

## CONSTRUCTION OF MEDIA DISCOURSE ABOUT JAMMU & KASHMIR CONFLICT

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### ABSTRACT

*The study intends to explore the dominantly employed war and peace frames by the Indian and Pakistani press along with analyzing the selection of lexical items used for constructing media discourse about the Kashmir Conflict. CDA framework proposed by Van Dijk and the theoretical ideas of Galtung's Peace and War Journalism were employed to comprehend the discourse. Critical Discourse Analysis of news stories from The Nation, Dawn (Pakistani press) along with The Hindu and Times of India (Indian press) is carried out. The study concluded that the Indian press used war framing more dominantly and constructed a discourse regarding Kashmir conflict in which it was portrayed as an intra-state conflict of the Indian State. Pakistani press used peace framing more dominantly for the coverage of Kashmiri's right of self-determination and developed a discourse in which Kashmir was portrayed as an inter-state conflict which could affect the stability of the whole region.*

**Key Words:** Jammu & Kashmir; Discourse; Peace Journalism; War Journalism

### 1. Introduction

Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) conflict as one of the longest running conflicts of the world has consumed the lives of countless Kashmiris. Both India and Pakistan has always approached the conflict with stark different policies. Pakistan has recurrently condemned India for the illegitimate use of military power to curtail the Kashmiris' right of self-determination (Sreedharan, 2009) whereas India has frequently blamed Pakistan for sponsoring conflict in the valley through fanning anti-Indian sentiments (Majid & Hussain, 2016). The highly polarized approach of both the stake holders enhanced the significance of the study. The findings will also prove to be significant in sensitizing the journalists and media practitioners towards more responsible and careful lexical choices. The killing of Hizbul Mujahiddin Commander Burhan Wani revived the sentiment of resistance in the Kashmiri population in the year 2016. Indian security forces used excessive force which resulted in the extrajudicial killings of Kashmiris (United Nations Human Rights Office of The High Commissioner, 2018). Kashmiris were badly injured and blinded because of the indiscriminate and excessive use of pellet guns. As a result more than 1000 Kashmiris sustained eye injuries in the 2016 turmoil ("Jammu and Kashmir: Three months, 1,000 eye injuries by pellets", 2016). The humanitarian crisis reinforced the impression that Indian state employed the policies of "extrajudicial killings, torture and mass repression" (Bukhari, 2010). Children were also not spared as "14% of pellet gun victims in Kashmir were below the age of 15" (Ashiq, 2016). In August 2019 the abrogation of Article 370 not only altered the geographical status of J&K but also put the stability of the whole South Asian region at an unprecedented risk. India's ruling political party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has advocated the idea of stripping the disputed Kashmir from its special status since decades and Pakistan's outrage on the matter has intensified the heated rhetoric (Chandrachud, 2019). The study aimed at comprehending the construction of media discourse about Kashmir conflict in the context of peace and war journalism. Galtung's classification of conflict reporting in to peace and war journalism has been distributed in to four major types.

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Framing of War Journalism flourished on apparent effects of conflict, it is propaganda-oriented with regard to revealing others' lies and hiding ours', it only presents opinions of elite and depicts victory over the enemy as the final end (Galtung & Fisher, 2013). Framing of Peace journalism, on the other hand is expected to be peace-oriented in terms of stipulating conflict construction and preventing conflict, truth-oriented in terms of illuminating untruths of all sides, people-oriented in terms of covering people as negotiators and peace makers, and solution-oriented in terms of highlighting peace and solution initiatives (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005).

Dailies The Nation and Dawn from Pakistani Press while Times of India and The Hindu from the Indian Press were selected for studying the discourse. The analysis was carried out through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA is not only interested in the description of talk and text but also involves the context of society in which they are constructed and how certain linguistic structures are incorporated in them (Van Dijk, 1995). Van Dijk (1998) believed that texts are not only created to inform the readers rather they represent the editorial and ideological positions of the people or organizations which are involved in their construction and production processes.

