Mapping Media Bias: Global Islamophobic Trends and their Reflections in South Asia

Nidaa Shahid[1]
Dr Bilal Ghazanfar[2]

Abstract

Islamophobia in the mass media is not a new phenomenon; however, this issue detonated across all media platforms following the events of 9/11. Since then, the majority of Western media outlets have continued to present a constructed stereotypical identity for all Muslims without regard to the diversity of the Muslim world, including different origins, outlooks, and aspirations. The Indian leadership perpetuates the Hindutva ideology, reflecting the same trend in South Asia. Media discourse on Islam reflects a repetitive pattern of rhetoric, all centred on the idea of Muslims as violent, primitive beings devoid of individual thoughts. This type of media coverage, focused mostly on elements of conflict and discord, is akin to war/violence journalism. In contrast, peace journalism uses insights gained from the perspective of common men and focuses on balance, fairness and accuracy. Through a discourse analysis, this paper ascertains that the prevalent Islamophobic trends in mass media at the global and South Asian levels fall under the ambit of war journalism, whereas peace journalism offers alternative means of media representation for Muslims focused on inclusion, fairness, and accuracy.

KEYWORDS: *Islamophobia, Hindutva, Media Bias, Perceptions, South Asia, War-Peace Journalism.*

Introduction

Samuel Huntington, in his seminal work "The Clash of Civilisation", had forecasted that the 21st century would be a time of deep-seated mistrust between the Muslims and the West owing to a lack of communication (Hafiz, 2000). He was right in predicting a deep-seated mistrust; however, it has not been due to a lack of communication but rather to an overwhelming abundance of available but selectively biased information. Advancements in the dissemination of media have reduced the world into a 'global village' where misinformation, disinformation and malformation are being proliferated at an unprecedented rate. The Western media has portrayed a very erroneous or one-sided image of the Muslim world, leading to a large-scale, deeply entrenched viewpoint which has only solidified in the last few decades, especially since 9/11. This deep-rooted stereotyping of the

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[1] Associate Director, Centre for Aerospace and Security Studies, Lahore. She can be reached at info@casslhr.com.
[2] Editor, Centre for Aerospace and Security Studies, Lahore editor@casslhr.com.

Muslim world has been termed as Islamophobia. Islamophobia is "an aversion or hostility to, disdain for, or fear of Islam or Muslims" (Islamophobia, 2025).

However, this is just a surface-level definition, as the issue is much more complex. Islamophobia encompasses decades-long systemic stigmatisation of a whole community who share religious values but hail from different countries and cultures with varied values and belief systems. Islamophobia, as a term, gained traction after the events of 9/11; however, the term itself was coined in 1918 by two French researchers who had converted to Islam. By their definition, "Islamophobia was a political effort by the colonial powers to undermine Islam" (Dinet & Ibrahim, 1918). The term gained prominence in the 1990s following the publication of a report by the Runnymede Trust, a British think tank, which characterised Islamophobia as referring to unwarranted animosity directed towards Islam (Conway, 1997). Since then, numerous scholars have endeavoured to define and elucidate the notion of Islamophobia. Nonetheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that each definition is limited by the author's viewpoint, which restricts its overall applicability. Moreover, the contemporary landscape further complicates this matter due to the interplay of various domains, wherein different facets intersect and mutually influence one another.

Most of the definitions pertaining to Islamophobia today make it a point to refer to the role played by the media in perpetuating this notion. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has identified that "Islamophobia is a combination of hate, fear, and prejudice against Islam and against Muslims, as well as against anything associated with the religion, such as mosques, Islamic centres, the Holy Qur'an, hijabs, etc. It also constitutes hatred, stigmatisation, racism and discrimination in daily life, in the media, at the workplace, in the political sphere, etc" (OIC, n.d.). Therefore, as the scope of the definition of Islamophobia broadened, so did the methods of its global dissemination. One of the major sources today is mass media. Akin to this global bias, similar prejudices exist in South Asia through movements similar to Islamophobia, like the Indian-perpetuated ideology of Hindutva, which advocates for Hindu supremacy. However, it does so by subjugating the Muslims of India, who form around 15 per cent of the Indian population as per the 2021 census (Top 25 Countries, 2024).

