

**This document is downloaded from DR-NTU (<https://dr.ntu.edu.sg>)
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.**

Media and a culture of peace : an Indian analysis

Agrawal, Binod C.; Latif, Durriya H.

2000

<https://hdl.handle.net/10356/87368>

Downloaded on 18 Apr 2025 12:51:25 SGT

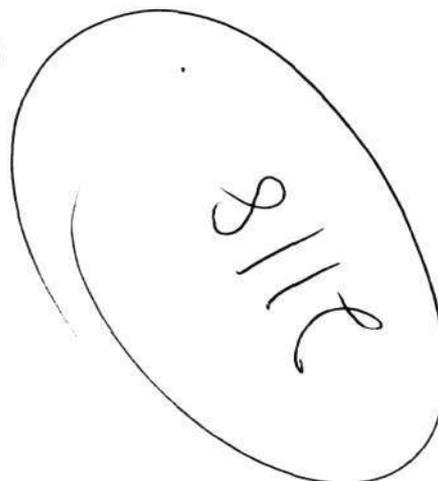
Paper No. 3

Draft

Media and a Culture of Peace: An Indian Analysis

by

Binod C. Agrawal
Durriya H. Latif



TALEEM Research Foundation

City Plaza, Sterling City
Bopal, Ahmedabad 380 058
India

Phone: 91-2717-31486/31007

Fax : 91-2717-31354

email: taleem@ad1.vsnl.net.in

Presentation to be made during the Symposium on "Facilitating Asian Media in Promoting a Culture of Peace", organized by the Asian Media Information and Communication Centre Ltd. (AMIC), Singapore, to be held in Manila, Philippines, December 4-6, 2000

Media and a Culture of Peace: An Indian Analysis

By
Binod C Agrawal
Durriya H. Latif

Introduction

Some years ago Agrawal (1993:231) observed "the satellite based broadcasting scarcely meets the needs of a large majority...centralised broadcasting in the pluralistic culture and linguistic setting have increased the gulf between poor and rich, urban and rural, and media owners and media non-owners. It has added another divide through satellite broadcasting. This division has weakened the democracy in India". Enhanced media access in broadcasting, print and telecommunications seems to have opened the floodgates of communications in the country. Recent advances in information technology, participation of Indian IT professionals in global markets, rise of IT exports (both software and human power) have created a euphoria in educational institutions, IT industry and individual homes. Indian Airports are buzzing with laptop computer carrying young professionals and laptop computers. cursory content analysis of satellite based cable TV in India bears ample evidence of "America", "American" and "American lifestyle". Newspapers are gaga over American news, views and products. Recent visit of a US president bears ample testimony to this phenomenon. US presidential elections have overshadowed major domestic issues, political crises and problems.

In the wake of economic globalisation, it seems that the media have started getting inspiration from Euro-American news, views and editorials, including the World Bank, than ever before. The news of the Indian Prime Minister, government policies and political debates and discussions have been sidelined in favour of front page news on beauty contests and visits of multinational IT leaders and media barons. These shifts are a reflection of the changing focus of the media. It also reflects the change in the political agenda of the country: strengthening democracy, creating a just and equitable society, peace and religious tolerance and national integration. These have been somewhat

relegated to a secondary position in favour of high consumerism, increased indifference towards the disadvantaged and minorities

One of India's leading media entrepreneur feels that today's media creates tension and earns money out of it. A leading communication scientist and philosopher argues that the increasing media access and reception is a key factor in increasing terrorism, religious intolerance, growth of separatist movements and increased dependence of a majority of poor persons on a minuscule rich. Further, he opines that the entire media especially the satellite broadcasting which a quarter of a century ago was thought to be a boon has turned into a belligerent bashing machine to enslave poor nations and communities. Telecommunications in no way have lagged behind in creating a culture of Diaspora. What emerges from the broad scenario is that the agenda of promoting a culture of peace through media has digressed further into oblivion.

van Dijk observes "research in several countries ... especially TV and the quality press are not explicitly and blatantly racist, few media play a positive role in the active promotion of a just and peaceful multicultural society" (2000:8). In many countries, the influential media, particularly TV and leading print media, while not showing overt prejudices, do little to promote a harmonious and positive atmosphere. Reports on discrimination against minorities and the underprivileged is often lacking in the media, especially the vernacular press who resort to blatant provocation and instigation during times of religious and political tension. In the wake of rapid privatisation of communications, it seems that news and reports related to the underprivileged is getting filtered and sidelined. Portrayal of the minorities during times of religious tensions reflects the widespread beliefs and the underlying ideology of the media owners, who influence both the messages and the content. These in turn influence and create the public opinion at large (Mertens 2000).

