Opening of Kartarpur Corridor: A Critical Discourse Analysis that How Indo-Pak Media Projected the Corridor Initiative

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**ABSTRACT**

**Purpose:** Taking Kartarpur Corridor opening as a case study, this research paper highlights the divergent perspective prevalence across Indian and Pakistani media.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The data was taken from Indian and Pakistani newspapers and selected articles (published from 2019 to 2021) from different religious background. The research paper used critical discourse analysis to draw pertinent conclusions and proffering Pakistan specific media recommendations.

**Findings:** When it comes to informing the public about vital issues, media plays a critical role in presenting diverse viewpoints in line with its own business practices and/ or state narrative. This research revealed that Kartarpur Corridor has been referred to as a symbol of peace and stability, religious tourism, mediation and diplomatic endeavors by Pakistani media. Indian media, on the other hand, concentrated on raising concerns about security and travel modalities, pilgrimage facilities and interstate tensions. **Implications/Originality/Value:** The research has a great implication with respect to awareness of media, peace and prosperity of the public, positive coverage of media and religious tourism for the republic of India and Pakistan.

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**Introduction**

**Background of the Research**

Indian and Pakistani media (including newspapers) covered Kartarpur Corridor opening at Indo-Pak border, which significantly influenced the opinion making in academicians and common man in both the countries. With its opening announced in 2019, this initiative triggered a wide-ranging debate/discussion across both sides of the border covering apprehensions and projection in many forms, as well as flagging several concerns and raising questions. Mutual consensus on establishment of this corridor thus drew significant media attention obviating the
sensitivities involved with respective to its symbolic religious values, peace and prosperity efforts by both the sides.

Briefly discussing the historical context on establishment of the Gurdwara's is important to draw its relevance of the subject under review. Located inside Pakistani territory, actual division of Kartarpur Darbar was ignored deliberately during Radcliff Award during partition of the Indian subcontinent (Goraya, 2017). Thus, Sikh Community living in Eastern Punjab was deprived from this spiritual land owing to this unjustified decision. There are numerous differing views on why Kartarpur was awarded Pakistani side, River Ravi is although the most substantial reasoning. Situated three kilometers away from the Darbar Kartarpur Sahib, eastern side of this river was agreed as an interstate border (Akhtar, 2019). Due to this restriction, the enormous distance between Wagah and Munabao and visa related issues posed complex problems for the Sikh Community while visiting their holy shrine in Pakistan.

A number of meetings were held between the two governments to discuss the corridor's possible opening including the ones in 1998, 2004 and 2008 (Hasan, 2021). However, in August 2018, the idea of opening the Kartarpur passage for Sikh pilgrims was finally agreed and the actual groundbreaking of the initiative was subsequently held in November 2019. This announcement gained traction of the media across both sides of the border and compelled researchers to express their respective points of view throughout the following period of time. Accordingly, primary focus of this study is exploring the very nature of opposing perspective of the media which shaped the environment till the Corridor was finally inaugurated.

Problem Statement
Varying perspective have been expressed by Indian and Pakistani media about Kartarpur Corridor which symbolizes peace and prosperity. Keeping in view missing reverent discussion on the subject, competing opinions and mixed findings in the available research, this research paper aims at adding a part in literature.

Significance of Research
India-Pakistan media has adopted/ exhibited a belligerent and opposing stance on matters concerning respective national interests. This research resounds importance of analysis about competing interests of the media on matters having peculiar religious affinities concerning shared interests between these two states. Fact that existing literature on media studies inadequately represents the subject, provides a justification for a definite need to analyze perspective of the opposing media.

Research Questions
What were the opposing views of Pakistani and Indian media concerning opening of the Kartarpur Corridor?
Is there any relation of these media perspectives with respective state narratives?
How projection of Pakistani state narrative can be enhanced through better media management?

Literature Review
Overview
Media is an important tool with any state employed to shape the opinion besides crafting the state narrative. Owing to peculiar environment prevailing across both sides in Indo-Pak equation, media represents the divergent perspectives of their respective governments. Incidents like Mumbai, Pulwama and Balakot have demonstrated the degree to which media was remained involved in projecting the state narrative. Literature review focusing diverse views of scholars from different religions has been covered in ensuing paragraphs.
**Media and Indo-Pak Relations (March, 2009)**
Dr. Saqib Riaz and Saadia Anwar Pasha in Margala Papers assessed that unlike India Media, Pakistani media has traditionally played a positive role in strengthening bilateral relations between the two states (Riaz & Pasha 2009). Investigating the agenda setting of opposing media, the research encouraged incorporating media as a key stakeholder in creating a conducive environment for bilateral relations.

