MODI ABROAD

Statement/Digital India: Leading US academics urge Silicon Valley to be cautious in dealing with Modi government

Sunday 30 August 2015, by [Collective / Multiple signers](#) (Date first published: 29 August 2015).

Digital India initiative ignores key questions about the collection of personal information and the near-certainty that such systems will be used to enhance surveillance, says statement. (Full text).

With Prime Minister Narendra Modi due to visit Silicon Valley to promote his Digital India initiative late in September, leading South Asian experts at US universities on Thursday issued a statement urging information firms to be cautious of doing business with a government that has "on several occasions already, demonstrated its disregard for human rights and civil liberties, as well as the autonomy of educational and cultural institutions".

The signatories include Columbia University's Akeel Bilgrami, Stanford University's Thomas Blom Hansen and the University of Chicago's Wendy Doniger.

Here is the full text of their statement.

As faculty who engage South Asia in our research and teaching, we write to express our concerns about the uncritical fanfare being generated over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Silicon Valley to promote 'Digital India' on September 27, 2015.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Silicon Valley highlights the role of a country that has contributed much to the growth and development of Silicon Valley industries, and builds on this legacy in extending American business collaboration and partnerships with India. However Indian entrepreneurial success also brings with it key responsibilities and obligations with regard to the forms of e-governance envisioned by 'Digital India'.

We are concerned that the project's potential for increased transparency in bureaucratic dealings with people is threatened by its lack of safeguards about privacy of information, and thus its potential for abuse. As it stands, 'Digital India' seems to ignore key questions raised in India by critics concerned about the collection of personal information and the near certainty that such digital systems will be used to enhance surveillance and repress the constitutionally-protected rights of citizens. These issues are being discussed energetically in public in India and abroad. Those who live and work in Silicon Valley have a particular responsibility to demand that the government of India factor these critical concerns into its planning for digital futures.

We acknowledge that Narendra Modi, as Prime Minister of a country that has contributed much to the growth and development of Silicon Valley industries, has the right to visit the United States, and to seek American business collaboration and partnerships with India. However, as educators who pay particular attention to history, we remind Mr. Modi's audiences of the powerful reasons for him being denied the right to enter the U.S. from 2005-2014, for there is still an active case in Indian courts that questions his role in the Gujarat violence of 2002 when 1,000 died. Modi's first year in office as the Prime Minister of India includes well-publicized episodes of censorship and harassment of those critical of his policies, bans and restrictions on NGOs leading to a constriction of the space of civic engagement, ongoing violations of religious freedom, and a steady impingement on the independence of the judiciary.

Under Mr Modi's tenure as Prime Minister, academic freedom is also at risk: foreign scholars have been denied entry to India to attend international conferences, there has been interference with the governance of top Indian universities and academic institutions such as the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, the Indian Institutes of Technology and Nalanda University; as well as underqualified or incompetent key appointments made to the Indian Council of Historical Research, the Film and Television Institute of India, and the National Book Trust. A proposed bill to bring the Indian Institutes of Management under direct control of government is also worrisome. These alarming trends require that we, as educators, remain vigilant not only about modes of e-governance in India but about the political future of the country.

We urge those who lead Silicon Valley technology enterprises to be mindful of not violating their own codes of corporate responsibility when conducting business with a government which has, on several occasions already, demonstrated its disregard for human rights and civil liberties, as well as the autonomy of educational and cultural institutions.

Meena Alexander, Distinguished Professor of English, Hunter College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York

Arjun Appadurai, Paulette Goddard Professor of Media, Culture, and Communication, New York University

Anjali Arondekar, Associate Professor of Women's Studies, UC Santa Cruz

Fredrick Asher, Professor of Art History and South Asian Studies, University of Minnesota

Paola Bacchetta, Associate Professor of Gender and Women's Studies University of California, Berkeley

Sarada Balagopalan, Associate Professor of Childhood Studies, Rutgers University, Camden

Radhika Balakrishnan, Prof of Women's and Gender Studies, Rutgers University

Shahzad Bashir, Professor of Religious Studies, Stanford University

Manu Bhagavan, Professor of History and Human Rights, Hunter College and the Graduate Center, The City University of New York

Mona Bhan Associate Professor of Sociology and Anthropology DePauw University

Srimati Basu, Professor of Gender and Women's Studies, University of Kentucky

Prashant Bharadwaj, Associate Professor of Economics, University of California, San Diego

Nilanjana Bhattacharjya, Faculty Fellow, Barrett Honors College, Arizona State University

Nandini Bhattacharya, Professor of English, Texas A &M University, College- Station

Tithi Bhattacharya, Associate Professor of South Asian History, Purdue University

