BOOK REVIEW

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I am a Troll: Inside the Secret World of BJP's Digital Army;
            By Swati Chaturvedi;
Publisher: Juggernaut;
            New Delhi pp:171; Rs 250

The life and growth of a political party is evaluated not on how many years it has been a lived but the roll it has played in the circumstances for building and enriching the democracy in the country. Today when BhartiyaJanata Party (BLP) is on the apex of its popularity in country, its way of functioning attracts scholars for its study. But there are many contradictions to it also.

The book under review seems quite relevant to know critique's attitude in this perspective. "Why does the PM of India alone among world leaders follow some of his country's worst online abusers?" Journalist Swati Chaturvedi asks this damning question and goes to answer it in an explosive expose of the ruling BharatiyaJanata Party's (BJP) secret digital world where everyone who disagrees becomes an enemy. After being abused and hounded on social media for six months, a fed up Swati became the first Indian journalist to file a police complaint. Under intense pressure, Twitter suspended the handle and gave Delhi Police the IP and email addresses of the anonymous slanderer. But no arrest was ever made because the culprits had "powerful backers in the government". This triggered Swati's two-year investigation into the BJP digital army. She spoke to BJP and RSS leaders, senior government officials, even BJP trolls who met her furtively.

Swati wonders why should any leader or party crave a support base making violent threats against women, issuing death threats and spreading communal poison? The BJP's social media cell, the book says, is a superbly organisedcentre, highly effective in spreading messages. The BJP had with foresight created a bank of thousands of dormant Twitter accounts when the verification process was less

stringent. These are used when the BJP goes for synchronised tweeting. "They also have bots controlled by the party's central IT cell which tweet out identical messages simultaneously. These are algorithms acting in social media networks which to the outside world look like a real user."

Swati is certain, after her extensive interview with former insider Khosla, that there is a clear link between online rightwing trolls and the BJP and that the BJP IT cell controls much of the online trolling. "The BJP's social media cell has the potential to morph into a bigger monster as it attacks citizens for not conforming to the party's world view on issues like diet, religion, Kashmir and tribal rights. It is time we opened our eyes to the dangers ahead."

With the increased penetration of social media in our lives, I've always wondered why would so many people defend a particular party with so much devotion and blindly criticize others with great vendetta?Although, all known public facts expressed (nothing new) and did not see any active "INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM" the author claims. However, the book interprets a story of mainstreaming hate in India.

This is an investigative report by a journalist (writer) into the organised system of trolling certain influential people (politicians, journalists, actors, activist etc.) which are vocal against PM Modi or BJP. This book is solely devoted to how BJP handles social media(Whatsapp, twitter, facebook etc.) to push their agenda, discredit any critic and also intimidate them by death threats, rape threats etc. It contains interviews of people who previously had worked inside the BJP social media department and also some who work there currently.

The book details how an organised attack on social media is done, how defamatory retweets or hashtag against a critic like ArvindKejriwal are made trending and using the same strategy other hashtags or tweets praising PM Modi or BJP is made trending. According to the book this whole thing is acheived by BJP IT cell in Delhi which decides who to target, what to say and how to say it and all this is done with support from BJP leadership. Then the messages are circulated via Whatsapp and trolling begins. Examples are given to support these claims.

Although, this book seems to be biased to some extent. The author also details how she was targeted so we also have a first-hand description. There is a bias in this coverage, this is all about BJP, a fair coverage would have been possible if analysis of other party social media handles would also have been done.

The quality of writing is very simple and candid. This book has unmasked a whole new side of the digital army that political parties have in store. The target

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audience is people who like to debate on social media on current political scenario but beyond that, it's an important read for every citizen to understand how and what she's being fed in the name of news.

Not a comprehensive study but indeed an investigative report on the systematic architecture of hate built by the political party in India.

Despite of its shortcomings, everyone one should read it and try to understand that every piece of news, tweet, FB post, Whatsapp forward they see, most likely has a questionable origin. And even if this book is biased or have exaggerated some facts, but still its message is still worth taking, do not trust every piece of information on social media, The target audience is people who like to debate on social media on current political scenario but beyond that, it's an important read for every citizen to understand how and what she's being fed in the name of news.

A must read for every Indian, especially the youth whose social media presence is an ever growing phenomenon.