The one-sided and biased representation of Muslims at the global and regional levels has had notable impacts and contributes to the marginalisation of the Muslim community by fostering an atmosphere characterised by distrust, apprehension, and hatred. Consequently, this has provoked instances of bias, mistreatment, and, in extreme instances, violence. Much of the existing scholarship on the role of media in managing perceptions focuses on the consequences of negative media portrayals. However, this study explores the root causes of these biased narratives through the lens of war journalism, which is a zero-sum-orientated point of view, where one side clearly emerges as the winning party. This paradigm is focused on the opinions of the elite and aptly explains the current role of media in stereotyping Muslims at the global and regional levels.

There is a need to bring about a shift in this status quo. Hence, acknowledging the pressing necessity for transformation, it becomes crucial to look at alternative avenues for countering these Islamophobic trends through principles of equity, equality, and accuracy. One promising approach in this context is that of peace journalism, which challenges the conventional norms of media discourse and strives to offer a more nuanced and

comprehensive understanding of people, countries and the world at large. This paradigm accentuates the viewpoints of common men, rather than focusing on the views of the elites alone. The rise of digital and social media offers a potential alternative avenue, as these platforms allow the voices of the common men to reach relevant quarters, quite unlike traditional media, which only allows for the views of the elites. This paper attempts to answer the question of whether an alternative media discourse can be used to dispel the prevalent malevolence against Muslims, particularly in the context of Islamophobia and traditional media discourse. To this end, a critical analysis of media discourse has been carried out in the subsequent section to shed light on the adverse effects of Islamophobic prejudice and sensationalised portrayals of news related to Muslims. The study also looks at how the application of the war journalism paradigm has exacerbated this issue and whether peace journalism, especially through digital media platforms, can be considered a means to counter these prevalent biased norms.

MEDIA BIAS AND ISLAMOPHOBIA – A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Early narratives pertaining to Islam, especially in the western sphere, depicted Muslims as the alien force incompatible with the western cultural values. Interestingly, the same notion is now being used in India, under the Hindutva ideology, to separate the two religious' ideologies. Following the events of 9/11, amid globalisation, the spread of information became more rapid and prone to sensationalisation. The globalisation of these media platforms in the current age means that Islamophobic content is now both localised and global, seamlessly reaching millions with ease. The media's bias towards perpetuating Islamophobic trends at the global as well as regional levels can be best understood through a discourse analysis of prevalent trends.

➢ ISLAMOPHOBIA IN THE WESTERN DISCOURSE

Several scholars have analysed media trends and their impact on the psyche of the viewers or readers since the 1980s, when television first became more mainstream in common households, especially in Western capitals. One such study conducted by Jack Shaheen in 1984 revealed that American television perpetuated negative stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims even before 9/11 (Jack Shaheen, 2017). His study, focused on television trends, revealed that American TV regularly propagated four myths about Muslims and Arabs:

- They are all fabulously wealthy
- They are barbaric and uncultured
- They are sex maniacs with a penchant for white slavery
- They revel in acts of terrorism (Jack Shaheen, 2017).

This belief system feeds into the paradigm of elite views and propaganda-orientated journalism while perpetuating the 'us-vs-them' mindset. Following the events of 9/11, the media discourse in the West exploded with anti-Muslim Islamophobic content. For context, one study examined the discourse on Muslims and Islam in two time periods: from 1901 to 2000 and from 2001 to 2020 (Sufi & Yasmin, 2022). The study looked at research articles from the databases of four major publishers: Taylor & Francis, Sage Publications, Pluto

Journals, and ScienceDirect (Sufi & Yasmin, 2022). The findings revealed that the 100-year time period pre-2001 had 43 articles which showed a negative portrayal of Muslims and Islam, whereas the post-2001 three-decade period had over 7,500 articles focused on Muslims and the Islamic ideology with underpinnings of Islamophobia (Sufi & Yasmin, 2022).

