



## Ethnic Crisis and the Role of English Print Media: A Case Study of Godhra and Gujarat Riots

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### ABSTRACT

It is a general observation that in the time of crisis the dependency of masses over Media increases many folds in comparison to normal days. This dependency over Media increases its significance in handling such crisis because one single false and unregulated news may further panic the situation in such crisis. It is no different in the matter of ethnic crisis as single rumor may also aggravate the angry mob further on communal line which can lead to severe devastation and communalization of minute issue between two individual. Paul Brass in his 'Institutionalized Riot system' has clearly signified the role of local Media in framing the News on such crisis in a way that lead to accusation of victims when normalcy is restored. Using 'Media framing' and the 'Spiral of Silence' theory this research article will revisit the event unfolded in Godhra, Gujarat. Methodologically, the article takes the assistance of Content analysis to analyze how English Print Media perceives Communal Riots in India. It exposes the 'Media framing' tendency of English Print Media which narrated in 2002 that it is the active presence of Hindus Organizations like VHP and RSS in Gujarat that resulted in either brutal torching of S-6 coach of Sabarmati Express or the reaction of Hindus against Muslims. This research work argue that this tendency in which Media framing has

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been done shows the impact of pseudo- Secular obsession constructed by Nehru and Congress. Which remained influenced of Media ‘Silence Spiral Theory’. On the contention that India should always strive for Hindu- Muslim brotherhood to ensure unity and integrity of the Nation. This led the birth of this Public Opinion that Muslim Minority of India cannot be the reason behind religious crusade against Hindus. Working of pseudo- Secular system resulted in biased reporting on Godhra and Gujarat riots. This biasness in reporting not only questions the responsibility of Media to watch over Democracy but also demands provisions regarding regulation over Media content.

**Introduction:** Media played a great role in supporting and sustaining the National Movement of India. It is significant to note that each social reformer as well as the organization during the National Movement against colonialism were editors of one or more than one News Papers. These Leaders of National movement kept their ideology at the peripheral position for winning National freedom. Thus one witness that till Independence different ideology and their affiliated Print Media had the crucial objective of liberating India from Colonial Masters and thus Print Media was not only medium of information transmission but also major source of enriching masses and their minds so that feeling of one Nation could be aroused. However as the Muslim league started blaming Indian National Congress as Hindu Organization, the Printing houses did not remain intact from credibility questions and with the time only two groups one of Congress and Second of Muslim league sustained their position one representing Muslim Nation and the second projecting Indian National Congress as Hindu Nation group. This religious divide of India by Muslim league and his leader Jinnah took a competitive communal turn, taking not only political figures but their respective media houses in to its fold. Thus one can say that the transition of power from British to Native Indians marked a shift in the Print Media’s Orientation over Hindu- Muslim unity. This has been objectionable with respect to Credibility of Media’s Objective and Independent stand over a period of time. Paul Brass in his book ‘*The Production of Hindu – Muslim riots in contemporary India* ‘ has criticized the Media reporting during ‘ Direct Action Day’ and its retaliation over the contention that Media has failed to maintain neutrality, as one witnesses in the case of Kolkata riots (Brass, 2003). It has been argued in his book that during Kolkata riots Print Media led the horizontal expansion of Hindu – Muslim riots. The pro Hindu print Media (congress Media Houses) infused hatred against the Muslim and vice versa. In contemporary times the similar charges are made on the credibility of the Media working in Pakistan and India for the existence of intense rivalry between them.



In the background of such findings, this research article provides an account of analysis of News and editorial being published by Hindustan Times, Indian Express, The Hindu and Times of India from 28/02/2002 to 4/03/2002. During these 4 days there was not a single day that passed without giving frontline and editorial over situation of Gujarat. Contextualizing the '*Media Framing*' as well as '*Media Silence Spiral theory*' this article goes on to investigate that Did English Print Media remained objective and impartial while reporting Godhra and Gujarat Riots? Did English Print Media remain free from '*Media Framing*' and impact of '*Silence Spiral theory*'? If No, then how Godhra and Aftermath was framed in English Print Media?

