CHAPTER-5

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The second largest constituent of the humanity, Muslims were bound to be an important subject of media discourse. The review of literature undertaken indicated that Muslim community is facing a number of challenges from both within and outside. On the one hand, it is going through a slow and painful process of transformation from an inward looking mindset and on the other hand, it has to face the emerging challenges of communal politics in the country. Amid the pulls and pushes of these two different but related processes, the image of the community has taken a serious battering. It has received a lot of what may be called negative image. Their social, economic, political and cultural life, indeed, also occupy some space in the media domain, sometimes they are positively treated as progressive but largely negatively treated as enemies of the state and civilization both at national and global level. The data shows that events like 9/11 have tilted media interpretation of Muslims in more negative tones. On reviewing the media scenario in India, it revealed that the media coverage also reflects a similar trend, as evident from popular media discourses. There is no denying the fact that media is called the fourth
estate or fourth pillar of democracy, enjoys enormous power to mould public opinion, and influence public perception by portraying a subject suggestively. Perhaps, because of the media portrayals, mis-perception in India gained popular currency reinforcing the belief that Muslims are enemies of society, the nation and the people. Often they are projected as terrorists, anti-nationals, communal, fundamentalists, fanatics etc. This kind of erroneous media reporting has the danger of building misplaced perception about the Muslims, having the potential to divide the civilization into groups with the conflicting interests. The analysis of literature review revealed that even a cursory glance at the reports related to Indian Muslims in the leading dailies of the country will tell that negative projection was given more prominence than the positive coverage of the community.

Against the backdrop of the strengthening perception in the media circles, as reflected in the media content, the present study was an attempt to explore the issue of coverage of Muslims and its concomitted image mirroring having a bearing on the perception in public domain.

The content analysis and their codification of the selected newspapers reflect some glaring facts about the media portrayal of Muslims in India.
Findings:
The findings of the study revealed that the selected four mainstream Indian English dailies analyzed 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.

When month-wise coverage of news category was analyzed, it was revealed that all the 12 months of 1997 were found statistically significant. During 2002, out of the total 12 months, three months (September, November and December) were found statistically insignificant and in the year 2007, out of all the 12 months, three months (July, August and December) were found statistically insignificant. This means that out of the total 36 months of the news coverage analyzed in the selected mainstream English newspapers during 1997, 2002 and 2007, only six months news count was found statistically insignificant, giving sufficient support to the view that the mainstream English newspapers predominantly carry negative dimensions related to coverage of Muslim community.

When month-wise coverage of 2002 was compared to 1997 and 2007, it was found that except January, September, November and
December, all the 8 months of 2002 have more negative coverage in comparison with 1997 and 2007.

When month-wise coverage of TOI, HT, TH and IE during 2002 was analyzed, it was found that followed the Godhra carnage (happened on 27th February) from March to July, the data was highly significant, means extreme negative projection of Muslim–related news was revealed.

When year-wise coverage of news, photographs, editorials, articles/features and letters to editor was analyzed, it was found that all the selected newspapers consistently over three different periods of times were statistically significant, means they gave more negative coverage to Muslim related news, photographs, editorials, articles/features and letters to editor, as compared to positive coverage.

When the data of 2002 was compared to the data of 1997 and 2007, it was found that in all the five specified categories i.e. news, photographs, editorials, articles/features and letters to editor, 2002 coverage was more significant than 1997 and 2007. It was also revealed that the photographs, editorials, articles/features and letters to editor during 2002 were found highly significant, thereby indicating extreme negative projection in Muslim related content.
When TOI, HT, TH and IE were analyzed, it was found that during all the three years 1997, 2002 and 2007, the data was statistically significant except (IE- 1997), and it was also revealed that in all the selected newspapers, the year 2002 was more negatively significant than the coverage appeared in both years 1997 and 2007. When overall TOI, HT, TH and IE were analyzed, all were found statistically significant in respect of negative projection. It was also revealed that TOI and HT were found statistically more significant than TH and IE.

When the data of the years 1997, 2002 and 2007 were analyzed, it was found that all three years were statistically significant in respect of negative dimension and was indicated that 2002 was more statistically significant than 1997 and 2007.

When the data analysis was done in respect of all the newspapers combined during the three years under reference, it was found highly significant, which means extreme negative projection of Muslim-related news, photographs, editorials, articles/features and letters to editor was pronounced.

The role of the newspapers in empowering communities is a recognized fact. Muslims in India are, on the whole, a marginalized community, the mainstream English newspapers can play a crucial
role in promoting internal reform and facilitating the community’s social, economic, educational and political empowerment.

The professional ethical premise suggested that journalism should not be governed by an ideology, it should follow the principles of the profession, and when the result of data analysis shows the domination of negative aspect of social existence of the largest minority of the largest democracy of the world, question marks are bound to arise relating to adherence to the standard ethical notion existing as part of its daily routine in the mainstream national newspapers of India.

