**What makes the application of peace journalism in Indo-Pak conflicts a Challenging task?**

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**Abstract:**

*Building on the existing literature, this critical review of peace journalism scholarship — based on various research studies from 2002 to 2017— observed that application of peace journalism in reporting Pakistan-India relations, particularly conflicts, has become a challenging task due to various media tendencies. The prominent among these tendencies are the nationalistic, jingoistic and ethnocentric approaches in media coverage, wherein the media look into the issues from these particular lenses. The inclination of media to become party in conflicts, instead of adhering to the universal journalistic principles of impartiality and objectivity, led to biased coverage, and resultantly peace journalism was the victim. "Us versus Them" or "Our side and Other side" media inclinations are also taking the application of peace journalism away from the practice. While reliance on official sources for information and the structural constraints of news media, are the other factors that keep media away from reporting the conflicts from a peace perspective.*

**Key Words:** Conflict, peace journalism, war journalism, media magnetism, ethnocentrism, nationalism, conflict escalator

**INTRODUCTION**

The concept of using media in wars and conflicts can be traced back to ancient times wherein Napoleon, Caesar, and Alexander the Great used certain types of media for propaganda. Some evidence shows that Greece utilized media thousands of years Before Christ (Jowett & O'Donnell, 1999; Taylor, 2013). Likewise, during World War-II, the media was artfully used for political domination by German Nazis (Taylor, 2013; Lasswell, 1927; Hieber, 2001; Bratic, 2008). Nevertheless, the diversified literature on conflict journalism has been available since the 20th century (see Lasswell, 1927; Mueller, 1973; 1988; Hallin, 1989; Knightly, 2004; Taylor, 1992; Wolfsfeld, 1997; Gans, 2004; Bratic, 2008; Hussain, 2017; Assaf, 2018).

However, it has been observed that when research scholars endeavor to investigate the correlation between media and war, they usually focus on media's war promotion and propaganda functioning. Puddephatt (2006)elaborated that millions of people were killed and millions of others suffered

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displacement during uncountable conflicts since the cold war. The media were used for manipulation in conflicts and war in former Yugoslavia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, and the Middle East, revealing how openly media played a role in these conflicts, showing its risky impact and correlation with the dissemination of hate messages and consequent killings (Kellner, 1992; Forges et al., 1999; Thompson, 1999; Hieber, 2001; Bratic & Schirch, 2007; Bratic, 2008; Odii & Ngene, 2017; McIntyre & Sobel, 2018). Many research studies found that media were playing a key role in conflicts. It has the potential to become an active part of conflicts and promote violence or keep itself out of the conflict and help resolve the disputes (Puddephatt, 2006). A vast scholarship has been developed on media's role in reporting conflicts and wars. Likewise, the media coverage of conflicts between Pakistan and India also received attention of research scholars to determine the nature of coverage. This paper aims to critically analyze various research studies to determine their observations on application of peace journalism in conflicts between India and Pakistan.

## MEDIA MAGNETISM OF CONFLICTS

By their innate nature, the conflicts work as magnets for media and incessantly attract their attention. Several research studies observed that the conflicting situations are irresistible to media. The conflicts are temptations for media because these certainly address the sentiments of conflict-stakeholders, involve vast humanitarian implications, especially at the time of violent conflicts (Bratic, 2008). Okunna (2004) observed that the conflict has become irresistible to media while Thomas & Lee as cited in Okunna (2004; p.8) say, "conflict is the bread and butter of journalism." Likewise, Tehranian (2002) quotes that "bad news is the focus of media" to show media interest in conflicts. Looking from another perspective, Hanusch (2010) opines that since news organizations work in competing environment, hence they enhance sensationalization to attract the audience. This leads the media to look for their interests and prefer a less news-worthy event over a newsworthy one. The commercial characteristic of media houses tends to make the events "newsworthy" rather than "peace-worthy" (Van, 2011). Gardner (2001) also found that conflict sells whereas good news is no news.

## PEACE AND WAR JOURNALISM APPROACHES

Choosing between, what John Galtung termed as "low path or high path," is media's prerogative. Following the "low path" means that media practice war journalism while "high path" indicates peace journalism attributes of media coverage. To comprehend these contrary constructs, following discussion is carried out to trace out the theoretical and methodological details of each construct.