### 1.1. Objectives of the study

The research has the following objectives:

- (a) To analyze the dominantly employed war and peace frames by the Pakistani and Indian press for reporting J&K Conflict
- (b) To study the lexical items, phrases and themes used for construction of media discourse about J&K conflict
- (c) To comprehend the differences in the framing of J&K conflict by the Indian and Pakistani Press

## 2. Literature Review

Media discourse is a significant tool for comprehending the meanings and perceptions which readers can construct in their minds. It is also a pivotal instrument for understanding the national and international magnitude of the issue under observation (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Two major theoretical frameworks employed for this study included framing and Critical Discourse Analysis. Framing is perceived as an important concept of agenda setting. It is understood as a practice of consolidating news stories thematically and factually to convey the central agenda of story (Maslog et al, 2006). Entman (1993) asserted that framing is the projection of selected aspects of the perceived and constructed reality which consequently helps in inferring certain causal interpretations more dominant and popular. Tankard (1991, p.3) focused on media framing and defined it "as the fundamental organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is".

The taxonomy of peace and war journalism also took language in to consideration as negative wording in terms of victimizing and persecuting are discouraged in peace journalism. Peace journalism encouraged a reconciliation based advocacy approach in conflict reporting not only through news stories but also through opinion writing. Peace Journalism also focused on highlighting less visible effects of violence and emphasizing on common grounds instead of focusing on retaliation and differences (Maslog, Lee & Kim, 2006, p.23).

The social reality is emphasized or de-emphasized within the parameters of cultural and social frameworks. The categories employed for analyzing the social reality through CDA included comparison, description of actor, generalization, victimization, hyperbole and euphemism (Van Dijk, 1997). CDA falls under a specialized analytical research which

discovers how dominance, inequality and abuse are connected, produced and repelled by content, text and conversation in both social and political contexts (Van Dijk, 1997). Thus CDA is not only interested in the description of talk and text but also involves the context of society in which they are constructed and how certain linguistic structures are incorporated in them (Van Dijk, 1995).

Print media including newspapers generally use different language patterns in their discourse to develop and nurture certain ideologies on given issues which in turn can ultimately help in controlling the perceptions of the readers. Certain Critical discourses of newspaper stories substantiated the notion that journalists have the potential to influence readers' perceptions in favor of their propagated ideologies. Fornkwa (2015); Mahfoz (2013); Mahmood, Javed & Mahmood (2011) among others utilized CDA to investigate their research aims in connection to propagation of editor's ideologies through media discourses.

Critical discourses have been extensively used to reveal the hidden ideologies which oppress the victimized group while represent the group or groups with power as positive and ideologically correct. Zia & Syedah (2015) analyzed Kashmir conflict's print media coverage with respect to conflict resolution and peace building. The study concluded that print media of Pakistan, India and United States failed in highlighting peaceful resolutions of the conflict. Sreedharan's (2009) India centric study concluded that the coverage of Kashmir conflict in Pakistani and Indian press was negative and dominated by government narratives.

Vence-Cheng's (2011) study on the discourses of war and peace in Kashmir concluded that perhaps the most suitable route for peace in Kashmir lies in larger autonomy for Kashmir and also in a strong commitment of the Indian state to protect human rights and the democratic processes in Indian administered Kashmir. Talwar (2016) conducted an analysis of the discourse related to dominant ideologies and the identity of the involved actors in Kashmir conflict along with analyzing how alternative options related to policy making are marginalized. Showkat (2017) asserted that in order to counter the strongly propagated narrative of the mainstream Indian press many Kashmiris had to publish their own newspapers so that the views of the local community along with the human rights violations carried out in the valley could be dished out to a wider international audience.

### 3. Methodology

The study focused on analyzing the dominantly employed war and peace frames by the Pakistani and Indian press for reporting Kashmir conflict. The construction of media discourse was also examined through the choice of lexical items, themes and phrases. Data selected for the study comprised of 36 purposively retrieved newspaper stories published on the national and international pages of The Nation and Dawn from Pakistani press and The Hindu and Times of India from the Indian press. The selected news stories were published from 1st June 2016 to 30<sup>th</sup> December 2016. The selected time period had significance because of the excessive use of pellet guns and the violation of human rights in the Indian held Kashmir after the killing of Burhan Wani. A total of nine news stories were selected for CDA from each of the above mentioned Indian and Pakistani Newspaper. News Stories were retrieved from the online archives of the selected dailies.