The data demonstrates a significant shift in the discourse following the events of 9/11, which feeds into the hatred and discriminatory approach towards Muslims. Another study, investigating the representation of Muslims and Islam in the British press from 1998 to 2009, revealed the presence of both explicit Islamophobic representations as well as what seems to be a subtler, implicit and ambivalent picture, which indirectly contributes to negative stereotypes (Baker, Gabrielatos, & McEnery, 2013). Western mass media also has a great tendency to characterise Islam as a fanatic and violent religion, cutting off hands, repressing women, and representing a clear antagonism towards Western ideas of freedom, human rights, and democracy (Hafez, 2010). The negative portrayal of Muslims and Islam in media has also led to a marked increase in anti-Muslim hate crimes and discrimination in the US. A 2020 report by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) highlights those 214 incidents of anti-Muslim bias, including harassment and assault, took place in 2020 (Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR, 2021). Between 2014 and 2019, over 10,000 incidents of anti-Muslim bias occurred in the US alone (Anti-Muslim Bias Incidents, 2021). The report also reveals that the negative portrayals of Muslims and Islam in the media had a direct impact on these incidents, with the majority of perpetrators citing media portrayals as a reason for their actions (Anti-Muslim Bias Incidents, 2021). Research has also shown that the negative portrayal of Muslims and Islam has effects that go beyond hate crimes and discrimination. Negative media portrayals have led to a decline in support for multiculturalism and an increase in support for restrictive immigration policies in Australia as well (Akbarzadeh et al., 2010). This highlights how media portrayal of Islam can have broader implications for society beyond just individual attitudes towards Muslims.

> ### REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON ISLAMOPHOBIA

Islamophobia wears the guise of Hindutva in the South Asian region, whereby the Indian socio-political landscape has been significantly reshaped by this ideology based on Hindu nationalism. Hindutva leaders, particularly those of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), under the aegis of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), have been portraying Muslims not only as religious 'others' but also as national security threats. This narrative permeates the Indian psyche owing to the State's policies towards Muslims as well as the coverage broadcast through different media sources. Quite like Western Islamophobia, which is rooted in the notion of 'othering' the Muslims, the Islamophobia rooted in Hindutva ideology also operates on treating the Muslims of India as the other entity despite centuries of shared history and citizenship. This is amplified through media sensationalisation and fear-mongering. There has been a surge in recent years, especially in media sources sympathetic to the Hindutva ideology, towards portraying Muslims as the antagonists in a cultural war. Debates over attire, facial hair, diet and even the location of a mosque have been used as examples of Muslims trying to overturn the supposedly Hindu cultural values of the Indian society. (Babur & Akhtar, 2018) The Nehruvian ideology

rooted in secularism and shared cultural identity is a thing of the past in the current Indian religious landscape (Srivastava, 2022).

This type of negative media coverage relies heavily on the 'us-vs-them' framework, which stigmatises the Muslim communities and reinforces the Hindutva narrative that the very presence of Muslims in India is an abhorration to what constitutes an Indian identity. Hindutva focuses not only on the subjugation of the Muslims but also on showcasing the Hindus as the superior race. According to a study published by the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, use of discriminatory words and phrases, not only by the Indian leadership but also by the media sources, adds to the 'otherisation' of the Muslims (Babar, 2023). This study posits that the Modi government, since coming into power, has established a nexus of power by side-lining the decades-old secular policies of the Indian government for a more Hindu nationalist discourse where violence against minorities, especially Muslims, is not only tolerated but accepted. The media has played a vital role in the spread of such violence.

A discourse analysis of 35 different instances, which include speeches, podcasts, and media appearances by the current Indian Prime Minister Modi, reveals that he has perpetuated the notions of Islamophobia under the guise of Hindutva ideology repeatedly throughout his tenure as the PM (Waikar, 2018). While the Islamophobia employed by the Prime Minister is subtle, it nevertheless incites feelings of violence against the Muslims in the general population who may want to align their actions with the views of the leadership.