Thus, a strong need is felt for media monitoring with a view to create and help in the formation of an equitable, humane, secular and multilingual society in India. It is

therefore imperative that communicators themselves realise the need for change in their attitudes and beliefs and make a conscious effort to achieve this vision of society.

Aim

The aim of the exploratory study is:

- (a) To carry out a content analysis of a three day period between November 10 to 12, 2000 of selected newspapers (one each in Hindi and English), National broadcasts of television and radio news in English.
- (b) To analyse the results of a tracer survey among selected media personnel and representatives from non-governmental organisations, advocates of peace and religious leaders.

Keeping the aim of the study in view the report has been divided into two parts. In part 1 content analysis has been presented while in part 2 covers the survey.

Content Analysis

A brief content analysis covering a three day period (November 10-12, 2000) was conducted. The period of content analysis was overshadowed by the national news pertaining to the formation of the governments of the newly formed states of Jharkhand and Uttra Khand in India as well as the US presidential elections. The content analysis approach followed was those of Krippendorff (1980) and Agrawal *et al.* (2000:81-106).

Television

The daily half hour (20 hours to 20.30 hours) primetime English news telecast on Doordarshan National was recorded from November 10 - 12, 2000 for the content analysis. Each of these bulletin had 15 to 18 news items which were classified under politics, treaties / summits, protests, interethnic strife, violence, accidents/ natural disasters, scandals, religious, business, weather, sports and miscellaneous. These news items were further divided into national and international news. Among the national news were the charge sheet served upon the central government minister and the state

government minister of Gujarat both from the ruling Bhartiya Janta Party for their role in the 1985 caste and religious riots in Ahmedabad and the protests (*bandh*) in the state of Assam.

On the international front, the Palestinian-Israeli clashes and the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) summit's views on it and the extension of the state of emergency in Sri Lanka were mentioned. The celebration of 531st birth anniversary Guru Nanak (founder of the Sikh religion) got a mention along with the festival of maritime activities in the state of Orissa. No peace relevant news was reported in the telecast.

Radio

Two English national news bulletin of 15 minutes each broadcast on the All India Radio in the morning (8.15 to 8.30 hours) and night (21 to 21.15 hours) were recorded for the analysis. Each of these bulletins contained 11 to 14 news items and was once again dominated by news on the creation of the two new states: Uttra Khand and Jharkhand, as well as the Florida stalemate in the US presidential elections. Analysis shows that among the international news, the OIC summit amidst the Arab-Israeli conflict dominated. The arrest of the militants responsible for masterminding the attack on the Amarnath pilgrims (a holy shrine of Hindus in Kashmir) and the killings in the state of Bihar by the extremists were the national news on the inter-ethnic strife during this period. The only peace news was on a scheme of rehabilitation of surrendered Naga militants by the Nagaland State government.

Newspaper

The newspapers taken into account for the content analysis were *The Times of India* (English) and *Hindustan* (Hindi). Both newspapers' headlines were mainly dominated by the Florida stalemate in the US presidential elections. Besides, the formation of the new states of Uttra Khand and Jharkhand, the Congress party presidential elections were among a few other news items that hogged the front page. Among news items the

killings of 16 people in Jammu and Kashmir and the massacre of five in the state of Bihar by the People's War Group (PWG) militants got a front-page mention. While news on religious issues were confined to editorial pages, other important news items found place in the national and international news sections.

The Hindi newspaper more than the English newspaper covered the inter-ethnic strife which included the curfew in Nalabari District in Assam, besides the cross border tensions prevailing between India and Pakistan on the front page. The arrest of Yasin Malik and the danger of nuclear war between India and Pakistan were other highlights. The Hindi newspaper also reported on various religious festivals though on the third, fourth, fifth and eight pages. Foreign news especially the West Asia conflict appeared on the international news page and the editorial page. It seems that while the English news focuses on the broad national and international news the Hindi newspaper somewhat focused on cultural and regional issues.

There is a broad similarity on the positioning of news and the importance given to the various categories of news in television, radio and newspapers. Both national and international political news remains most important headlines. Television and radio are thought to reflect the Government's views as opposed to privately owned newspapers. But no differences in reporting was observed. The brief content analysis does not support the contention that reporting of news reflected the views of the media owners.