Framing of War Journalism flourished on apparent effects of conflict, it is propaganda-oriented with regard to revealing others' lies and hiding ours', it only presents opinions of elite and depicts victory over the enemy as the final end (Galtung & Fisher, 2013). Framing of Peace journalism, on the other hand is expected to be peace-oriented in terms of stipulating conflict construction and preventing conflict, truth-oriented in terms of illuminating untruths of all sides, people-oriented in terms of covering people as negotiators and peace makers, and solution-oriented in terms of highlighting peace and solution

initiatives (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). The construction of media discourse about Kashmir conflict was analyzed through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) techniques developed by van Dijk. The linguistic devices of comparison, generalization, description of actor, victimization, euphemism and hyperbole were examined to comprehend the construction of discourse (Van Dijk, 1997). Comparison includes the contrast of in-group and out-group ideologies, members and actions. Actor description refers to the negative or positive portrayal of 'Us' and 'Them'. Generalization includes the process in which the meaning of a word or phrase is interpreted as broad or inclusive in comparison to its earlier original meaning. Victimization referred to the persecution and oppression of a particular group or person. Hyperbole is a linguistic device which referred to the extreme use of exaggeration for creating emphasis or strong impression. Euphemism referred to the replacement of harsh and negative phrases with polite and subtle expression. It is important to note that every news story might not include all the above discussed categories.

#### 4. Data Analysis

##### 4.1. Construction of Media discourse about Kashmir Conflict in the Indian Press (Times of India & The Hindu)

*Times of India* published a story on the refusal to ban the use of pellet guns. The ruling came forward by the Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) High Court. The reason reported in the story was the violence elicited by the "unruly mob" in Kashmir (PTI, 2016). The court further justified the excessive use of force by the Indian security forces as "inevitable". As the story proceeded it was stated that the court also refused the appeal to prosecute the related personal who were involved in authorizing the use of pellet guns on Kashmiris. The court further asserted that the practice of any specific form of "force" in any given situation can be executed at the discretion of officer in-charge against the "unruly mob" (PTI, 2016). In another story published in *Times of India* the then Indian Attorney General Mukul Rohatgi asserted that the Indian Forces were using "pellet guns instead of bullets" but even then if somebody dies it will be a case of being unfortunate (Choudhary, 2016). Pellet guns were justified in the third selected story by stating that "security forces cannot be put at a disadvantage while dealing with aggressive crowds" (Jain & Chauhan, 2016).

*The Hindu* adopted a more straightforward approach by reporting that young Kashmiris who were injured because of Indian atrocities required "complicated surgeries under anesthesia" (Ashiq, 2016). The story also incorporated the version of an 8-year-old boy who was shot from close range by the pellet gun and ended up in severe chest wounds. The story also stated that "14 percent of pellet gun victims are below the age of 15" (Ashiq, 2016). In another story *The Hindu* quoted the version of Indian government in which pellet guns were declared as "non-lethal". The functioning of pellet gun was discussed at length in the story. A Jammu & Kashmir police officer explained that "500 small pieces of metal coated with gun powder are fired haphazardly from a single cartridge of pellet gun" (Jeelani, 2016). The Hindu gave coverage to the narrative of an Indian State Ministers in which he asserted that "government would look in to the use of these guns" after a 12 year old boy was shot by the "non-lethal" pellet gun (Singh, 2016). The story also stated that in Kashmir the crowds were targeted straight in the eyes or upper part of the waist from close quarters which was against the standard operating procedures (Singh, 2016). Although *The Hindu* compared and victimized the out-group of Kashmiri demonstrators to a certain extent but it also utilized the approach of euphemism.

