

On [January 4, the Mumbai police booked the alleged perpetrators of the 'Bulli Bai' app](#), report Alishan Jafri and Naomi Barton.

The two persons arrested – an 18-year-old young woman, Shweta Singh, and her friend, 21-year-old Vishal Jha – are symptomatic of a larger disease: a new kind of extremist alt-right majoritarian radicalisation. As in the case of the young man from IIT who posted rape threats against Virat Kohli's daughter, they are not isolated cases of young people gone astray. These individuals are a product of a radical ecosystem that is inspired by the propaganda of a 'Hindu rashtra' but which is suspicious of the official purveyors of Hindutva for their 'pragmatism' and supposed 'softness' towards Muslims and Dalits.

In the past few years, a significant number of young men and women in India have been attracted to this dangerous alt-right digital ecosystem called 'trad-wing', in which they serve as self-styled civilisational warriors. Trads view other right-wingers as too liberal and call them 'raitas'. Unlike the trads, the raitas – whose name stems from the

phonetic pronunciation of right-wing and a play on the idiom 'raitafailana' or to botch up – supposedly believe in a Hindu nationalism that is more symbolic than theological. For them, the political leadership Narendra Modi provides is enough to further the Hindutva agenda. And as the more 'mainstream' of Hindu nationalists, they're more visible in the public sphere.

Conversely, traders believe in a narrow religious supremacy within which there is very little scope to bend the rules to suit political convenience. Raitas are perceived by them as moderates, with little to mark them out from leftists and liberals.

The fault lines between these two subcultural movements within Hindutva became visible during the post-poll Bengal violence, and after Modi succumbed to the farmers' protest and repealed the controversial farm laws. Even as the raitas praised his pragmatism, he was viciously attacked by the traders for what they say was his moderate response. What distinguishes this alt-right movement from the organised hate

crime nexus is its self-sustaining and organic nature.

This is a movement in which people willingly participate for association, irrespective of what they may gain or lose. In that sense, it is an online army of individuals deeply committed to the movement, with their political engagement expressing itself in twisted forms of “humour”.

The vocabulary is borrowed from the Western ‘alt-right’ – the neo-Nazi online ecosystem which is vocally opposed to affirmative action, minority advocacy and liberal values. A section of generally educated ‘upper’ caste Hindus have appropriated the symbols of the Western alt-right, like Pepe the Frog. The meme originated from a politically unaffiliated cartoon in 2005, burgeoning to cult status by 2015, before being co-opted by white-supremacists in the US.

While these spaces do not contain rigid structural organisation, they work as a subculture, developing a visual language that is simultaneously new yet draws on a historic tradition of hateful

iconography.

For instance, Shweta Singh, the alleged perpetrator in the Bulli Deals case, shot to notoriety after she posted a Hindutva propaganda poster which directly reconfigured a Nazi propaganda poster exhorting 'Aryans' to have more children. Niraj Bishnoi, the young man arrested in the case allegedly tried to mislead the investigation through his account @giyu44 by constantly sharing false information about the Sulli Deals case.