Tracer Report Survey

A quick survey was conducted among media persons and "media consumers" to assess their perception about the role various media play in promoting peace in India. Since it was an exploratory study, a purposive sampling technique was followed which included professionals working in television, radio and newspapers. The media users included religious leaders, non-governmental organisations and advocates of peace. The analysis attempted in the tracer report to provide a broad understanding as to how Indian media may have contributed towards a culture of peace.

Methodology

The respondents divided into half media persons and the other half into media users which included non-governmental organisations, advocates of peace and religious groups. A purposive sampling using the snowball technique was used to have required number of 40 respondents. Individual respondents were approached for personal interviews. In addition, a few respondents were interviewed on phone. Some respondents expressed their difficulty in responding to the questionnaire. Data were collected during November 5 to 30, 2000. Table 1 provides sample distribution of respondents by sex.

Table 1: Sample Distribution of Respondents by Sex

Category of Respondents	Male	Female	Total
Newspaper	8	6	14
Television	4	1	5
Radio	2	2	4
Advocates of Peace	1	2	3
Non-Governmental Organisation	2	9	11
Religious Group	3	-	3
Total	20	20	40

Analysis

Table 2 indicates that a majority did not feel that media made negative reporting. According to them both positive and negative news was reported. They believed that news reported the reality as it was happening in society. A variety of opinions were expressed which ranged from extreme negative reporting by language newspapers to extreme positive. By and large, the explanation given by the respondents were defensive in nature as to why news was negative. Negative or sensational reporting based on the conventional view was "if everything is alright it does not make news."

Table 2: Opinion about Negative Reporting by Media Persons and Users

Negative Reporting	Media Persons	Media Users	Total
Strongly agree	2 (8.7)	1 (5.9)	3 (7.5)
Agree	2 (8.7)	3 (17.6)	5 (12.5)
Disagree	15 (65.2)	10 (5.9)	25 (62.5)
Strongly Disagree	4 (17.4)	3 (17.6)	7 (17.5)
Total	23 (57.5)	17 (42.5)	40 (100.0)

(Percentage in parenthesis)

Opinion was divided whether mass media in India gave prominence to events such as conflict between nations, wars, inter-ethnic strife and misunderstandings. Both media persons and users felt that prominence was given to conflicts, wars and ethnic strife. All those who agreed to this statement rationalised that "in a nation with diverse religions, ethnic and caste sections giving prominence between them is understood". It is difficult to make a conclusive statement whether prominence was given to conflicts and strife in the Indian media (see Table 3).

Table 3: Prominence to Conflict and Strife by Media Persons and Users

Conflict	Media Persons	Media Users	Total
Strongly agree	2 (8.7)	1 (5.9)	3 (7.5)
Agree	11 (47.8)	8 (47.1)	19 (47.5)
Disagree	9 (39.1)	6 (35.3)	15 (37.5)
Strongly Disagree	1 (4.3)	2 (11.8)	3 (7.5)
Total	23 (57.5)	17 (42.5)	40 (100.0)

(Percentage in parenthesis)

There seems to be an even response on biased, imbalance and subjective reporting on religion. Out of 40 respondents 22 agreed, while three respondents had taken no stance on this statement (see Table 4). By and large few comments were offered for their disagreement on the issue. "With religious sentiments having a major role to play in getting political mileage media does get influenced by the powerful religious and social forces".

Table 4: Biased, Imbalance and Subjective Reporting on Religion

Biased Reporting	Media Persons	Media Users	Total
Strongly agree	5 (21.7)	2 (11.8)	7 (17.5)
Agree	8 (34.8)	6 (35.3)	14 (35.0)
Disagree	7 (30.4)	5 (29.4)	12 (30.0)
Strongly Disagree	1 (4.3)	3 (17.6)	4 (10.0)
No stance	2 (8.7)	1 (5.9)	3 (7.5)
Total	23 (57.5)	17 (42.5)	40 (100.0)

(Percentage in parenthesis)

About 55 percent of the respondents felt that religious and social groups and non-governmental organisations have performed well in promoting peace, tolerance and understanding in India. (See Table 5)

Table 5: Performance of Religious, Social groups and NGOs in Promoting Peace, Understanding and Tolerance

Performance	Media Persons	Media Users	Total
Strongly agree	1 (4.3)	4 (23.5)	5 (12.5)
Agree	9 (39.1)	8 (47.1)	17 (42.5)
Disagree	3 (13.0)	4 (23.5)	7 (17.5)
Strongly Disagree	6 (26.1)	-	6 (15.0)
No stance	4 (17.4)	1 (5.9)	5 (12.5)
Total	23 (57.5)	17 (42.5)	40 (100.0)

(Percentage in parenthesis)

Table 6 indicates 62.5 per cent respondents believed that religious and societal groups and non-governmental organisations had established good relations with the mass media. As "everybody is interested in getting exposure".