### War Journalism

War Journalism existed even before the Peace Journalism was introduced (Keeble et. al. as cited in Indradat, 2015). However, it came to the limelight when scholars started exploring peace journalism approach in the coverage of wars and conflicts. Galtung & Vincent (1992) and Galtung (1998) elaborate that the main attributes of war journalism include negativity, personalization, and elite concentration. War Journalism concentrates on violence by focusing on the existing situation of conflicts and highlights their physical aspects like casualties, destruction or weapon description. War Journalism does not explore backgrounds of the conflict nor does it focus on consequences. It also ignores cultural and structural aspects of violence. It focuses on victory or defeat; hence its concentration remains on propaganda. According to McGoldrick & Lynch (2007), this kind of

journalism differentiates between self and others, consequently demonizes the other. Partisanship and predetermined "good or bad" notions are its virtues. It reflects "the warrior's logic of a world of states pitted against each other, with the inter-stage/national conflict and war being matters of the state and statesman, not to be touched by the common folk" (Lynch & Galtung 2010, 17). War journalism dehumanizes the enemy and focuses on visible effects of violence, propaganda, elitism, victory, and quote official sources (Galtung, 1998). It would take sides and employ triumphalist military language, with superficial narratives and concentration on the action with the provision of little background perspectives (Knightley, 2004). The conventional war-oriented reporting revolves around conflict for its news value, whereas good journalism has its basis on accuracy, fairness, and balance (Lynch, 2007). In addition, war journalism is propaganda oriented as has been aptly described by Taylor (as cited in Nohrstedt et al., 2000, p.384). It tends to be elite-oriented, as elaborated by Herman & Chomsky (1988) in their propaganda model. So, this type of journalism plays escalatory role in conflicts (Odii & Ngene (2017).

## Peace Journalism

The "Peace Journalism" concept came into the limelight in the first quarter of 1990s as an outcome of peace research, which provided the basis for it. The reporting of the 1991 Gulf War proved to be an essential milestone in throwing a critical debate on coverage of war and conflict (Hanitzsch, 2004). The Norwegian professor, Johan Galtung coined the term "peace journalism." After its penetration into academics, the theory of peace journalism was advocated and taken forward by Jake Lynch, and Annabel McGoldrick (Çiftcioğlu 2017). "Peace Journalism is the counterpart and corollary of War Journalism, which tends to report conflicts as if they are confined to the present day and to the 'conflict arena' where violence is taking place, or might potentially take place" (McGoldrick & Lynch 2007, 250). Since the basis of conflicts is in structural and cultural process, understanding their contextual backgrounds is imperative while reacting to conflicts; and treating the conflicting parties equally. "Peace Journalism is when editors and reporters make choices – of what stories to report and about how to report them – that create opportunities for society at large to consider and value nonviolent responses to conflict" (Lynch & McGoldrick 2005, 5).

The peace journalism is considered as a "deliberate creative strategy conceived as specific response" (Lynch 2013, 36). Lynch and McGoldrick (2005, 5) proclaim it, "is a serious, inquisitive, professional reporting making conflict more transparent." While for Shinar (2007), it is a normative mode of responsible and conscientious media coverage of conflict, aim at supporting peacekeeping and bringing about transformation into the attitude of media-owners, professionals, advertisers, and receivers towards peace and war.  For Bratić (2005), it is a brave attempt to reformulate the responsibility and functions of journalists who cover conflicts. However, for Peleg (2006), it is a "tightrope walk between advocacy journalism and constructive conflict coverage."

Despite gaining popularity, it has been found difficult by peace journalism advocates and practitioners to practically practice it in conflicts. However, there are examples of utilizing peace-oriented media for conflict transformation, as has been elaborated by Bratic (2008) by listing peace-oriented media projects covering 13 conflicts of different nature in eighteen countries. Likewise, the use of peace media in Rwanda is yet another example. Bratic (2008) noted that82 percent of Burundian listeners believed that media intervention helped in peace promotion and reconciliation. McIntyre and Sobel (2018) also found that constructive journalism helped

reconstruct the country after passing through genocide. Likewise, the peace-oriented media in Bosnia was also successful in promoting peace (Bratic, 2008) while in Kenya as identified by Rao (2014), National Civic Education Programme helped in reducing possibilities of peoples' involvement in ethnic violence. Assaf (2018) observed support of people to peace deal due to media intervention. Likewise, de Fransius (2014) observed that the peace journalism approach would have provided alternative transcending in US-Iraq conflict by involving diverse voices and viewpoints.

## PEACE OR WAR JOURNALISM APPLICATION IN ASIAN REGION

Most of the studies conducted to examine media role in Asian conflicts found that media coverage was war-oriented. Myint (2017) observed war-dominating frames in the coverage of Rakhine conflict. Similarly, the media coverage of two events, including the hitting of Turkish and Syrian jet plans by respective armies, was war-oriented and influenced by political pressure, ownership structure, regulations, marked conditions, and mainstream news values (Ersoy, 2016). Likewise, Abdul-Nabi (2015) found dominance of war journalism in the coverage by Al-Jazeerah Network of two Arab uprisings movements. Contrary to this, Indradat (2015), found the prevalence of peace journalism in coverage of Southern Insurgency in Thailand, while Lee et al. (2005) observed the coverage of Asian regional conflicts to be war-dominated.