### Research Methodology

This study involves an account of content analysis of the headlines and editorial selected from English News papers i.e., *Hindustan Times*, *The Times of India*, *The Indian Express* on Godhra and Aftermath from 28 February 2002 to 4 March 2002. Using quantitative and qualitative orientation this research article aims to expose biasness of English Print Media in reporting of Ethnic crisis. It takes the help of discourse analysis to revisit Godhra and Aftermath to depict how the English News Papers especially The Hindu, Hindustan Times, The Times of India and The Indian Express framed News and stories on Godhra and Aftermath according to the dominant discourse of Secularists. The English Print Media in 2002 framed Godhra and Aftermath with the underpinnings of '*Silence Spiral theory*' thus not only muted the voice and anger of the victims of Godhra rather they tried to put the whole blame on the head of Hindutva Ideologues and the then Chief Minister of Gujarat Narendra Modi.

### Theoretical Frame Work

Is the News only disseminate factual information? What Media Framing theory and Media Silence Spiral theory advocates

**Media Silence Spiral Theory** : Popularly known as Public Opinion theory in Political Science and Communication Science , explains that due to the fear of alienation from the group/ main stream Individual rather of taking own self stand based on his cognizance most of the time takes the stand of group . To better explain this Elizabeth Noelle Nuemann has contextualized the election of American President Ronald Regan and JIMI Carter in which before the election it was very difficult to say who would be elected as citizens of America were almost in a dilemma to select best among them. However the role of Media and the supporters of Regan created such a pressure through public opinion that on the day of Election it became obvious that JIMI Carter is going to lose. This was only the magic of so called Public Opinion which no one



can deny in Indian Election too. The other side of this Majority who have their own conscience shifted towards the Public opinion or get changed according to Public Opinion opposite to that comes those who fall in minor number not on ethnic, religious or caste, creed but thoughts approach towards any act. Neumann says the Media amplifies the muteness of Minorities and thus makes the opinion of the Majority as 100% objective truth.

**Media Framing:** This silencing is done through Media framing which involves the selectiveness of seven elements which includes: Definition of the Issue, Interpretation of the reason behind such issue, Evaluation about the stand of Morality, Accusing the entity involved, Inquiring the solution Provider, Discussing what may exaggerate/ reduce the expansion of issue and finally giving the verdict of solution (Taylor, 2008, Entaman, 1993, Iyengar, 1991). These are supplemented through use of metaphor, images and text for making things sensational and makes natural through selection and salience which involves highlighting certain aspects of and while excluding others which results in biased narrative. Everyone have their own story because each individual follows certain frame to see the world around them. This is what 'framing theory explains, according to Goffman what is going on in the World is viewed by the people through their primary framework. In 1974 while propounding the 'Framing theory Goffman argued that its framing that determines the implications and shape practices because such situations are effects of the frame that has been applied. In such circumstance Media being a profit oriented industry need to include the interest of elite classes uncritically (Herman, 1996).

In nutshell one can argue that news are created and propagated to provide benefit to one group of entities over other. This is done through 'selection and silence' of facts, therefore News Papers should not be taken as objective source of information on a particular issue. In other words it could be summarized precisely that what is made invisible through framing in the media discourse, deemphasizes the reality, affects the visibility of the reality, and often puts the victims at a losing end (Riaz, 2021).

