



RESEARCH PAPER

Religious Contends of Pakistani Print Media Discourses: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The study was under taken to explore the representation of Islam and Muslims through print media discourses. For this purpose, the data was collected from Dawn Daily. The time span for data collection ranges from 1 Feb 2023 to 30th April 2023. The data has been analysed by using Dijk's (2006) research model. The significant themes that emerged regarding representation of Islam and Muslims include appointment of Immas, concept of Hilal and Haram and role of religions bodies to curb extremism from society. Besides, the study finds that in order to maintain peace and harmony the religious bodies should play their roll in true letter and spirit. The study recommends that ministry of Religious Affairs should observe the practices of religious schools and the Imams appointed there should be qualified enough to perform their duties comprehensively. In the regard, the roll of media is of vital significance.

Keywords: Discourses, Ideology, Print Media, Religious Contends, Representation

Introduction

Representation of Islam and Muslims has ever been very significant either at home or in abroad through media discourses. The changing global scenario results in changing peoples' perception about Islam and Muslims. In this regard, the significance of print media discourses has increased many folds in shaping general perception about Islam and Muslims at all forums. The terms like 'banal and Ontological Islamophobia' are among the frequently used terms, which carry negative social meanings to position Islam and Muslims stereotypically. The print media discourses used to represent Islam and Muslims either in Pakistan or in abroad have never been neutral. The representation of the issues related to Islam and its followers plays a role in assigning positive or negative identity to the practioners of Islam. The newly coined terms related to Islam and Muslims that are used these days to assign desired identity to Muslims include #jihad, terrorism, heaven seekers, ISIS, terror mothers, the squad etc.

Khan et al. (2021) maintains that one of the fundamental reasons of this (mis) trust is the ever-increasing (mis)representation of Islam and Muslims especially post 9/11 The Muslims are essentially and deliberately constructed and represented as deviation from norm through media discourses. Such media representations are meant to disseminate an unpleasant image of Islam and Muslims by ideological controlling forces behind discourses.

Poole (2010) argues that during the last three decades representation of Islam and Muslims has increased significantly across the globe. Said (1997) opines that it has become common practice among the media pundits either in the east or in the west to bring Islam and Muslims under the spotlight for every negative activity. However, it is observed that representation of Islam and Muslims varies through the print media discourses of Pakistan and the west in terms of themes that find representation through these media enterprises. In this regard, the study at hand is significant, as it has critically analysed the discourse of

articles of a Pakistani daily (DAWN) related to representation of Islam and Muslims. The data for the present study has been taken from the articles of the mentioned newspaper. The time span in this regard ranges from 1st Feb 2023 to April 30th 2023. The data has been analysed by employing Critical Discourse Analysis research paradigm.

Newspapers as Mirror of Social reality

Though the readers of newspapers may get a news before it is published in a newspaper because of swift means of electronic media communication, yet they want to buy and read newspapers. It is because they like to know all the aspects of news with additional background information and in-depth and detailed analysis of language. The print media has become one of the most pervasive phenomenon in our culture as it mirrors social reality as per its ideological affiliation. The framing of social issues through print media discourses is never neutral. It is done focusing the stakes of those powers, which are behind media discourses. Newspapers most often serve as watchdog and critique social affairs accordingly. Newspapers have been largely responsible for voicing the contemporary social issues.

Articles of newspapers on one hand carry valuable comments on different issues and on the other shape the perceptions of the people accordingly. Our knowledge about this world is mediated through the press. The analysis of language can provide insight into how that mediation can affect the representations of people, places and events. The mass media on one hand is a source of entertainment and on the other; we gain access to a large part of information about the world. Althusser (1971) says that our understanding of reality is entirely mediated by language and system of signs available to us. Language is a product of ideologies of our culture. Fowler (1996) opines that news is the representation of the world in language and that language imposes a structure of values on whatever is represented to lead into a discussion of 'bias' and discourse as approaches in the press.

