American life that continues to spread among people across all age groups, education levels, and incomes."¹ As the Internet expands across North America and around the world, the United States Internet Council, in its 2001 edition of "The State of the Internet Report," announces that the online population has crossed the half billion milestone globally and that online demographics have finally begun to reflect offline realities.² What is more interesting in this annual report, however, is its declaration that English speakers have now for the first time lost their dominance in the online world, and represent approximately 45 percent of the total online population. While the United States, European nations, and Japan still lead the Internet in terms of technology and language content, the council further observes, "several other nations such as China, India, and South Korea (have begun) to play larger roles."³ The latest development of the Internet and the emergence of the three Asian nations as new major players in the IT industry have important political and cultural implications. To begin with, as the Internet continues to facilitate the free flow of information across regional and national boundaries, these three Asian national governments have promoted the technology as a means to integrate their national economies into the global economy and bridge the gap between them and the more advanced countries such as the United States, even though it means that they have to continue to wrestle with issues of authority, jurisdiction, and law enforcement in their traditionally defined nation-states. As a result of their efforts, the Internet and their native language contents on it have now flourished