Repetition of similar views across different media platforms allows zealots with biased opinions against Muslims to carry out untold atrocities in the name of religious purification without any fear of the consequences, since they see the leadership being in favour of their actions. Another study focused on Hindu nationalism and the role of gurus and media and has identified that across different time frames, the spread of Islamophobia in India has been carried out through different media platforms. The study suggests that media portrays 'Gurus' or so-called religious scholars with divine powers, as the symbols of Hindu nationalism, perpetuating an exclusivist narrative that elevates the Hindu identity while subjugating the Muslims and other minorities (Copeman, Duggal, & Longkumer, 2023).

The study cites a particular example of a prominent Hindu guru named Baba Ramdev, who has a substantial following across different media platforms. The Indian media depicts him as not only a spiritual leader but also as a defender of Hindu cultural identity, stemming from his vocal opposition to Muslims and encouragement of violence against minorities as a form of Hindu nationalism. This showcases how gurus are positioned in the media as moral authorities of Hindutva, while in actuality, they are essentially purveying an Islamophobic ideology. This also aptly demonstrates how print and audio/visual media, such as cassettes, TV and social media, have significantly contributed to the ideological reproduction of Hindu nationalism and the ability of Hindutva organisations to mobilise middle-class consumers (Copeman, Duggal, & Longkumer, 2023). According to another study, conducted by the Washington Post, Hindu nationalist groups are now also leveraging mainstream as well as digital spaces to promote their ideologies, which include inflammatory narratives against Muslims. Instances of hate speech, instigated through these media platforms, are especially prevalent in states that are

governed by the BJP, including Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. (Shih, 2023) Such incidents have real-world repercussions, as they exacerbate the marginalisation of the Muslim communities, leading to discrimination and violence. This is also reflective of the broader pattern of media bias against Muslims, whether under the ambit of Islamophobia or Hindutva, where different media platforms serve as the primary vehicles for spreading the bias.

The implications of this ideological media framing extend beyond the Indian borders, especially into Pakistan, a Muslim-majority country as well as a historic rival of India. As a key figure in South Asian geopolitics, Pakistan often gets swept into these narratives, especially under the umbrella of terrorism and extremism. Such representation not only disregards Pakistan's own struggles with terrorism but also serves the Indian purpose of devaluing the Pakistani narrative internationally. This is especially important keeping in mind the notion of war journalism as a way to perpetuate one's own views while discrediting others. Within this context, media narratives do not reflect religious bias alone; they also contribute to shaping the foreign policy discourse, thus leading to institutional consequences. Thus, the media plays a critical role in ensuring that the ideological goals of any particular state or group of states are the dominant narrative, especially when it comes to Islamophobia.

Understanding the Media Bias Through the Lens of War and Peace Journalism

A framework that aims to put this prevalent Islamophobic media discourse into perspective is essential to understand what the adverse impacts of this portrayal are and how this impacts the greater Muslim community. Framing theory, rooted in the theoretical foundations of media studies, posits that media plays a significant role in shaping individuals' perception of the world by influencing what they perceive as relevant and how they interpret events and individuals within their surroundings (Druckman, 2011). The concept of framing is based on the idea that the portrayal of an issue in news articles influences how viewers interpret it. In this same context, the War and Peace Journalism framework, coined by Johan Galtung in 1997, is a relevant frame to understand the issue of Islamophobia in the media from a theoretical perspective. Galtung, a Norwegian sociologist, is best known as the founder of the discipline of Peace and Conflict Studies; however, he also developed two opposing modes of reporting wars, namely, "Peace Journalism" and "War or Violence Journalism". These frames have since been expanded and adapted to understand different media discourses, including the portrayal of different religions, political opinions, ideologies and interstate rivalries. The same framework theoretically explains how Islamophobia is portrayed in the media at the global and regional levels.

Galtung classified war and peace journalism in four broad linguistic and practical classifications (Table 1). According to him, war journalism is orientated towards war/violence, propaganda, elite points of view, and victory. It is zero-sum -orientated, with one side clearly emerging as the winning party. On the other hand, peace journalism seeks to minimise the rift between opposing parties by choosing to omit facts that demonise one side and set the stage for further conflict. Peace journalism challenges the conventions of

typical media reporting by shifting the focus from insights provided solely by the elite, as seen in traditional media, to contextualising the conflict narrative through the perspective of the common man, particularly via digital and social media platforms.

