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The image of a person, a group, a community and a nation at large depends to a great extent on how it is being portrayed in the media. Thus media image creates stereotypes and communities hold this prism in their minds and view everything accordingly. A substantial segment of Muslims intelligentsia is sad to witness how the media deal with Muslim-related issues. They feel that more and more negative words are used to describe Muslim issues and affairs. They see it as a new scheme of thing, where negative news on Muslims is getting prioritized in the agenda of the print media. They fears that more and more inflow of Muslim news and the way it is represented in media, definitely distort the image and concomitantly influence the vulnerable young minds of the country.

In contemporary times, no discussion on the public sphere is complete unless it takes into account the role of media in representing concerns of the citizens. According to Kumar (2011), the media has become an extremely important institution, with almost unlimited power in today’s society. It initiates debates, facilitates dialogue and shapes public consciousness. He further added that as recently as 20
years ago, mass media in India was essentially different from its present day structure. It has become the most powerful institution of creating and communicating cultural influences in the public sphere. It plays a crucial role in projecting images. What appears in media, print or visual, is widely accepted by people as true. There are very few discerning readers or viewers who would critically look at what appears in the media. With these developments, however, it has played itself as vehicle for opinion making and therefore, its role in projecting images has to be very careful which unfortunately, it is not, in majority of cases. In its new role of infotainment, the media has completely failed to do justice in analyzing the complex and emotional issues of the multi-religious and multi-cultural Indian society in general and that of the minority communities in particular. It is within this spectrum that the present study attempts to examine image of Muslims in mainstream English dailies of India.

According to Singhal and Rogers (2001), India is a land of multi-cultural, linguistic and ethnic groups. The multi-lingual, multi-cultural trends and traditions of the country are reflected in an equally sizeable and varied media. India publishes more daily newspapers than any other country in Asia, covering a range of languages and cultural diversity that is unparalleled in the world.
India, already a knowledge superpower, is positioned to take its place within the next decade as one of the top economies. It is already a crucial player in the global politics on security and environmental issues. In the context of the globalization media will, therefore, become one of the most important players in the world. In the backdrop of these developments, every social group has become conscious of the ‘mirroring of image’ in the media.

The modern mass media not only provide information but also shape public opinion. As part of their functional routine, they contribute to creation of images in the public mind.

Islam is India’s largest minority religion with Muslims officially constituting 13.4% of the country’s population. (Census-2001). According to Sachar (2006), Muslims constitute the second largest religious group in India and thus the largest religious minority. The 2001 census enumerated India’s Muslim population at over 138 million, and it was estimated that by 2006, the Muslim population would be over 150 million. India’s Muslim population is amongst the second largest in the world, exceeding only by Indonesia’s and close to the Muslim populations of Pakistan and Bangladesh. Moreover, it is larger than populations of most countries of the world.
Unofficial estimates claim a far higher percentage of Muslim population than census. Hindutva groups (2004) claim in their reports that the Muslim population has reached 30%.

The analysis on religious data, among the six major Indian religious communities, shows the decadal growth of the Muslims was the highest (36%) in the 2001 census. The statistic suggested that while the growth rate for Hindus has declined between 1991 and 2001 compared with 1981 and 1991. Muslims have actually grown faster in the last decade, this led Indian media and different parties raising an alarm at the growing number of Muslims and expressing concern about the demographic imbalance and overpopulation. (Frontline-2004).

There is also an almost universal psychological make-up of the minorities throughout the world to suffer from a sense of persecution, subjugation and oppression by the dominant majority population groups. This perception gets further strength if the minority group in question also suffers from socio-economic backwardness, as in the case with Muslims in India. Campbell (1995) argued that “whilst on the one hand media creates the invisibility of minorities by marginalizing their voices on the other actual portrayals more often than not fall into restricted and negatively stereotyped contexts.”
In a country like India, mass communication plays an important role in creating people’s awareness about national policies and programmes by providing information and education, besides healthy entertainment. It helps people to be active partners in the nation-building. India has a very active print and electronic media. An understanding of the character and spirit of the newspapers, their potential powers and inherited spirit is essential for further exploring the subject under study.

Media in India has come a long way during the past 50 years. However, the decade of the 1990’s can be truly considered transformational in several respects for the Indian media, which today has emerged as the second largest media market in the world after China, says the World Association of Newspapers (WAN), the global association for the industry. According to figures compiled by the Indian market, advertising and marketing organizations, the readership of the print media in the country has gone up from 232 million in 2000 to 302 million in 2007. Around 99 million copies of newspapers are sold in India everyday, making it the second largest newspaper market in the world after the United States.