Amit R. Baishya, Assistant Professor of English, University of Oklahoma

Akeel Bilgrami, Sidney Morgenbesser Professor of Philosophy and Director, South Asian Institute, Columbia University

Purnima Bose, Associate Professor, English and International Studies, Indiana University-Bloomington

Christopher Candland, Associate Professor of Political Science, Wellesley College

Paula Chakravartty, Associate Professor, Gallatin School, & Department of Media, Culture and Communication, New York University

Shefali Chandra, Associate Professor of South Asian History Washington University, St. Louis

S. Charusheela, Associate Professor, School of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences, University of Washington, Bothell

Partha Chatterjee, Professor of Anthropology and South Asian Studies, Columbia University

Indrani Chatterjee Professor of History and South Asian Studies, University of Texas, Austin

Swati Chattopadhyay Professor History of Art and Architecture, University of California, Santa Barbara

Marty Chen, School of Public Policy, Harvard Kennedy School and Affiliated Professor, Harvard Graduate School of Design

Rohit Chopra, Associate Professor of Communication, Santa Clara University

Elora Chowdhury Associate Professor & Chair, Women's and Gender Studies, University of Massachusetts, Boston

E. Valentine Daniel, Professor of Anthropology, Colombia University

Monisha Das Gupta, Associate Professor of Ethnic Studies and Women's Studies, University of Hawaii, Manoa

Jigna Desai, Professor of Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies, University of Minnesota

Pawan Dhingra, Professor of Sociology, Tufts University

Wendy Doniger, Professor of the History of Religions, University of Chicago

Richard Falk, Professor of International Law Emeritus, Princeton University

Bishnupriya Ghosh, Professor of English University of California, Santa Barbara

Huma Ahmed-Ghosh, Professor and Chair of Women's Studies, San Diego State University

Durba Ghosh, Associate Professor of History, Cornell University

Sumanth Gopinath, Associate Professor of Music Theory, School of Music, University of Minnesota

Nitin Govil, Associate Professor of Cinema & Media Studies, University of Southern California

Paul Greenough, Professor of History and Community and Behavioral Health and Director, South Asian Studies Program, University of Iowa

Inderpal Grewal, Professor of South Asian Studies, Yale University

Sumit Guha, Frances Higginbotham Nalle Centennial Professor of History, University of Texas, Austin

Thomas Blom Hansen, Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Center for South Asia, Stanford University

Syed Akbar Hyder, Associate Professor of South Asian Studies, University of Texas, Austin

Nalini Iyer, Professor of English, Seattle University

Priya Jaikumar, Associate Professor of Cinema and Media Studies, University of Southern California

Pranav Jani, Associate Professor of English, Ohio State University

Sheila Jasanoff, Professor of Science and Technology Studies, Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government

Arun W. Jones, Associate Professor, Candler School of Theology, Emory University

May Joseph, Professor of Social Science, Pratt Institute

Priya Joshi, Associate Professor of English and Associate Director, Center for the Humanities, Temple University

Sampath Kannan, Henry Salvatore Professor of Computer and Information Science, University of Pennsylvania

Suvir Kaul, A.M. Rosenthal Professor of English, University of Pennsylvania Waqas Khwaja, Professor of English, Agnes Scott College

Naveeda Khan, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Johns Hopkins University

Nyla Ali Khan, Visiting Professor of Women's Studies, University of Oklahoma, Norman

Satish Kolluri, Associate Professor of Communications, Pace University

Ruby Lal, Professor of Middle East and South Asian Studies, Emory University

Sarah Lamb, Professor of Anthropology and Head of the Division of Social Sciences, Brandeis University; Co-Chair of South Asian Studies

Karen Leonard, Professor of Anthropology, Emeritus, University of California, Irvine

David Lelyveld, Professor of History, Emeritus, William Paterson University

Jinee Lokaneeta, Associate Professor of Political Science and International Relations, Drew University

Ania Loomba, Catherine Bryson Professor of English, University of Pennsylvania

David Ludden, Professor of History, New York University

Ritty Lukose, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Gender and Sexuality Studies, and South Asian Studies, the Gallatin School, New York University

Sudhir Mahadevan Assistant Professor of Film Studies, Comparative Literature, Cinema and Media, University of Washington, Seattle

Tayyab Mahmud, Professor of Law and Director, Center for Global Justice Seattle University School of Law

Sunaina Maira, Professor of Asian American Studies, University of California, Davis

Bakirathi Mani, Associate Professor of English Literature, Swarthmore College

Rebecca J. Manring, Associate Professor of India Studies and Religious Studies Indiana University-Bloomington

Monika Mehta, Associate Professor, Department of English, Binghamton University

Jisha Menon, Assistant Professor of Theatre and Performance Studies, Stanford University