## Literature Review

Conflict and Media representation shares a close relation to each other as it has been well researched fact that Media working influence the vulnerability of conflict as highlighting issue and biased report may lead further panic situation and horizontal expansion of Violence (Chebii, 2015; Alimba, 2020). This relation has been carved out from the example and working of BBC news channel in Rwanda Crisis of 1994 and local Media. Romeo Dallaire who was commander to Rwanda crisis in 1994 of United Nations Assistance Mission in his book '*The Media and Rwanda Genocide*' has outlined that it was the local polarized Media who worked as tool of inciting the violence between Hutus and Tutsis on one hand whereas on the other



hand the international news channels like BBC interrelated this issue and projected as small tribal clash not more than that. This led the silencing of the genocide of 1994, this show that it is a fact that local Media majorly remained attached with the identity and thus they had chances of slipping to biasness. However the observation of Romeo Dallaire also highlights that how the International Media misrepresent ethnic issues as they do not takes the cognizance of context and often makes them ignorable from mainstream discussion on one hand on the other hand sometimes in the line of dominant perspective Media also without depth inquiry just starts to narrate and project who should be taken as Villain and to whom people should regard as Hero.

Decade of 1990 not only marked the shift of academic discourse from ideological conflict to Identity issue but also introduced the debate over the role of Media during identity conflict that soon started to take importance in academic discussion. Especially after Bosnian crisis, as much of the reporter and Media person followed the dominant lens of NATO in which Serbian leader Milosevic was projected as the main accused behind the mass killings of Albanian masses like Hitler whereas Albanian militia leader as freedom fighter. This interpretation of Media about the Bosnian crisis led the scholars to argue that Media posses the power of interpretation and accusation (Speer, 2017) .

Thus one can draw conclusion that Media should not be understood as only an information disseminator; rather it shapes the reality and mind of the masses during War and Conflict (Kaul & Saxena 2017, 314).

It is worth noting that in India there has been obsession towards English, the movement of Gandhi succeeded half. As, It is going to be more than seven decade that we Indians become free from colonial rule but still it is unfortunate but hard core fact that the educated and elite social class of India projects English as a standard so as reading English Newspapers that is evident to show that ‘swadeshi’ of Gandhi still find enslave to British English . Even for good vocabulary it has been always advisable to read The Hindu and other English News Papers to the students. Thus it cannot be denied that English Print Media has influence over the most influential class of India. In India the readers of English News Papers are intellectuals who participate in formation and implementation of Public Policies in India on the one hand whereas on the other International Media also uses these English News Papers as source to interpret the issues related to India.

### **Godhra and Aftermath**

The Word ‘Godhra’ records the gruesome killing of some 59 innocent people including 25 women and 15 children and injuries to 40 India saw many horrors, this was one of the worst of them(Deshpande2022 page



11). On Feb 27 of 2002 Ahmadabad bound Sabarmati Express before it reached its last station its coach S-6 was set on fire at the station named Godhra by a mob of Muslims comprising 500 to 2000 in numbers. This gruesome act which deadly burnt the innocent Karsevaks who were after providing their service in Ayodhya in construction of Temple on the Birth Place of Maryadapurusottam Ram, returning to their home, became reason for spontaneous aggressive reactions of Hindus against local Muslims involved in orchestrating 'Godhra'. The aggressive reaction of Hindus transformed into riots between Hindus and Muslims that continued for the next three days from 28 March to 2 March 2002. This confrontation between Hindus and Muslims led to the loss of 1169 people including those killed in Police firing and assuming all missing as dead (Deshpande, 2022). These three sections will be analyzed from 28/02/2002 to 4/03/2002 on the contention that reaction against Godhra which should be seen as reaction of Godhra that resulted in popular term used in dominant stream as Gujarat riots persisted mainly from 28 February to 2 March 2002 in only 16 districts of Gujarat against Muslims (Savant et al., 2002).

Internationally as well as domestically the 'Gujarat Riots of 2002' has been criticized much especially in academic as well in political discourse. More than a dozen of books and articles have already been written on this topic with different objective and intent. However one found two different intent and objective behind these writing. First is to show how BJP and Narendra Modi, the then C.M of Gujarat played a dubious role in killing of Muslim Masses whereas the second group was against this narrative and sought to provide whole story without ignoring Godhra. The Supreme Court of India also passed its Judgment on Godhra and Gujarat on same premises that second group of writers claims that Gujarat was none other than the reaction of Godhra and pseudo-secular stand of Media and rejected plea of Zakia Jafri and provided clean chit to Modi and his officials on June 24, 2022.