WAR JOURNALISM	PEACE JOURNALISM
War Oriented Focuses on conflict areas, us-them, dehumanisation of them, reactive reporting	Peace Oriented Exploration of the conflict, humanisation of all sides, proactive reporting
Propaganda Oriented Exposing the other side covering up own	Truth Oriented Telling the truth with no preconceived biases
Elite Oriented Focus on the voices of the elites	People Oriented Focus on the voices of the common men
Victory Oriented Zero-sum game. Only one side emerges as the victor	Solution Oriented Focused on finding solutions to existing problems for all sides

Table 1: War and Peace Journalism Classifications

Galtung's framework offers deep insights into how media coverage can escalate or de-escalate an issue. This is observable in the way media has purported Islamophobia in the Western and South Asian spheres as well as through the media reporting of various conflicts involving the Muslim world, including the wars in Iraq, Palestine, Syria and Afghanistan. During the Iraq War, Western media outlets, including CNN and Fox News, focused primarily on showcasing the military victories of the coalition forces, side-lining the civilian or common-man perspective (Sahlane, 2022). This elite-driven, zero-sum reporting concentrates on the achievement of victory for the Western forces and defeat for Iraq's regime, leaving very little space for the viewpoint of the local communities of Iraq about the long-term impacts of the coalition forces' actions. This, in turn, reduced the human value of the Iraqi people and reduced them to numbers in the overall war reporting machinery.

In a similar vein, the latest victim of Western media's application of war journalism is Gaza, with the media publishing unsubstantiated claims and narrating a thoroughly one-sided viewpoint. News reports portraying Palestinians as 'nothing more than objects in Hamas's hands' (Nashed, 2023) are perpetuating the viewpoint of the elites only, which falls under the ambit of war journalism. Western media outlets have frequently framed Palestinians as aggressors or terrorists while downplaying the role of Israeli forces in the ongoing conflict (Albast & Knarr, 2023). This binary framing contributes to a narrow understanding of the conflict and reinforces stereotypes associated with Muslims and Arabs as a violent group. Peace journalism, on the other hand, allows for the point of view of the people to come forward and can change the perceptions regarding a particular people or conflict. Adoption of either war or peace journalism, as described by Galtung, can have an impact on shaping public perceptions of the conflict as well as the involved parties.

PEACE JOURNALISM AS A COUNTER-RESPONSE

The interweaving of media biases, ideology and politics aptly illustrates its profound influence on how a particular group of people is viewed by the majority, in this case Muslims. In order to address this complex entanglement, there is a need to formulate

narratives which transcend the narrow confines of any particular belief system and selective ideologies. Media, as the fifth pillar of state, has a very important role to play in this regard. Within this context, Peace Journalism, which highlights the views of the common men, offers an essential counterbalance, inviting media practitioners to consider not only the dominant perspectives but also those of the Muslims as a means to advocate for peaceful co-existence. At the global level, the Islamophobic bias has become so prevalent in traditional media sources that finding an alternative becomes not only difficult but, in some cases, almost impossible. In this scenario, opposition of the dominant viewpoint is unlikely to gain any traction. Therefore, alternative ways of approaching the issue are essential to try and mitigate decades of harmful stereotyping.

> ### Highlighting Muslim Diversity and Avoiding Stereotypes

Muslims hail from many different cultures, regions, and ethnic groups with vastly different ideologies. The media tends to portray Muslims as a monolithic homogenous entity, devoid of individual thought. Media also unfairly portrays entire Muslim communities as violent, fanatical, or regressive owing to the acts of a few, thus perpetuating negative stereotypes. Instead, it is crucial for the media to actively strive for a portrayal of Muslims that is unbiased, equitable, and reflective of the genuine range of their experiences and viewpoints. This effort falls under the ambit of peace journalism. There have been a few instances in the past when some media sources have offered alternative perspectives that seek to highlight the diversity of the Muslim community while striving to avoid stereotyping. For example, in the aftermath of the 2015 attacks in Paris, the mainstream media peddled the views of the elites and generalised the Muslims as a monolithic group jointly responsible for the actions of a few fanatics. This resulted in racial profiling and subjugation of all people of the Islamic faith in not only the country but also greater Europe (FRA, 2015). Within this context, the Guardian UK chose to take a different approach, whereby they highlighted how the Muslim Imams across the continent not only condemned the attacks but also emphasised the basic tenets of Islam, the greatest of which was peaceful coexistence (Shaw, Lynch, & Hackett, 2012). The Guardians' approach also focused on the narrative of the individuals and the diverse lived experiences of the Muslim communities, showcasing how Muslims are varied in their beliefs and thinking. This is a clear example of peace journalism, where the aim was to highlight the plight of the people rather than the elites.