Even Press Council of India have issued categorical directives to strengthen the journalistic standards that reporting of communal strife should not be done without proper verification. But a close scrutiny of data collected revealed several unpardonable lapses on this count particularly in relation to the sad and sordid Godhra episode and its alarming fall out. This is a highly fertile gray area that needs a separate detail research study, as it do not directly fall into the domain of the current study.

Most of the literature reviewed shows that several distinguished media personalities revealed that India’s national media lacks social diversity; it does not truly reflect the country’s social
profile. Obviously under these circumstances, Muslims cannot be an exception and are severely under-represented in the mainstream national media (including the English dailies). It was reported in a leading national newspaper that Muslims in media constitute only 3% among the key decision makers against their 13.4% share in the country’s population. The reason often cited is that the Indian media is dominated to the brim by elite and ivory tower dwellers of all kinds.

One major study shows that 91% of articles about Muslims were negative. Some studies revealed that national newspapers reported false stories on Gujarat. The findings of present study supports the above conclusions.

The selection and projection of negative dimension of a community as revealed by this study have dangerous consequences and likely to place Muslims in a disadvantageous position. The Times of India, Hindustan Times, The Hindu and The Indian Express believed to influence the thinking of both the common man and the ruling elite. These newspapers stand out as India’s quality Press, have a wide appeal, particularly among the educated and the young. Knowingly or unknowingly, they are becoming a cause to impair national unity, solidarity, integrity and social progress. The data
analyzed point out clearly that these four mainstream English dailies gave extreme negative projection to Muslim-related content.

Review of literature relating to the infamous Godhra episode also revealed that in the beginning, mainstream English dailies often declared Muslims as the culprits. Then later when it was established as genocide, then the same mainstream English newspapers declared, it was an accidental happening. Communal tension between two communities, often manifested in the form of riots has been the unfortunate part of Indian history. So the role of mainstream English newspapers becomes all the more significant to address the expectation of creating a cohesive society or at least reduce the influence of divisive elements.

News, photographs, editorials, articles/features and letters to editor 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. The present study verified that news, photographs, editorials, articles/features and letters to editor was found statistically significant in relation to negative projection. Negative dimensions and issues such as sensational, provocative and alarming headlines and the news
takes should be avoided and strict neutrality to be observed in all those events that tend to put at stake the confidence and image of the community.

The present study is not criticizing mainstream English dailies of India, but to request them to work on ethical grounds. Because newspapers are the schoolmasters of the common man, so press should be very cautious when playing with words. However, a heavy responsibility devolves on the photographs. It is the nature of all humans that ‘to see is to believe’. The editor has to ensure that his analysis should be free from any personal preferences, prejudices or notions in editorials.

The analysis of the news coverage indicated that all the newspapers have just given 2.82 % total news space during the selected years. Out of this small percentage, the major portion 1.83 % was published in a negative tone and 0.71 % was given to positive tone and the remaining 0.27 % was in a neutral way.

The percentage of photographs related to Muslim community in all the selected three years was 2.84 %. Out of this, a majority of 1.93 % were found in a negative tone and only 0.64 % and 0.27 % in positive and neutral tones.
3.13 % was the percentage, in which editorials related to Muslim issues were presented in all the four selected newspapers. Out of which, major portion i.e. 1.90 % was given to negative projection and remaining 0.76 % and 0.47 % were shared by positive and neutral tone.

The percentage of articles/features related to the largest minority community in India in all the years under review was 2.99 %, out of which the maximum percentage 1.88 % was given to Muslims in a negative tone and 0.73 % and 0.38 % was given to positive and neutral manner.

2.70 % was the percentage, in which letters to editor related to Muslim community were presented in all the four selected newspapers. The major portion of this percentage 1.81 % portray Muslims in a negative way and remaining 0.59 % and 0.30 % was given in positive and neutral manner respectively.

To conclude, it was revealed that the overall percentage of all the above mentioned selected five categories, the area covered by total Muslim related content in the years under review was 2.90 %. This percentage is highly inadequate in comparison to its proportion of population share which is 13.4 %. It also establishes a clear under-representation of the Muslim community in the public domain. The
efforts need to be made to redress this issue voluntarily by the mainstream English newspapers themselves and fulfill their democratic obligations and bring into public focus the marginalized social class.

Out of this total 2.90 %, a major share of 1.87 % was presented in a negative manner, and just 0.69 % was published in a positive tone and remaining 0.34 % in a neutral way when it come to the largest minority community of India.

**Limitations:**

The findings of the present study are needed to verify on a large sample size for generalization purpose.

The study is limited to analyze the image of Muslims in four mainstream English dailies of India. Hence the findings can not be generalized to other mainstream dailies, vernacular newspapers, magazines and electronic media.

The present study concerns only image of Muslims, hence the findings are limited only to Muslim community. The findings can not generalized to other religious communities in India.

The study covers the news, photographs, editorials, articles/features and letters to editor. Hence the findings are limited only to the above mentioned categories.
The sample size is limited because the study is undertaken by a single researcher and it has to be completed within specific time.