**Sustainability in Bilateral Relations through Common Grounds (Mar, 2020)**
Mumtaz Khan has underscored the importance of bringing shared ground between two countries for bilateral peace and prosperity through frequent media discourses. The research has proposed that for peace and sustainability process between India and Pakistan, Kartarpur corridor can serve as a common ground to develop a sustainable relationship (Khan, & Tahir 2020).

**Exploring Political and Religious Dimensions of Kartarpur Corridor (September, 2020)**
Referring thousands of Sikhs embarking on pilgrimage to Pakistan every year, Tejpal Singh Bainiwal has deliberated that conversations on government’s control/monitoring of religious sites and its political inferences have been missing in media discourse (Bainiwal, 2020). Examining Darbar Sahib through the background of 1947 partition and current developments on Kartarpur Corridor are necessary to explore its impact on relations between India and Pakistan.

**Tourism and reconciliation amidst an enduring Enmity (July, 2021)**
Salma Yousaf in her research paper has highlighted role of the Kartarpur corridor as a unique collaborative initiative between Pakistan and India (Yousaf, 2021). Role of media has regarded as instrumental to tap the potential of tourism which may force both the neighbours to look beyond the identity politics to peace projects.

**Media Approach towards the Peace – The Media (November, 2021)**
Examining the media coverage during Pulwama attack and Balakot surgical air strike, Jamal Ud Din argue that about broader perspective of peace journalism. Seeing the criticality of situations prevalent in the countries during these difficult times, the research showed how media in Indo-Pak can be employed for peace or aggression representing the bellicosity of relations (Din & Qadri 2021).

**Identification of Gaps in existing Literature**
Research on media role in creating an enabling environment has been identified as a missing link which can help India and Pakistan to move on common grounds on peace. How media can project initiatives like Kartapur Corridor is a matters of test for the researchers to explore this unique potential. Given limited focus of previous researchers in pursuing initiative of shared interest between India and Pakistan is a larger gap identified for undertaking this research project.

**Research Methodology**

**Methodology**
Critical discourse analysis was used to research the topic questioning media viewpoint which significantly impact coverage of events on sensitive issues related to religious and peace/prosperity. Analysis was done by approaching the data into two categories: Newspapers coverage and scholarly articles from writers from different religious background.

**Data Collection**
Secondary data was collected focusing print media coverage and relevant research articles published in between 2020-2022. Discourse was done on viewpoints expressed in print media and scholarly article. Critical discourse analysis was applied to find attributes of media thinking process and its implication on peace process between the two countries. Thereafter, collected data was
analyzed into two different sections including print media separating India print media (Times of India and Hindustan Times) and Pakistan print media (Dawn and The News) and research articles.

**Findings And Analysis**

**Data analysis and Results**
The research carefully analyzed perspectives conveyed by Indian and Pakistani newspapers to project opening of the Kartarpur corridor. Newspaper data on this subject was analyzed from the period July 2019 to December 2019. Moreover, viewpoints of different scholars were also highlighted after analysis research articles published from period 2019 to 2021.

**Issues highlighted in Indian News Papers**

Indian newspapers widely discussed issues like pilgrims access to the Darbar, bilateral relations, modalities on visa/ move, apprehensions on security, security and safety of pilgrimages and criticism on service charges. Apprehensions made by the Indian media about entry and movement of suspected individuals were highlighted as a predicament to broader peace efforts. Recurrent charges on pilgrims was also criticized by India media narrating in their own peculiar version style.

**Issues highlighted in Pakistani News Papers**

Aspects or issues discussed in Pakistani newspapers were mainly related with projecting this corridor opening as a unique opportunity on religious tourism. From this novel idea, Pakistani print media framed it as a distinctive opportunity for peace as the project fell under the ambit of development and harmony in the region. Indian concerns were discussed in newspapers implying that there was a need to build trust between the two countries. The corridor was also discussed as a business potential and a positive step from the development point of view. Main issues in newspapers included interstate cooperation, tourism, pilgrims’ sentiments and religious harmony.

**Analysis of Research Articles**

Similarly, the research articles conveyed perspective peculiar to cognitive biases and respective state narrative. Sikh scholars underlined media importance for Corridor opening from the prism of religious affiliation, while Indian authors expressed that media convey their apprehensions citing past incidents and other security aspects. Moreover, Pakistani researchers called for a pragmatic approach and promotion of peace and prosperity through frequent diplomatic and people to people approach.