## PEACE OR WAR JOURNALISM IN PAKISTAN INDIA CONFLICTS

The conflicts between Pakistan and India were rigorously investigated, and interestingly, most of the studies conducted were dominantly tilted towards war journalism. Even the media reporting of positive developments like negotiations, summits, and agreements was found in war frames. For instance, Yousaf et al. (2018), in analysis of Indo-Pak relations, found predominant use of war frames in the editorial coverage of elite press of Pakistan and India. Likewise, Zia & Syedah (2015), in a case study on Kashmir dispute, observed the focus of press on violence and negative framing. Gadda (2014) found dissent voice from Kashmir was ignored by Indian media while following the government policies in reporting the conflict. Khan (2019), in his study on the coverage of Dawn on Kashmir conflict, observed dominance of war frames. Siraj (2008) found war-oriented coverage of the Pakistan-India conflict in the US press. Ishaq et al. (2018), investigated the coverage of armed operations of Pakistan in international and Pakistani newsmagazines. He observed war-oriented coverage of Pakistani armed operation in international newsmagazines while the same event was covered as peace-oriented coverage in Pakistani newsmagazines. Pandit & Chattopadhyay (2018) while analyzing coverage of the "Surgical Strike"— as claimed by India and categorically denied by Pakistan after Uri Attack in 2016— observed a nationalistic approach in media coverage. Likewise, Zaheer (2017) found editorial coverage of Kashmir conflict by Pakistani media dominated by war frames. Many such studies observed the conflict coverage as dominantly tilted towards war journalism.

## CHALLENGES TO PRACTICE PEACE JOURNALISM IN REPORTING INDO-PAK CONFLICTS

Research scholars have identified many media realities that influence media content and pose potential challenges to practice peace journalism. These include media ownership, organizational values, market forces, political and socio-economic affiliation (Tehranian, 2002; Fawcett, 2002; Hanitzsch, 2004; 2007; Shinar 2007; Herman & Chomsky, 2010). Scholars have also pointed out the

limitation of media regarding the issues related to nationalism and ethnocentrisms or the concepts like "Us and Them" or "We and They" (Bläsi, 2004, Sreedharan, 2009, Bose, 2010).

As is evident from the existing literature, the media of both nuclear-armed neighbours play an essential role in determining their interstate relations. There has been rigorous academic debate to ascertain whether media were influencing the state or vice-versa. Bose (2010) observed that the media of both the states were capable of either promoting peace or becoming a cause of deteriorating relations. However, media was observed following official lines in reporting the "other side." Sreedharan (2009) found nationalistic and ethnocentric approaches and elite orientation of reporting. The people of either side are desirous to overcome differences, but political parties adhere to hostilities, which is reflected in media reporting. The influences of nationalism empower media as indicated by Bose (2010) that when it comes to national feelings, more particularly India versus Pakistan, the media becomes propaganda tool and focuses on government-led severely negative coverage of the other side. "I found the coverage in the Indian and Pakistani media mutually antagonistic and negative. It was not only partisan and jingoistic, I felt, but ill-informed as well. Some of it did not add up to the 'reality'" (Sreedharan 2009, 3). Bose (2011) too observed that the coverage was based on jingoism lie and nationalistic posturing.

Both countries' media are engaged in proxy war, uncovering "bias and hypocrisy" of the other side. "India sees Pakistan through the tunnel-vision of Muslim fundamentalism nursing Islamic terrorism. Unfortunately, journalists on both sides wear the same glasses too" (Bose 2011, 27-28). In this condition, when media depend on the elite as information source and resort to propaganda and jingoism, the peace journalism is the immediate prey. While covering the decades old conflicts— especially from Kargil (1999) to Uri Attack (2016)— the media have been proving either side as the cause of the problem, blurring the positive prospects for peace and harmony. Media, as observed in Kargil war (1999), and Mumbai attacks (2008) was tilted towards jingoistic, nationalistic and propagandistic policies. With the inception of electronic media, the Kargil war is the first televised war wherein India used media as weapon, and the conflict received coverage from the nationalistic perspective (Bose 2011, 85). "The patriotic consolidation of India was complete during the Kargil war thanks to private TV channels and newspapers. Pictures of soldiers' bodies being brought home to their wailing kith and kin accompanied by a charged-up commentary inflamed passions" (Bose 2011, 18). The condition was alike in print media. In contrast, the Pakistani media did not use the Kargil episode as observed by Senior Pakistani Columnist, Anees Jillani, it was not regarded as war there while the media in India converted it into war (Bose, 2011).