> ### Contextualising Conflicts

Instead of exclusively fixating on the acts of violence and conflict transpiring in nations with a Muslim majority, peace journalism offers the opportunity for more intricate and comprehensive coverage. This entails placing these conflicts within their historical, political, and social frameworks to provide a more profound understanding. By delving into the underlying causes and shedding light on the perspectives of various stakeholders, the media can offer a more nuanced portrayal of the situation. One example where peace journalism has been used to contextualise the issue is that of post-conflict Guatemala in the early 2000s (Shaw, Lynch, & Hackett, 2012). During this time, the mainstream media focused on peddling an oligarchic perspective which focused on the opinions of the elite.

On the other hand, the local and alternative media sources, like radio stations, were instrumental in promoting a narrative which called for peace-building and resolution of the conflict through dialogue. This allowed the voices of the masses to reach the leadership, thus impacting the dominant narrative and bringing about a change for the country at the grassroots level.

➢ **Digital Media for the Endorsement of Peace Journalism**

Within the framework of peace journalism, digital media sources have become instrumental in propagating narratives which focus on conflict resolution, views of the common man, empathy and mutual understanding. Unlike war journalism through traditional media sources, which thrives on advocating for the elites and sensationalism, digital media allows for the dissemination of nuanced, solution-orientated narratives. It also allows the views of the people to reach directly to the policymakers without the need for middlemen, such as local officeholders, thus reducing the red tape and allowing greater access. The most compelling recent example which showcases how digital platforms can be a useful tool to offer an alternative perspective is that of the Israel-Palestine conflict when it began in Oct 2023. While mainstream media sources like CNN, BBC, etc. aligned with the narratives of the aggressor, aka Israel, social media platforms, particularly Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok, allowed the people on the ground to not only document their everyday plights but also offer an alternative point of view (Khamis & Dogbatse, 2024).

During the course of this conflict, social media platforms became digital diaries where the civilians were able to document the destruction of their homes and the subsequent displacement while also sharing stories of anguish, resilience and aspiration. By allowing the voice of the people on the ground to be heard across the globe through the presentation of lived experiences, these platforms supported the key tenets of peace journalism, namely the people's perspective forgoing the 'us-vs-them' binary. Social media as a conduit for peace-oriented narratives also allowed the people to bypass the traditional gatekeepers of the discourse, allowing a greater variety of voices to be heard throughout the world. Viral posts, journalism by the people including social media influencers and live streams of the atrocities allowed unprecedented visibility. Thus, digital platforms open up new avenues whereby people can highlight their plights, in their own words, without needing access to traditional media sources. This approach is also in line with the tenets of peace journalism.

Challenging Hindutva Narratives Through Peace Journalism in South Asia: A Path Forward

Unlike the efforts to counter Islamophobia at the global level, the employment of the peace journalism paradigm in South Asia requires different handling due to the ideological nature of Hindutva policies. The Islamophobia here is subtler and guised under the ambit of Hindu nationalism. In this regard, the following alternatives offer some potential means of combating this issue.

➢ **Amplifying the Voices of Marginalised Groups**

Hindutva policies are not discriminatory against Muslims alone; they also marginalise other minority communities. To counter the prevalent Hindutva narratives in the media, there is a need to amplify the voices of all marginalised groups and highlight their plights. This inclusive coverage would not only humanise but also showcase them as active contributors to the society. By focusing on common social factors, such as economics, education, healthcare and climate change, peace journalism offers constructive ways to counter the divisive voices of the elite alone, as these factors impact the general masses more. This shift in focus encourages collective actions, illustrating that all communities face similar issues and can work together for a better future. Such efforts can also include cross-community initiatives. Media can play a critical role by focusing on the unifying elements rather than the divisive ones.