The lexical choices employed by Times of India portrayed a heavy reliance on war framing especially with reference to highlighting the visible effects of conflict and using negative actor description for the Kashmiri demonstrators. The story also lacked in background information on how the excessive

use of pellet guns resulted in severely wounding the unarmed Kashmiris women and children. The use of pellet guns was repeatedly rationalized by negative actor description of the Kashmiri population. The objectionable narrative of the Indian government was more dominantly advocated and the Kashmiri population was expected to be thankful for being injured and killed through pellet guns instead of bullets. Times of India employed the linguistic choices based on victimization, negative actor description and generalization. Although the linguistic device of euphemism was more dominantly employed by The Hindu but war framing was the dominant pattern of reporting Kashmir Conflict. Positive actor description in terms of favoring Us (Indian Government) and victimizing Others (Kashmiri demonstrators) was also found. Overall the Indian press used more war framing in terms of victimizing others and promoting the propaganda of the Indian government and constructed a discourse about Kashmir conflict in which it was portrayed as an intra-state conflict of Indian state.

#### **4.2. Construction of Media discourse about Kashmir Conflict in the Pakistani Press (Dawn & The Nation)**

*Dawn* reported that Pakistani Premier Nawaz Sharif presented a dossier to the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon about the violation of human rights in J&K (Abbas, 2016). The Pakistani Prime Minister briefed the UN Secretary General about the worsening human rights conditions of the Kashmiris who were brutally victimized by the Indian forces after the killing of Hizbul Mujahideen Commander Burhan Wani. The killing triggered violent clashes with the Indian Security Forces in J&K.

In another story *Dawn* reported that “hundreds of patients” were injured in only 4 days and doctors cautioned that many people “could lose their eye sight” because of shotgun wounds. Patients were shifted to Sri Mahraja Hari Singh Hospital in large numbers where they were “forced to share beds” (“Police Shelling leaves Kashmiri youth blind in one eye, medics claim” 2016). The story also included the version of a J&K doctor in which he asserted that mostly people left the hospital as “one-eyed boys” (“Police Shelling leaves Kashmiri youth blind in one eye, medics claim” 2016). The version of a pellet gun survivor was also included in which he said that “I can’t see anything right now” as tears dripped “out of the sides of his bandaged eyes” (“Police Shelling leaves Kashmiri youth blind in one eye, medics claim”, 2016). In one of its stories *Dawn* covered the funeral of an 11-year-old Kashmiri boy (AFP, 2016). *Dawn* employed euphemism by stating the views of a J&K police officer in which he asserted that “Forces responded when large crowds defied restrictions” (AFP, 2016).

*The Nation* published a story about a 12-year-old boy who was killed by Indian forces in Srinagar (12-year-old killed by Indian forces in Kashmir” 2016). The killing triggered protests across Jammu and Kashmir. It was reported that the child was only looking at the protest while “standing outside his home” when he was hit by pellet gun (12-year-old killed by Indian forces in Kashmir” 2016). The incident provided an insight into the valley’s law and order situation where even a child standing outside his house was considered to be extremely vulnerable. In another story *The Nation* reported that Pakistan had held India accountable for “spreading chaos” in the Indian held Kashmir because the Indian forces have created “bloodshed and chaos” in J&K (“India spreading chaos: Aziz”, 2016). The story also commended Burhan Muzaffar Wani for becoming an “iconic face” of the Kashmiri struggle. The story emphasized Pakistan’s determination to support Kashmiris in their right to freedom of self-determination. The situation in Kashmir was termed as the “worst civilian unrest” in the Indian held Kashmir since 2010 (“India spreading chaos: Aziz”, 2016). In one of its stories *The Nation* sent a strong call to the international community for assisting the Kashmiris in the prevailing “humanitarian crisis” as most of the pellet gun survivors would never be able to see the “light again” (“Let Pakistan help IHK’s pellet

victims: PM”, 2016). The then Pakistani Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif also asked his office to gather “support of international political leadership” along with humanitarian and civil organizations in order to resolve the Kashmir conflict (“Let Pakistan help IHK’s pellet victims: PM”, 2016).