**Context behind Opposing Media perspectives**

Issues highlighted reveal prevailing biases and tendencies in both the media. It demonstrated that Kartarpur corridor is of importance to both sides, as the subject was widely debated in media showing their respective perspective (Tere, 2014). As the Indian print media emphasized procedural problems, its readership became more concerned about project's technical aspects when negotiating with a competing adjacent state. Preference of procedural aspects in India media shows that their concerns are shaped by their interactions with Pakistani side on pervious/ historical instances. According to the issues identified from the newspapers, Indian media was found more concerned in project's completion and mechanisms than its impact on regional peace.

The Pakistani side, on the other hand, depicted an image-building through Kartarpur. The government's goal of promoting religious unity, tolerance and even religious tourism is reflected in messages broadcasted by Pakistani media. Overall, it can be concluded that media in Pakistan depicted the Kartarpur as a unique opportunity to boost religious harmony and tourism.

**Conclusions And Recommendations**

**Conclusions on Print Media**

**Linkage of Print Media Issues with State Narrative**

Conclusively, it may be ascertained from preceding arguments that print media is a major tool in
communicating information related to Kartarpur Corridor opening. Debate which initiated after announcement of this peace enterprise resulted in perception building is grounded on opposing perceptions as underlined by print media of both the countries. Based upon the results and discussion from this research, print media in Pakistan saw this initiative as a unique opportunity for revival of relations, religious tourism and harmony. While Indian print media on the other side, mainly raised concerns, and much against the symbolic value attached to this corridor. Therefore, it may be established that agenda of both Medias is reasonably opposite. Hence after analyzing these viewpoints, it becomes obvious that this difference actually manifests/ represents narratives of respective states.

**True Media representation in Bilateral Relations**

Overall the data reflects that media has followed state narrative and business schemes to present the issue of Kartarpur Initiative. Media in India linked this development with the very nature of historical relations with Pakistan and flagged more concerns about security and timely completion of this project. On the other hand, Pakistani media presented this project as a way to break the ice on stalled bilateral relations to encourage religious harmony, peace and tourism (Shaheen, 2021). Moreover, a positive development was that, both the Medias underscored a need for establishment of more of such projects in future to facilitate the people living across both side of the border.

**Conclusions from Research Articles**

**India-Pakistan Relations in Politics of Kartarpur Corridor**

Concerns on the national security dictate a diverse debate amongst policy makers across both the sides and the Kartarpur is an unusual explanation to resolve extremely contentious matters between these two neighbouring states. Notwithstanding, it demonstrated that both the states can think of developing a consensus on setting aside their differences for progress on resolution of issues concerning wider mutual interests and overall promotion of peace and prosperity in the region (Shukla, 2019).

**Kartarpur Initiative for Tourism Development**

Kartarpur Initiative represents that how foreign policy encourages peace building through religious tourism. Presenting true image of religious harmony, the religious tourism can be promoted by Media to realize its true potential (Fayaz, 2021). Development of the Kartarpur Corridor can be linked in promoting peace by promote religious freedom and harmony of all minorities.

**Recommendations**

**Exploitation of Regional and International Media**

Pakistan has limited ingress in regional and international media. It not only hampers Pakistan’s positive initiatives in projecting soft image but helps adversaries to effectively propagate their narrative without any check. Pakistan needs to effectively engage regional and international media to highlight equal rights of minorities, religious freedom and coverage of special religious occasions to project true image of Pakistan and Islam.

**Enhancing Media Outreach through Diplomatic Maneuvering**

Pakistan through its diplomatic missions should effectively engage with international diaspora to further highlight such projects in seminars and conferences. Recently established Strategic Communications Division in MoFA may take a lead role in this regard.

**Projection through Local and International Media**

PEMRA must formulate an all-inclusive plan for private media houses to promote religious tourism in Pakistan. International journalists should be invited to Pakistan to visit famous religious sites and special festivals to project them in their respective media houses. Government to allocate funds to international media houses and sponsor free lancers to project the tourism industry in Pakistan.
Conclusion
Pakistan has always shown its resolve for a sustainable peace in the region by opening Kartarpur Corridor – ushering an era of peace and relationship building. This is a distinctive step to realizing the respect for all the religions within Pakistan and beyond. Projected through constructive media coverage, projects like Kartarpur Corridor has the potential to further the relationship building between India and Pakistan. Given immense potential of media in modern day hybrid warfare environment, vigorous pursuit of Strat Communication by making media in lead, can help in true projection of Pakistani narrative on peace and property in the region.

References