Table 6: Relations between Religious/Societal Groups, NGOs and Mass Media

Good Relations	Media Persons	Media Users	Total
Strongly agree	2 (8.7)	2 (11.8)	4 (10.0)
Agree	17 (73.9)	8 (47.1)	25 (62.5)
Disagree	3 (13.0)	4 (23.5)	7 (17.5)
Strongly Disagree	-	2 (11.8)	2 (5.0)
No stance	1 (4.3)	1 (5.9)	2 (5.0)
Total	23 (57.5)	17 (42.5)	40 (100.0)

(Percentage in parenthesis)

There is a very strong concurrence among almost all respondents that all parties concerned have to work closely to promote a culture of peace. Such a desire emanated from the fact that there were recurrent eruptions of conflicts, tension and strife in the country. It also reflects that people by and large want peace in the sub-continent. Though cynics thought it to be an "utopia and would require a massive mass movement in order to change the mindset of the masses".

Table 7: Need for Closer Association to Promote a Culture of Peace

Closer association	Media Persons	Media Users	Total
Strongly agree	14 (60.9)	3 (17.6)	17 (42.5)
Agree	9 (39.1)	12 (70.6)	21 (52.5)
Disagree	-	2 (11.8)	2 (5.0)
Strongly Disagree	-	-	-
Total	23 (57.5)	17 (42.5)	40 (100.0)

(Percentage in parenthesis)

Good Practices Adopted by Media Persons and Users

It was difficult to elicit a response on the question of good practices adopted by media in reporting about religion. Over 40 percent could not provide any examples and many chose not to respond to the question. On further probing, it was observed that most of them could offer an example in which media in India had made positive contributions in the promotion of peace, mutual understanding and tolerance. It seems "no one thinks that way, but media persons write whatever is happening without seeing the other side. Further, few people must have tried but failed." A few especially from the print media indicated that name of religions and communities are left out in their report to avoid escalation of tension. Ignorance or lack of information is considered a means of avoiding conflict or tension.

A number of national, regional and even one international religious group and few social organisations were mentioned who have carried out good work in promoting peace were mentioned. On one extreme was the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) and Vishwa

Hindu Parishad (VHP), while on the other extreme was the Forum for Democracy. While half of the respondents were not able to mention any name, the other half offered a plethora of names ranging from Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), to Sarvodaya Parivar (Sarvodaya Family). All these organisations are involved in economic and social development of women, poor and underprivileged groups. The process of communication, followed for promoting peace by these groups is not documented but in most cases they use interpersonal communication.

Suggestions

Almost everyone offered some suggestions as to how media and various groups can work together to promote a culture of peace in India. These suggestions vary both in their content, approach and scope. They also vary a great deal in the use of electronic, interpersonal and print media. Leaving aside all those who did not respond to the question, a number of suggestions were directly drawn from textbooks like "be a responsible, accurate and a good reporter". The other extreme was a political cliché like "media must give equal opportunity to all groups so prejudices do not occur. Instead of giving plain publicity through coverage of events, these groups should effectively use the media to achieve higher goals for the benefit of the whole society".

Conclusion

Limited analysis presented so far, indicate similar approach, content and importance given to various news, both by electronic and print media. While there is a regional focus in Hindi news, the broad national and international news and conflict reporting remain uniform in all media. Both media persons and media users are of a similar view on negative reporting. However, opinion was divided whether mass media gave prominence to conflicts between nations, wars, inter-ethnic strife and misunderstandings. The statement on biased, imbalance and subjective reporting seems to evoke only partial acceptance. A similar response has been reported for the performance of religious and societal groups and non-governmental organisations in promoting peace, tolerance and understanding. Analysis does not warrant any definitive conclusion.

References Cited

1. Agrawal, Binod C., J.N. Hashmi, I. Kar, A.K.Sinha and J.Verma
2000 Message System Analysis of VGC Countrywide Classroom *In* Higher Education Through Television; editor Binod C. Agrawal; pp.81-106. New Delhi : Concept Publishing Company.
2. Krippendorff, Klaus
1980 Content Analysis : An Introduction to its Methodology; London : Sage Publishers.
3. Mertens Stefan
2000 Everyday Racism and the Importance of a Cultural Paradigm. Media Development, Vol. XLVII (2); pp 27-31.
4. van Dijk, Teun A.
2000 Media, Racism and Monitoring. Media Development, Vol. XLVII (2); Pp 7-10.