According to World Association of Newspapers (2008), newspaper sale in India increased by 11.22 % in 2007.
Sawant (2001) said that the Indian press, however, is not a homogenous institution. It consists of different units, big and small, published at various territorial levels and from various places by different persons with different qualifications and motivations.

Similarly Eapen (1982) wrote that India’s press was “diverse and irregular in quality.”

Wolseley (1971) observed that India had “newspapers of wide varieties of appearance, quality and purpose.”

The fundamental objective of journalism is to serve the people with news, views, comments and information on matters of public interest in a fair, accurate, unbiased, sober and decent manner. According to Gupta (2001), newspapers are meant primarily to educate the people. They make the latter familiar with contemporary history.

One of the objects of a newspaper, Mahatma Gandhi said, is to understand the popular feeling and give expression to it; another is to arouse among the people certain desirable sentiments, and the third is fearlessly to expose popular defects. His approach to journalism was building bridges in a responsible way for the benefit of the society. The media can eliminate division between the communities by highlighting the positive strengths. The discourses filled with bias and
negative dimensions may likely to breed hostility contributing to social strife and degeneration.

Gandhi looked upon journalism as a means to serve the public. The newspaper is a great power, but just as an unchained torrent of water submerges whole countryside and devastates crops, even so an uncontrolled pen serves but to destroy. If the control is from without, it proves more poisonous than want of control.

Mahatma Gandhi recognized that communication is the most effective tool to shape opinion and mobilize popular support. He was of the opinion, ‘Newspapers are meant primarily to educate the people.’ If newspapers realized that it is their duty to educate the people, they could not but wait to check a report before publishing it. Gandhiji is of the opinion that it is better not to publish a report at all if it has not been found possible to verify it. Let us take the example of Gujarat Violence (2002), on 27, February 2002 at Godhra city in the state of Gujarat, the Sabarmati Express train was attacked. As a result, 58 Hindu pilgrims, mostly women and children returning from Ayodhya, were killed. Initial media reports blamed the local Muslims for setting the coach on fire. The attack prompted retaliatory massacres against Muslims and communal riots on a large scale. In September 2004, a panel appointed by the Central government and
headed by the former Supreme Court judge U. C. Banerjee to probe the Godhra train fire concluded that the fire was accidental. The Godhra fire received extensive news coverage until it was overtaken by the presentation of the Union budget. While covering communal disputes/clashes, according to Press Council of India (2005), news, views or comments relating to communal or religious disputes/clashes shall be published after proper verification of facts and presented with due caution and restraint in a manner which is conducive to the creation of an atmosphere congenial to communal harmony, amity and peace. According to Code of ethics for journalists and newspapers, they should ensure that information dissemination is factual. No fact should be distorted nor shall information known to be false or not believed to be true be published.

There are numerous instances of newspapers carrying unverified and false reports igniting passions causing riots, disrupting social harmony and creating ill will between peaceful communities.

Today, when there is widespread concern over the growing influence of market forces on media, and regret over journalism being no longer a social service, Gandhi’s views on values of journalism bring to bear on the profession of journalism the force of ethics and morality. In this context, He had said, ‘it is often observed that
newspapers published any matter that they have, just to fill in space. The reason is that most newspapers have their eyes on profits.

Mitra (2009) argued that English media however, plays an important role in shaping perceptions in the minds of India as a whole. The images that the English media builds and creates are reflected decisively in the international scene as well as within India.

According to Radhakrishnan, “newspapers should aim at development of a humanist vision of society in which man is treated as man and not as a Catholic or Protestant, Hindu or Muslim, Jew or Christian.” (Srivastava-1991).

To reveal the importance of newspapers, Rogers said, “All I know is what I see in the papers.” (Srivastava-1991).

Beecher said that “Newspapers are the schoolmasters of the common man.” (Srivastava-1991).

Sorabjee (2000) said that the print media in India is predominantly a private enterprise. Newspapers are owned mainly by individuals or by private firms and are relatively free from government control. Article 19 (1)(a) of the Indian Constitution guarantees “freedom of thought and expression” to all its citizens, which means freedom to publish newspapers. Except for a short period of emergency imposed during 1975, the press in India has
enjoyed freedom of expression. However, certain restraints are imperative in the very exercise of the freedom.

The Indian media market, as it is increasingly referred to for its market driven contents, is the fastest growing free Press in the world. In India, the booming economy is providing a sustained boost to print media along with the electronic media. The news media sectors are growing—indeed, faster than the economy itself. Strengthening economic and social fundamentals such as growing literacy rates and a strengthening newspaper reading culture is boosting the newspaper readership and hence their circulation in India. Despite the revolutions in electronic media, especially the new information and communication technologies (ICTs), the newspapers in India are registering a steady growth in their circulation.