➢ **Highlighting Inter-Faith Harmony**

There have been many examples where communities from both faiths have come together or collaborated to promote unity amid diversity. It includes peacebuilding initiatives, interfaith dialogues, shared cultural practices, etc. Conducting more of such activities and highlighting them through different media platforms would serve as a powerful message of unity to counteract the divisiveness of Hindutva and Islamophobic tendencies.

➢ **Countering Hindutva-Driven Media Practices**

A large majority of the Indian media is in league with the ruling elites who want to posit a more Hindutva-centric ideology with underpinnings of Islamophobia. However, there still are journalists and media personnel who can be expected to take a more nuanced stance. Keeping that in mind, one way to counter negative media portrayals is to incentivise these neutral voices to take a more proactive stance against Hindutva narratives. By bringing national, regional, and international attention to the harm being done to Muslims in the name of religious nationalism, the media can help cultivate public awareness and accountability. In this same vein, independent media, as well as digital content creators, who are already using their platforms to highlight these issues, must be supported by external actors as a means to strengthen such neutral voices in India.

➢ **Challenging the 'Othering' Narrative**

The "othering" of the minority communities, especially Muslims residing in India, is one of the leading reasons for the spread of anti-Muslim biases under the ambit of the Hindutva narrative. One of the major causes is the separation of the types of Muslims into good and undesirable categories dependent upon the whims of the majority. For example, Muslims who bring in higher revenues and returns for the country, for example movie stars, musicians and businessmen, etc., are more acceptable than the ordinary Muslim community, who have to face untold atrocities daily at the hands of the Hindutva extremists. Using the lens of peace journalism, media can become an active conduit for dismantling this divisive perspective.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the media wields significant influence in shaping public perceptions, especially when it comes to Muslims. The prevalent Islamophobic biases in media at the global and regional levels not only reflect but also actively shape points of view, creating tangible consequences for Muslim communities all across the globe. John Gultang's war journalism paradigm offers a clear understanding of how the media, in all its iterations, has disseminated narratives of exclusion, division and fear with regard to the Muslims, thus producing a monolithic image which only fuels antagonism and marginalisation. By taking this approach, the media bias has effectively silenced the plurality within the Muslim community, reducing their social, political, societal and cultural standing. The war journalism paradigm has also fostered an 'us-vs-them' mind-set which leads to violence, crime and far-right populism. The implications of this media bias extend far beyond the confines of any one state or group owing to the globalised and digital nature of modern media outlets. In the South Asian context, the prevalent Islamophobic tendencies have taken a more ideological contextualisation under the ideology of Hindutva.

Under the aegis of Hindutva ideology, India not only marginalises Muslims and other minorities but also seeks to redefine Indian identity as inherently Hindu, thereby excluding those who do not fit this definition. Indian media has been a complicit partner in this endeavour, reinforcing this narrative through active coverage that supports the Muslims as foreigner's incompatible with the Indian culture and societal values. In some extreme cases, they have gone beyond society and termed Muslims as a threat to national security. Such coverage not only deepens the religious, cultural and societal divides within India but also impacts the other Muslim-majority regional powers, especially Pakistan.

As a viable counter-strategy, peace journalism, focused on showcasing the voices of all rather than just the elites, allows for more inclusive media reporting. It delves into the root causes of the conflict and highlights the voices of the ordinary people, in this case Muslims. Adopting this framework allows media across different domains to contextualise the Muslim struggles within their historical, political, economic, and social contexts, thus fostering a more informed and empathetic understanding amongst the masses. By reorienting the focus towards shared human experiences, rather than keeping different communities marginalised, peace journalism can serve as a powerful tool in challenging the prevalent media biases. In today's era, where media swiftly transcends boundaries to reach millions, a dedication to accurate, inclusive, and human-oriented journalism would pave the way for a more harmonious world.

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