One of the common similarity among these streams either, it be those, who narrated either Godhra and Gujarat riots as two different events and remained against to what SIT of Supreme court reported or the second whose interpretation was based on SIT and Nanavati Commission Report is none other than 'News Papers'. Especially English Print Media on the contention that the local section press of Gujarat either Sandesh or Gujarat Samachar narrated Gujarat Riots as voice of Hindu Organizations and BJP (Ahmed, Saifuddin, 2010) whereas opposite to local press National English Print Media especially The Times of India and The Indian Express were overtly critical and empirical towards their reporting. However these findings lack the discursive and holistic analysis of News and Editorial of English News Papers. Thus there is need to rethink and revisit News and Editorials printed during Godhra and Gujarat to see how English Print Media of 2002, defined either Godhra / Gujarat Riots? To whom it accused for Godhra / Gujarat?





What were the reason and casual factors that led either Godhra/ Gujarat Riots? Was it sided with ruling regime at the state or Centre? What solution was provided to control and mitigate the situation?

### **How Godhra and Gujarat Riots was defined in English Newspapers?**

The Hindu published on very first March in editorial section under the title ‘Deadly Spiral’ that the Gujarat’s status as Hindu Laboratory and its vulnerability to communal Violence is alarming, that means the situation of Gujarat is due to its status of Hindu Laboratory. Accusing Gujarat on one side through Metaphor of Hindu Laboratory whereas on the other side using phrase ‘situation of Gujarat’ rather of criticizing Muslim fundamentalism for their inhuman act of Godhra Massacre and made it explicit in next page on that same day that the reaction of Hindus against Muslims was not genuine rather it was result of the seeds of hatred and divisiveness that Modi and BJP has so far has sown in Gujarat through the publication of edit page article by Harish Khare under the Title of article “Will the Conflagration be contained ?” .

No different line of argument was made by The Times of India under editorial titled as ‘Vicious Spiral’ in which The Times of India guaranteed that it is VHP whose social networking is dense in Gujarat but Gujarat riot was not possible without the back support to VHP of ruling BJP in Gujarat (The Times of India 1/03/2002, page 10).

In same way, the Indian Express while discussing over Godhra and Gujarat rather of taking the name of miscreants involved in Godhra, the Journalist Darshan Desai on March 3 2002 authoritatively declared that in Gujarat the Godhra and Its fallout should not surprise anyone because in Gujarat the lines of division which was to exist between Sangh Parivar has now faded. This statement of Darshan Desai in his article ‘Where the trishul is held high’ in simple terms accuses to unification and coherence among Hindu Organization for Godhra and its fallout (The Indian Express, page7, 3/03/2002).

Simple conclusion is that rather of condemning Muslim miscreants and accepting the fault of their ignorant towards Ramsevak in Godhra , these English Newspapers defined Godhra and Gujarat riots as vulnerable situation which had erupted due to activities of VHP and RSS under Modi government.

**Whose immoral act resulted in either Godhra or Gujarat?** English News Papers approached Godhra and Gujarat with moral angle and published editorials. The Times of India published article named ‘Children of a bewaiting God’ written by Jyotirmaya Sharma in which she while discussing about morality and civic sense related VHP and Rambhakta who were fighting for the Birth place of Ram in their own country with Osama. According to her understanding which Times of India rather of restraining such thoughts published that –‘The jihadist Who go about their business in Godhara, Kashmir, Afghanistan,



America and elsewhere- as well as so called Rambhakta who run riots in Ahmadabad, Vadodara and Rajkot approximates to the literal meaning of word – Ravana’. (The Times of India, page 10, 3/03/2002). On the other hand It is quite interesting that on that same day the Indian Express published ‘Islam's progressive spirit is abused by repressive regimes written by Soha Ali khan. In which she argued in that ‘Islam is not inherently more violent than other religions as is often perceived but that it is local expression of conflict over access to resources and political space ploughing nation the world over. (The Indian Express page 10, 3/03/2002).