The increasing involvement of international media groups with the Indian newspaper sector through foreign direct investment is also contributing to the improvement in the health of the Indian print media. So the Indian print media is here to stay and continue to play a very important role in keeping the people informed, educated and entertained.

In recent years, profit prioritization, has made the print media market driven, some trends such as move towards more sensationalist
and celebrity-driven journalism are already in the market, increasingly engaging the public in a debate about standards and ethics in journalism.

The soul of people is in the press. The real danger lies in the fact that the contemporary press is in the hands of a few financial magnates, who may murder its soul by corruption or narrowness of commercial interests.

The second press commission reveals that newspapers controlled by the big business are liable to become vehicles of expression of the ideologies of their owners and the selection, presentation and display of news in such newspapers would be dictated by that ideology. The commission also added that the interest of the owner of a newspaper generally lies in its economic success. (Parthasarathy-1997).

It is often argued that commercialization of media has been to a large extent responsible for it becoming insensitive and not fulfilling its expected social responsibility. However, the argument comes from the wrong notion that media is not business and those who own the media houses are guided by idealism and not by profit or business motives. Mehta (2009) suggest that “when people talk of the commercialization of the media, which is a kind of catchphrase for all
evils, what they are getting at is that the media are only interested in making profits and that their social responsibilities has been diluted. It is possible at one and at the same time to be a media house interested in making profits (though out solely dedicated to this) yet also fulfilling its social responsibilities.”

This makes the present study image of Muslims in mainstream English dailies of India evidently important as a research topic, because media has the power to create good and bad images of individuals, groups and issues and more than this enjoy the power to mould public opinion that is why media is called the fourth pillar of democracy.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The broad objective is to investigate the quantum and characterization of Muslims and Muslim related issues and concomitantly the image of Muslim community in the mainstream English dailies of India.

The specific objectives are as under:

- To measure Muslims image in news coverage in proportion to overall news selected in the mainstream Indian English newspapers and to identify trend in quantitative terms month wise and annually during 1997, 2002 and 2007.
• To study the tone (positive, negative and neutral) of Muslim-centered news in mainstream English dailies of India during the above mentioned years.

• To measure Muslims image in photographs in proportion to overall photographs selected in the mainstream Indian English newspapers and to identify trend in quantitative terms annually during 1997, 2002 and 2007.

• To study the tone (positive, negative and neutral) of Muslim-centered photographs in mainstream English dailies of India during the above mentioned years.

• To measure Muslims image in editorials in proportion to overall editorials selected in the mainstream Indian English newspapers and to identify trend in quantitative terms annually during 1997, 2002 and 2007.

• To study the tone (positive, negative and neutral) in which Muslim-centered editorials in the mainstream English dailies of India during 1997, 2002 and 2007.

• To measure Muslims image in articles/features in proportion to overall articles/features selected in the mainstream Indian English

- To study the tone (positive, negative and neutral) in which Muslim-centered articles/features in the mainstream English dailies of India during 1997, 2002 and 2007.

- To measure Muslims image in letters to editor in proportion to overall letters to editor selected in the mainstream Indian English newspapers and to identify trend in quantitative terms annually during 1997, 2002 and 2007.

- To study the tone (positive, negative and neutral) in which Muslim-centered letters to editor in the mainstream English dailies of India during 1997, 2002 and 2007.

- To compare the status of coverage both in terms of quantum and tone in The Times of India, Hindustan Times, The Hindu and The Indian Express during 2002, four years before and after 2002 i.e. in 1997 and 2007.

- To study how The Times of India, Hindustan Times, The Hindu and The Indian Express differ from each other giving space to Muslim-centered news in terms of positive, negative and neutral attributes.
HYPOTHESES:

After reviewing the available literature on the topic under investigation and also on the basis of a pilot study and taking into account the aims and objectives of the study, the following hypotheses were framed:

H1- Indian mainstream English dailies consistently over three different period of times gave more negative coverage to Muslim-related news, photographs, editorials, articles/features and letters to editor, as compared to positive coverage.

H2- During 2002 (the year of Godhra episode), Indian mainstream English dailies gave Muslim-related topics a sufficient space in a negative tone as compared to four years before and after 2002.

H3- The content of The Times of India and Hindustan Times content including news, editorials, photographs, articles/features and letters to editor gave maximum coverage to Muslim-centered news in a negative light in comparison with positive news, followed by The Hindu and The Indian Express.
CHAPTER DIVISION:

- The first chapter deals with the introduction, with main focus on importance of the study, hypotheses and objectives of the study.
- The second chapter covers with review of literature.
- The third chapter spells out the research methodology.
- The fourth chapter carries the analysis and quantify the news, editorials, photographs, features/articles and letters to editor, and
- The fifth chapter of the present study draws conclusions.
REFERENCES