Kalyani Devaki Menon, Associate Professor of Religious Studies, DePaul University

Sally Engle Merry, Silver Professor of Anthropology, New York University

Raza Mir, Professor of Management, Cotsakos College of Business, William Paterson University

Deepti Misri, Associate Professor of Women and Gender Studies University of Colorado, Boulder

Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Chair and Distinguished Professor of Women's & Gender Studies, and Dean's Professor of Humanities, Syracuse University

Satya P. Mohanty, Professor of English, Cornell University

Megan Moodie, Associate Professor of Anthropology, University of California, Santa Cruz

Projit B. Mukharji, Martin Meyerson Assistant Professor in Interdisciplinary Studies, History & Sociology of Science, University of Pennsylvania

Madhavi Murty, Assistant Professor of Feminist Studies, University of California, Santa Cruz

Vijaya Nagarajan, Associate Professor of Theology & Religious Studies, Program in Environmental Studies, University of San Francisco

Gyanendra Pandey, Arts and Sciences Distinguished Professor of History, Emory University

Carla Petievich, Visiting Professor of South Asian Studies, University of Texas, Austin

Sheldon Pollock, Professor of South Asian Studies, Columbia University Kavita Philip, Associate Professor of History, University of California, Irvine

Vijay Prashad, George and Martha Kellner Chair of South Asian History, Trinity College

Jasbir K. Puar, Associate Professor of Women's and Gender Studies, Rutgers University

Balakrishnan Rajagopal, Professor of Law and Development, Department of Urban Studies and Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

R. Radhakrishnan, Chancellor's Professor of English and Comparative Literature, University of California, Irvine

Gloria Raheja, Professor of Anthropology, University of Minnesota

Junaid Rana, Associate Professor of Asian American Studies, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana

Anupama Rao, Professor of Anthropology, Barnard College

Velcheru Narayana Rao, Distinguished Visiting Professor of Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies, Emory University

Kasturi Ray, Associate Professor of Women and Gender Studies/Co-Director, South Asian Studies, San Francisco State University

M.V. Ramana, Program on Science and Global Security, Princeton University Sumathi Ramaswamy, Professor of History, Duke University

Chandan Reddy, Associate Professor of English, University of Washington, Seattle

Gayatri Reddy, Associate Professor of Women's Studies, University of Illinois, Chicago

Parama Roy, Professor of English, University of California, Davis

Sharmila Rudrappa, Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Texas at Austin

G.S. Sahota, Assistant Professor of Literature, University of California, Santa Cruz

Yasmin Saikia, Hardt-Nickachos Chair in Peace Studies & Professor of History, Center for the Study of Religion and Conflict, Arizona State University

Arun Saldanha, Associate Professor of Geography, Environment and Society University of Minnesota

Juned Shaikh, Assistant Professor of History, University of California, Santa Cruz

Nitasha Tamar Sharma, Charles Deering McCormick Professor of Teaching Excellence and Associate Professor of African American Studies and Asian American Studies, Northwestern University

Elora Shehabuddin, Associate Professor of Humanities and Political Science, Rice University

Bhaskar Sarkar, Associate Professor of Film and Media Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara

Priya Satia, Associate Professor of History, Stanford University

Aradhana Sharma, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Wesleyan University

Snehal Shinghavi, Associate Professor of English and South Asian Studies, University of Texas, Austin

Ajay Skaria, Professor of History, University of Minnesota

Shalini Shankar, Chair and Associate Professor of Asian American Studies, Northwestern University

S. Shankar, Professor of English, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Amritjit Singh, Langston Hughes Professor of English, Ohio University

Mytheli Sreenivas, Associate Professor of History and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, Ohio State University

Rajini Srikanth, Professor, English, University of Massachusetts Boston Nidhi Srinivas, Associate Professor of Nonprofit Management, The New School

Ajantha Subramanian, Professor of Anthropology and South Asian Studies, Harvard University

Banu Subramaniam, Professor, Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Kaushik Sunder Rajan, Associate Professor of Anthropology, University of Chicago

Raja Swamy, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, University of Tennessee Tariq Thachil, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Yale University

Ashwini Tambe, Associate Professor of Women's Studies, University of Maryland, College-Park

Vamsi Vakulabharanam, Associate Professor of Economics, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Jyotnsa Vaid, Professor of Psychology, Texas A&M University

Sylvia Vatuk, Professor of Anthropology, Emeritus, University of Illinois, Chicago

Kamala Visweswaran, Professor of Ethnic Studies, University of California, San Diego

Kalindi Vora, Associate Professor of Ethnic Studies, University of California, San Diego

Bonnie Zare, Professor of Gender & Women's Studies, University of Wyoming

P.S.