Projecting Islam as progressive and Indian regime under BJP as suppressive in the Indian Express on one hand and relating RSS and VHP to Ravana and Jihadist of Afghanistan by The Times of India, make it crystal clear the influence of secularization which Nehru and Congress Imposed over India, that transforms Hindus in to Minority and Muslim Minority as the voice of Majority. One finds that its even not one week when Muslim fundamentalist torched 59 people returning from Ayodhya in Sabarmati Express and The Indian Express published article advertising and supporting Islam on one hand whereas on the other hand equated rule of BJP as suppressive regime. The Times of India remained forerunner and equated RSS and Hindu Organization with Jihadists and Ravana.

### **Which Factors led exaggeration of the violence?**

It is the Hindustan Times which Published on 4 March 2002 that ‘ A partisan police and politics of hate add fuel to Gujarat fire – Pankaj Vohra’ this news by Pankaj Vohra on analysis of Gujarat Riots dictate that It was not the Godhra that led Gujarat Riots in 2002 but the Police and politics BJP . (Hindustan Times page 1 3/03/2002).

On that same page Journalist Vinay Menon written on 2/03/2002 that ‘Curfew ties Victims, frees Killers’ how one should take to this observation of Hindustan Times ?

In no different to that The Hindu published on the page on second of March that ‘ The Gujarat chief minister however claimed that situation was improving and intensity of violence was much less than what it was yesterday , however what The Hindu finds that Police presence had little impact on two communities pelting stone on each other” ( page 1, 2/03/2002). It was not the first headline of Hindustan Times such headlines on front page were more than hundreds in number throughout Month of March and Year 2002. Even on the issue of first march Hindustan Times asserted that Its ‘Modi who blames Muslims for sparking Violence’ what this lines signifies it means simple that Hindustan Times do not think that Muslims can be perpetrator of Violence ignoring the latest brutal killing of 59 Ramsevaks.





### **What will be appropriate Solution for bringing Normalcy in Gujarat?**

From the march second echo to dismantle Modi government was started to be pushed by the English Newspaper to better understand this the Edit page article of Shekhar Gupta “Backfires & burning question” is crucial he advocates that It is not important that behind Godhra who is main accused rather it is significant to consider that Godhra has compensated the failure of BJP and Sangh Pariwar as their aim has been to produce Hindu- Muslim riots , after accusing BJP and Sangh Pariwar in his article Shekhar Gupta further goes on warning BJP that Hindu extremism will not be tolerated any more in India because it has become much different to the extremist environment of Pakistan. (The Indian Express 2/03/2002, page 10). This implicit warning to BJP as protagonist of Hindu- Muslim riots in India by Shekhar Gupta transformed in explicit demand by March 4 from News headlines to Editorial and Edit page article for example the article of Kuldip Nayar ‘Gujarat was on fire two government fiddled- Burnt beyond recognition’, in which he argued that ‘ the only solution and suggestion for bringing normalcy in Gujarat is Narendra Modi government should resign as it is failure of Modi government in not controlling the situation( The Indian Express page 6, 4/03/2002) ‘Narendra Modi should have submitted his resignation for the failure to control the situation. He should do it now. If not, the centers must dismiss him for lesser reasons State government has been asked to quit.”

It is not only one article which made such suggestion rather the demand of putting Gujarat under president rule and to ban VHP and RSS was reiterated on daily basis in News Headlines of The Hindu, The It Times of India , The India Express and Hindustan Times, even for creating an echo in the Mind of public The English Papers inquired those who could rather of focusing Godhra , may argue that there is failure of Gujarat BJP and RSS working there and finally solution is putting Gujarat under President rule.