Newspapers as Image Makers

The print media is significant social agent, capable of shaping and influencing community perception by disseminating a desired image of a person or a group in a desired manner. The discourse(s) of articles of Pakistani newspapers shape the image of Islam and the Muslims by publishing certain stories about them related to local and international issues. The representation of the issues related to Islam and Muslims through the discourse of articles shape the image of the Muslims and their religion among the masses locally and internationally. Such media coverage helps a lot in propagating real or stereotypical image of Islam and Muslims.

It is usually observed that journalists are also shaped by various social forces, which contribute to their understanding to Muslims and Islam. How an event related to Islam and Muslims is constructed and represented is relative and never absolute. Newspapers are also representative of social and cultural backgrounds. One thing very important must be kept in mind that the newspapers' editorial practices and writing styles contribute significantly in shaping the image of Islam and Muslims at home (Pakistan) and in abroad (the West). Images and perceptions of the people are shaped with help of newspapers' discourse(s) (Barker & Galasinski, 2001).

Indeed, media as an institution plays a significant and predominant role in the cultural production of knowledge (Poole, 2002) and depending on which newspapers have access to one's level of knowledge of the Muslims and Islam may differ. As we do know that media is fluid and changing, so too is the way in which it portrays Islam and the Muslims. This tendency of representing Islam and the Muslims in a desired manner plays a significant role in showing the image of Islam and the Muslims in a particular way. In this way, print media discourses serve as image-maker about Islam and Muslims.

Representations and Reality

Hall (1997) argues that what appears in media must be viewed critically because media representation of something is most often far from reality. Every individual sees reality through his/ her own prism and cultural norms. Every society constructs its own reality keeping in view its stakes. One's reality may be twice removed from reality for others. What we perceive as reality it may be recapitulation of reality. The powerful group creates reality for the consumers to follow. This is done to disseminate a desired version of reality to the general masses and to make things common sense for them. Similarly, the Western and American print media construct and propagate a stereotypical version of reality regarding the representations of Islam and the Muslims to the target audience. The continuous (mis)representation of Islam and Muslims through western and American print media paves the way for the audience of other culture that there might be some flaws in Islamic ideology and the way Muslims follow it. In this way, the Muslims are Othered linguistically and socially.

The study in hand delves deep to explore representation of Islam and Muslims through the discourse of articles of The Washington Post as representation of Islam and Muslims has become an important issue to be explored. Mis-representation of Islam and Muslims through print media discourses has created a sense of unease on both sides. This study is an attempt to know how Muslims are represented and how this stereotypical representation is causing trouble.

Literature Review

Alharabi (2017) believes that representation of Muslims in western main stream media has become a planned and stereotypical activity. This is done to done to relegate Islam and Muslims from the main streams of the society. The terms like Islamophobia and radical Islam have become a characteristic feature of western agenda to represent Islam and Muslims negatively. Such fear- based activities reflect western mind set about Islam and Muslims. Anti- Islam rhetoric is very much in vogue there in the west. He asserts that this war of words can be countered by producing counter discourses to defend Islam and Muslims. Omi and Winanat (1994) opine that Islam is associated with racial crimes and negative identity is assigned to Muslims in America. Representation of Islam and Muslim through popular culture is far from real. Mostly Muslims are shown as villains. The Arabs are shown as brute murderers, sleazy rapists, religious fanatics, oil rich dimwits and abusers of women. Carr's (2014) research highlighted that Islam and Muslims are portrayed in negative light such as cold, money hungry, incept villainous terrorists that seek to destroy western and American civilisations. Rane (2017) asserted that the association of hate speech and #jihad has become a prominent feature of western media representation about Islam and Muslims. Muslims are shown as unresponsive to any positive change initiated by west. Miller (2002) argues that western and American perception and representation of Islam and Muslims is a planned activity to disseminate negative image of Muslims by associating them with violence and rigidity. Sajid (2021) opines that linguistic and semiotic discourses are very tactfully employed to represent Islam and Muslims as deviant from norm. Muslims are shown as rigid and unwilling to embrace any positive change initiated by civilised west. Saeed's (2007) research documented that representation of Islam and Muslims has been centre of attention for academics and civil sector of society for the last two decades. Smith (2005) believes that representation of Islam and Muslims in Australian newspapers highlighted that Muslims are represented as dangerous others. They are busy in contriving against the European societies. By no means can they be included among the members of in-group. The dichotomy of Us vs them is created deliberately to represent west positively and Muslims negatively. Sajid and Qadir (2020) argue that western representation of Islam and Muslims through linguistic and semiotic discourses post 9/11 is fear based. Association of negative attributes to marginalise Islam and Muslims has become a common phenomenon among the western academia. Similarly, Muslim women are represented as terror mothers