Meanwhile, Thussu (2002) termed it "televised war," bringing into limelight the media's power in sustaining public opinion for support for enmities. In contrast, in the Agra Summit (2001), initially, media of both the counties were using the productive and optimistic language of friendliness and goodwill. But it was short joyed as "the peace balloon was burst by the very media that had pumped in so much hot air into it," (Bose 2011, 23). Javaid & Ejaz (2017) observed media's role in the summit as powerful and controversial because initially it created atmosphere of optimism, which was very short-lived. In the Mumbai episode, the Indian government was completely supported by the media in its campaign against Pakistan (Ozguness 2000, 89). The Mumbai Attack was transformed into "9/11 of India" by the media by linking the episode with Pakistan (Javaid & Kamal, 2013) and "war against India" (Boss, 2011). The media in Pakistan also adopted an offensive

posture, blaming Hindu and Western Zionists or local Muslim militants for the attack (Bose, 2011). The Indian media were also unison in promoting their narrative concerning the attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001, in which India blamed the Pakistani militant group, Lashker-e-Tayyaba. Van (2004) observed that media played an important role while reporting the attack, and the "drama was played out in front of the TV cameras" which attracted the highest viewership at that time. The discourses were formed by media, particularly the electronic media (Veen 2011). Dixit (2003) observed that tension between India and Pakistan touched critical levels after the attack.

Likewise, the assessment of Uri Attack (2016), following the massive unrest and insurgency after the killing of militant leader, Burhan Muzaffar Wani, showed that the coverage was intensely nationalistic in tune, following official narratives. Both politicians and Indian media blamed Pakistan for the attack, while Pakistan categorically denied the blames. The media, particularly the Indian media, played role of unhinged warmongering and was used for a war of words. Pakistani newspaper Dawn identified such type of language in its editorial on the attack ("Pak-India media war," 2016). Raha (2016, 77) observed the promotion of war narratives by electronic and social media; however, the print media and news portals offered measured analysis. "Payback Time", "War not Peace," "Time to Teach Pakistan a Lesson," "Pakistan's 'K-game' is over" were some narratives sparked by electronic media, hence leading to escalation and further tension. The Indian media, with its nationalistic coverage, was targeting Pakistan. While on the other hand, Pakistani media expressed suspicion over who were the perpetrators, and some papers even blamed that it was India's own handiwork to distract attention of the world from human rights violations following the assassination of Burhan Muzaffar Wani.

In this perspective, the application of peace journalism in Indo-Pak conflicts seems unrealistic. Keeping in view the hostile positions taken by the media with their tilt towards nationalism and ethnocentrisms, their dependence on official sources for obtaining information and favour for their respective country against the other with the concept of "We and They" and "Us and them." Sreedharan (2009) observed that the government negatively influenced newspapers coverage of Pakistan and India. While the print media have also been observed to present "US versus Them" conflict scenario before their respective publics, depicting themselves as victims of violence and other side the perpetrators. Besides, as has been aptly observed by Hanitzsch (2004), the audience perspective of news production is one of the media interests for revenue generation. Many studies observed that audience are commonly attracted by stories of wars, disasters, terrorism, unusual weather and in terms of Allan & Thorsen (2009) "a dose of titillation and trivia." So as Hanitzsch (2004) elaborates, media "cannot take liberty not to be a business." For Howard (2008), journalists commonly possess similar beliefs as of their society, so they would help society cope with such situation by sharing common beliefs. Hence, Weighton (2015), observed that peace journalism would have to offer appropriate workable and tangible solutions to overcome the issue of content influencing factors faced at newsroom, societal and ethnicity levels. Otherwise, as Fawcett (2002) observed, journalists related to one party of the conflict are unlikely to become peacemakers.

**CONCLUSION**

Practicing peace journalism in Indo-Pak context has become a challenging task. The main constraints hindering the tractability included the nationalistic approach adopted by the media across the borders, who reported the issues and conflicts from the "nationalistic and ethnocentric

lenses," hence the coverage is more tilted towards promoting national narratives over an issue rather than presenting an objective picture, as envisaged by the peace journalism. Secondly, the approach "Us versus Them" or "We verses They" or looking opponents from "Others" perspective makes media biased towards their side, so the coverage remains mostly constrained towards "Own gains" wherein "Our Side" is the victim of violence and the "Other Side" is the perpetrator of Violence. Thirdly, media dependence on official and elite sources is another challenge faced by peace journalism. The coverage from this perspective mostly becomes elite oriented, highlighting the points of view of elites, ignoring other voices. This also leads towards propagandistic coverage of issues and events. Fourthly, as identified above, there are other media realities which included financial interests of media, rating cultures, and competitive environment, that hinders peace practices. Lastly, structural problems also block peace journalism practice, as messages are formed by structures not by journalists. For some scholars, the structure is the message. Hence in this perspective, this analysis concludes that the application of peace journalism in Pakistan-India conflicts has been a challenging task.

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