### **Conclusion**

Dr Koenraad Elst has argued in his book “ BJP vis-a –Vis Hindu resurgence “ on the Media reporting that Riots, though mostly started by Muslims for example the Mumbai riots of December 1992 and of January 1993 are systematically reported in the Media world as “ Progroms” committed by well prepared and well armed Hindu death squads against poor defenseless Muslim . According to Dr Koenard in Journalistic and scholarly references, Advani’s peaceful 1990 Rath Yatra has become a proverbially violent “ Blood Yatra” , He is not alone on this stand in similar vein one find reiteration by the one of prominent leader of Congress Kanhaiyalal Munshi , who in his book argued that “ if every time there is an inter- communal conflict, the majority is blamed regardless of the merits of the question... the spring of traditional tolerance will dry up”(Munshi ,2018, page 312.Pilgrimage to freedom). But the reality what one find that these



orientations has been always projected opposite to dominant narrative that see Muslims as Noble and Preachers of peace and Hindu organizations as anti-integrity to India which are always seen to enmeshed with divisive politics and hatred speech. In creation of this narrative policy Television and Films even played a significant role in consolidating the view of Nehru and Media that anything which harms the Muslims either its speech/act no matter that is crude fact also he /she should be seen as inferior and his speech to be an offence.

In such environment and norms constructed through reiteration and humiliating to Hindutva Ideologue Godhra and Aftermath gave a full length opportunity for opposition and Media to freely exercise its authority and engaged itself in proving that it was Modi and BJP with their Hindu Organizations like RSS and Vishwa Hindu Parishad who were responsible for Godhra and Aftermath. Godhra because the people of Vishwa Hindu Parishad were immoral and against the Hindu Muslim cooperation which resulted in burning of train and thus Godhra was spontaneous in same it was VHP and their worker who killed Muslims and attack the Media. They will not bother to see who has suffer, and try to investigate who is at fault, but simply close their eyes and blame one group ,i.e. the Hindu group during the Hindu- Muslim conflicts (Deshapande, 2022). One may argue for the biased claim of Deshpande but no different view has been of Ganesh Kanate , a staunch anti –BJP and anti- Sangh Pariwar Journalist with columnist leanings , wrote in his weekly column in English daily the Hitvada dated 15 August 2003, ‘ Muslims starts riots and then suffers heavily in riots which they themselves start . The report of Congress ‘ Home ministry blamed Muslims for starting riots 23 out 24 riots between 1968 to 1970 in Bhiwandi. This same data was quoted in the parliament on 14 may 1970 by the late Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

The Hindu, Hindustan Times, The Indian Express and The Times of India reported more vividly about Gujarat riots but it is found to be unfortunate that only excluding Indian Express none of the English News Paper tried to publish a single editorial or edit page article on Godhra and to condemn the Muslim miscreants rather they remained engaged directly or indirectly in providing justification and falsifying the inhuman act orchestrated by orthodox communal fundamentalist of Islam. The news and Editorials of each English News papers converges and follow a patterned propaganda in proving that Godhra was are spontaneous reaction of Minority against aggressive Karsevaks who hurts the emotions and creates threat in the heart of Minority by misbehaving and raising slogans against Minority on each station. Thus simple conclusion which could be draw from the above that English Print media projected that Godhra and its fallout was due to cohesion and strong presence of Hindu Organization in Gujarat which has full support of BJP government under Modi there, under the BJP government extremism in Gujarat is no less than extremism led by Jihadies in Afghanistan and Pakistan. This was alarming for India’s unity and Integrity



even they reach to the extent of arguing that Godhra is important for BJP because it could hide its failure and can achieve its aim of producing Hindu – Muslim riots.

However one should not forget to acknowledge here that The Supreme Court of India rejected finally the plea of Zakia Jafri's allegation against Modi and 60 state official in Gujarat Riots 2002 on 24 June 2022. This was not the fresh appeal of Zakia rather it has been rejected from the very first metropolitan court of Gujarat. It is popular say that Justice delayed is Justice denied on this basis one can argue that it was the reports of English Print Media that made such narratives that kept motivated Zakia to put question over the decision of the Courts of India. This show that the verdict which Media narrated was not unethical but also could be taken as more dangerous for the one of the sole ideal of Our Indian Constitution that is unity and integrity of the country.

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