busy in breeding more terror grounds along with their men against west. All this is meant to other the others tactfully.

Material and Methods

The present study employs Van Dijk's (1998) of Critical Discourse Analysis. The rationale behind using this research model is that it deals with social, cognitive and discourse analysis levels. It studies social structural features of language. Cognitive analysis is a prominent feature of this research model. It is usually, used for in-depth ideological analysis of language. This model sees language as a form of social critique. According to Dijk mental models are created to control the thought process of the target audience. This Ideological square Model illustrates the concept of in/ out- grouping. How people are othered on ideological grounds. It takes into account linguistic and meta-linguistic features of language. The prominent analytical categories included in the model have been operationally defined as under:

Actor Description: The way persons are discussed in the text who do things.

Authority: It is a process of supplementing an argument by quoting some authoritative or powerful person/s

Topos: Self-supported arguments are called topos.

Categorization: People are divided into various categories and are positioned because of their affiliation with certain groups.

Comparison: It means to compare one group with another by using different metaphors

Consensus: It is an attempt to show solidarity among the nations or groups

Distancing: It is a process of showing solidarity with or distance from a particular group on linguistic and geographical grounds.

Illustration: It is a process of proving one's stance through forceful arguments

Hyperbole: It is semantic rhetorical strategy used for emphasis. Metaphors are also used to give hyperbolic impression

Implication: It is study of invisible meanings in language. As everything is said against something un-said. Here an attempt is made to locate what is un-said.

Lexicalization: It is ideological use of language to lay stress on something

Number Game: The use of statistics or numbers to bring certainty and objectivity in analysis. Here, facts are presented against mere point of view

Polarization: It is a process of showing in-group and out-group as two poles apart from each other

Victimization: It is a technique of representing out- group as threats for the in-group

Results and Discussion

Dijk (2006) argues that print media discourses mirror social reality prevailing in a particular society during a particular period of time. It is believed that reality is never absolute rather constructed by a particular group in accordance with the position of its own lens. Discourse of newspaper articles provide an insight into constructed version of reality about certain issues. Similarly, the very title of the article "Appointment of Imams" which appeared in Dawn (daily) on March 31, 2023 illustrates that issue highlighted through the

title of the article is of vital significance. Selection and appointment of 'Imams' (a person who leads the Muslims in prayer in Islam is called Imam. The noun 'Imam' is also defined as a successor Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in Shiite Islam. The very title of the article under analysis connotes that so far the selection and appointment of 'Imams' has not been on merit and it has caused certain religious issues. After facing these issues repeatedly, it has been decided that appointment of 'Imams' should be made after following a prescribed procedure.

Dijk (2003) asserts that media framing of an issue is of vital significance. The way an issue is framed through media discourses matters a lot. The very opening of the article with capital letters is ideological.

"EXTEREMISM and intolerance straining the social fabric of societies"

The sensitive issue of extremism and intolerance has been indirectly associated with the appointment of 'Imams'. It implies that right persons are not appointed at right places; it may result in bringing extremism and intolerance in the social fabric. Imams are the persons who can shape the mind-set of their followers in any direction. Religious misconstruction has been associated with ills of society. Most often, it is observed that issues related to the religious personalities are swept under the rug. As a result harmony of the society is disturbed.