The linguistic devices of actor description and comparison were used by Dawn. Kashmiri demonstrators were depicted as favorable in-group whereas the Indian security forces were portrayed as the negative out-group. Thus war framing was employed to a certain extent in terms of victimizing the ‘others’ (Indian Security Forces) and favoring ‘Us’ (Kashmiri demonstrators). The dominance of peace frames was also noted in the coverage of Dawn as the coverage was more solution oriented in terms of granting Kashmiris’ their right of self-determination. Peace framing was also evident in the construction of media discourse with respect to covering less visible effects of conflict and highlighting first-hand accounts of victims. The devices of hyperbole and generalization were also employed by The Nation. The Nation constructed a media discourse around the narrative of the Pakistani government and its determination in engaging the international community to resolve the Kashmir conflict. Over all Pakistani press employed peace frames more dominantly by highlighting the less apparent aspects of conflict and also by adopting a solution oriented approach in which international players can also play their pivotal part. The media discourse which the Pakistani press tried to construct about the Kashmir conflict was more based on the grounds that Kashmir should be dealt like an interstate conflict as compared to an intra-state conflict.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The paper attempted to analyze the dominantly employed war and peace frames by the Pakistani and Indian press for constructing media discourse about Kashmir conflict. CDA of the news stories published in The Nation and Dawn from Pakistani press and Times of India and The Hindu from Indian press were carried out. Framing is understood as the practice of consolidating news stories thematically and factually to convey the central agenda of story (Maslog et al , 2006). Entman (1993) asserted that framing is the projection of selected aspects of the perceived and constructed reality which consequently helps in inferring certain causal interpretations more dominant and popular. Overall the Indian press used war framing more dominantly in terms of victimizing the Kashmiris. The war framing was also more propaganda oriented (Galtung & Fischer, 2013) in terms of highlighting the narrative of the Indian government and Indian Security Forces. The stories of the Indian Press also lacked in background information on how the excessive use of pellet guns resulted in severely wounding the unarmed Kashmiris women and children. The media discourse constructed about the Kashmir conflict portrayed Kashmir as an absolutely internal matter of the Indian government which should be treated like any other intra state conflict. The differences in the framing of Kashmir conflict by the Indian and Pakistani press were significant as Pakistani press employed more positive actor description for the coverage of Kashmiris and negative actor description for the Indian Security Forces. In the Pakistani press Peace framing was also more strongly evident in the construction of media discourse with respect to covering less visible effects of conflict and highlighting first-hand accounts of victims. As Peace Journalism is solution-oriented in terms of emphasizing peace and solution initiatives (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005) Pakistani press focused on solutions of the J&K conflict by highlighting the right of self-determination and ensuring the involvement of International players in conflict resolution. The media discourse which the Pakistani press constructed about the Kashmir conflict was based on the grounds that Kashmir should be dealt like an interstate conflict instead of an intra-state conflict. Vence-Cheng’s (2011) study on the discourses of war and peace in Kashmir also suggested that the most suitable route for peace in Kashmir lies in larger autonomy for Kashmir

Dijk (1998) asserted that texts are not only produced to inform the audience rather they signify the ideological and editorial stance of the people or organizations which are involved in their

production and construction. Times of India employed the linguistic choices based on victimization, negative actor description and generalization. Although the linguistic device of euphemism was more dominantly employed by The Hindu but war framing was the dominant pattern of reporting Kashmir Conflict. Actor description in terms of favoring 'Us' (Indian Government) and victimizing 'Others' (Kashmiri demonstrators) was also evident in the Indian press. The linguistic devices of positive actor description and comparison were used more frequently by Dawn. Kashmiri demonstrators were depicted as favorable in-group whereas the Indian security forces were portrayed as the negative out-group. The devices of hyperbole and generalization were employed more dominantly by The Nation. The Nation constructed a media discourse about the narrative of the Pakistani government and its determination in engaging the international community to resolve the Kashmir conflict.

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