The concept of harmony can be achieved only if there is coordination between mosque and the religious leaders. It must be regulated by the government. It has been mentioned through the discourse of the article under analysis the in many Muslim countries the religious affairs of the masses are regulated by the state. The names of Turkiye, Saudi Arabia and Iran have been mentioned in the text of the article. In this regard the following lines are worth quoting:

"The potential Imams are assessed based on their religious knowledge and loyalty to the state. The state decides what type of sermons should be delivered on Fridays and on other occasions"

It implies that in most of the Islamic countries religion is under state control and the appointed Imams only deliver through their sermons what is approved by the state. It is claimed that all this is done to maintain religious harmony in the states. It leads the state towards prosperity and clashes on religious grounds should be tackled high handily to keep peace and order in the country. The underlying message that is being disseminated through the discourse of the article is that Pakistan should do the same to avoid religious disturbance. It is believed that country cannot make progress if there is no religious harmony in the country. What is being stressed is as under:

"In Pakistan, according to federal law all madressahs must be registered and licenced by the government of Pakistan. But on the contrary, it is observed that numerous such religious centres are working without getting them registered"

Dijk (2003) maintains that number game technique is used in media discourses to lay stress on something and to make it seem more factual than mere statement. In this way, an individual's stance is put forward more convincingly. The same technique has been used here to highlight the issue under discussion more significantly.

"In the capital of Pakistan, there are 562 religious schools which have not yet been registered and are operating illegally."

It is a common practice in print media discourses that everything is said against something un-said and un-said are the real meanings. The very mentioning of number game technique implies that either the authorities concerned are not performing their duties

honestly or these madrassahs are so powerful that they do not bother to follow the rules and regulations laid down by the government of Pakistan.

It is observed that the curriculum plays a vital role in imparting desired ideology to the target learners and to make them behave in a certain manner. In the regard, the curriculum taught at these religious schools must be viewed critically and be revised if necessary. It should be made as per the requirements of the modern era. The students taught there must be imparted the latest domains of knowledge as well. This will broaden their worldview accordingly. The instructors appointed there must be selected after a fair process of selection and only the qualified ones should be appointed as teachers. In this regard, The National Counter Terrorism authority was tasked to revise the curriculum of religious seminaries in collaboration with HEC (higher Education Commission of Pakistan). Although, the commission was formed to investigate the matter of revising the outline/ curriculum, yet nothing has been done so far in this regard as has been mentioned below:

*“Two committees were formed.....however, , no significant progress has been made.”
Extremism can be curbed if mosques are regulated”*

The lines mentioned above illustrate that religious peace and harmony can be achieved by regulating the mosques and by appointing Imams there who are well educated, trained and enlightened. A uniform curriculum should be devised and implemented there in Madarassahs. Screening and selection process are needed to ensure that only the qualified Imams are selected and appointed there. Their performance must be monitored on regular basis. The accountability of Imams and other authorities related to religious schools must be there without any discrimination. Violation of laws must be prevented at all levels. The concept of hate speech can be avoided if sermons at Friday prayers are regulated by the state. Interfaith harmony should be highlighted through these sermons. Ministry of religious affairs and department of inter faith harmony should work in collaboration to bring peace and harmony among different religious sects. The appointed Imams should be tasked to create an atmosphere of tolerance and harmony among the followers.

Conclusion

The present study attempted to find out representation of religious affairs from Pakistani print media discourses. The objective set for the study was to explore the themes which are discussed through the discourse of articles of Dawn. The qualitative mode of data analysis has been used to find the answer of the research question. The analysis of data reveals that representation of religious matters either at home or in abroad is never ideology free. The prominent themes which have been found include appointment of Imams, concept of hala and Haram in Islam, role of state in regulating religion, curbing extremism and madrasahs and extremism. It is concluded that appointment of religious heads in the mosques be made very carefully. Only qualified and enlightened people should be appointed as imams in the mosques. Interfaith harmony and soft image of Islam should be promoted to represent Islam and Muslim positively and to counter the concept of Islamophobia.

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