

ISLAMOPHOBIA, INDIAN MEDIA, AND COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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DOI : http://dx.doi.org/10.30983/islam_realitas.v8i1.5352

Submission: 23 February 2022

Revised: 23 June 2022

Published: 30 June 2022

Abstract

This research is designed to demonstrate (1) how the Indian media attempts to construct the Islamophobia issue during the Covid-19 pandemic (particularly in the earlier March–April, 2020) and (2) how the Indian news media use social media, such as Instagram and Twitter, to claim that Muslims were the disseminators of the virus to the majority of Indian population. In collecting and analyzing data, the researchers use the descriptive qualitative methodology as the scientific research procedure. There are three collected data classified in this research i.e., the primary data, the secondary data, and the supporting data. Furthermore, in analyzing the data, the researchers applied the critical discourse analysis (CDA) as the linguistics theory to study the Islamophobia discourse on the news media. Finally, the research result shows that (1) most of the Indian mainstream media not only spread Islamophobia but also justify and hegemonize Muslims as Corona virus disseminators, and (2) these news media eventually influenced hate speech memes and racial statements posted by Indian netizens/Buzzers on social media that accuse Muslim minority as the disseminator of the Corona virus.

Keywords: Islamophobia; Critical Discourse Analysis Theory; Corona Virus; Indian Media

Abstrak

Penelitian ini dirancang untuk menunjukkan (1) bagaimana upaya media India dalam mengkonstruksi wacana Islamofobia kepada warga sipil selama pandemi Covid 19 (khususnya pada awal Maret-April 2020) dan (2) bagaimana berita media India memiliki berimplikasi pada penggunaan media sosial seperti Instagram dan Twitter, yang mengklaim minoritas Muslim sebagai penyebar virus Corona terhadap mayoritas penduduk India. Untuk mengumpulkan dan menganalisis data penelitian, peneliti menggunakan metodologi deskriptif kualitatif sebagai prosedur penelitian ilmiah. Data yang terkumpul diklasifikasikan menjadi tiga data yaitu data primer, data sekunder, dan data pendukung. Selanjutnya, dalam menganalisis data, peneliti menerapkan analisis wacana kritis (CDA) sebagai teori linguistik untuk memahami dan mempelajari wacana Islamofobia berdasarkan berita media. Akhirnya, hasil penelitian menunjukkan fakta yang sebenarnya bahwa (1) sebagian besar media utama India tidak hanya mengkonstruksi wacana Islamofobia namun juga membenarkan dan menghegemoni bahwa masyarakat muslim merupakan penyebar virus Corona (2) berita media ini pada akhirnya berimplikasi pada meme ujaran kebencian dan pernyataan rasial yang diposting oleh netizen/Buzzers India di media sosial yang menuduh minoritas Muslim sebagai penyebar virus Corona.

Kata Kunci: Islamofobia; Analisis Wacana Kritis; Virus Korona; Media Indian

Background

In nowadays, the news media holds a crucial role in educating and entertaining society. Media, moreover, is frequently perceived as the social control instrument that could oversee both the political and economic

policy for the civilian. In many countries, the news media is often supported legally in spreading the news even though it criticizes the government policy. The media is a branch of democracy that exists outside of the legislative,

executive, and judiciary branches of government¹. It means the media has legal rights and responsibility to inform and increase the readers critical awareness.

On the other side, the benefits of the existing media is that they involve people (the news readers) to share their opinions and knowledge in the form of the literary work (short story), articles, and essays of social issues in the particular country. The news readers could be the informants or the news writers as well. Therefore, the function of media is not only to inform people about the news information; it provides the opportunity for society to voice their own opinion.

However, the media sometimes is hampered in doing their professional journalism due to the political interest of the ideology of the dominant class. The media worker or reporters cannot undertake their professional jobs as a journalist because the funder of the media's company, in some cases, are capitalists who are affiliated with the government². This issue can be seen as Analyzed by Anggoro as follow:

*"Produksi berita berhubungan dengan bagaimana rutinitas terjadi dalam ruang pemberitaan, yang menentukan bagaimana wartawan didikte/dikontrol untuk memberitakan peristiwa dalam perspektif tertentu. Selain praktik organisasi dan ideologi profesional tersebut, ada satu aspek lain yang sangat penting yang berhubungan dengan bagaimana peristiwa ditempatkan dalam keseluruhan produksi teks, yakni bagaimana berita itu bisa bermakna dan berarti bagi khalayak"*³

From the Anggoro statement above, it can be seen that media is seen as a political tool for the dominant class's ideology i.e., capitalist

interest. The last sentence of Anggoro's statement above clarify that only media can frame which situation (based on the news media) is valuable for public.

Therefore, if the news media desires to elucidate the actual fact that occurs in a particular case, then it has to ensure that the discourse written in the news is in line with the capitalist or the political interest of particular social group. Laksono situates this issue as follow:

*"Media massa seharusnya tidak boleh didominasi oleh sekelompok kepentingan yang mengontrol. Namun pada akhirnya demi kepentingan bisnis dan politis terjadi praktik konglomerasi media yang dikuasai oleh para oligarki media. Kepemilikan beberapa media yang terkonsentrasi pada satu elite tertentu, dan membentuk oligarki media dapat dijadikan alat politik oleh para elit politik untuk mencapai ambisinya"*⁴

In contrast, if the dominant class or capitalist would like to demonstrate their social branding and campaign their political interest to public, then the media will easily advertise it⁵.

In the Indonesian media context, for example, there are media used for campaigning the politician's political program. These media are used as political propaganda especially when the Indonesian presidential election is conducted. In 2014, there were two that represented a particular candidate, namely *TV One* and *Metro TV*.

Anggoro argued that at that time *Metro TV* tended to stand for the presidential candidate namely Joko Widodo (Jokowi) and Jusuf Kalla. On the other hand, the other candidate, namely Prabowo Subianto and his partner, Hatta Rajasa, gained the political support of *TV One*⁶.

¹ Susilawati Belekubun, Andi Alimuddin Unde, and Hafied Cangara, 'Opini Tokoh Partai Politik Terhadap Keberpikahan TV One dan Metro TV Dalam Pilpres 2014 di Sulawesi Selatan', *Jurnal Komunikasi KAREBA*, 4.2 (2015), 88–100 <<https://doi.org/10.31947/kjik.v4i2.614>>.

² Ayub Dwi Anggoro, 'Media, Politik dan Kekuasaan', *Jurnal Aristo*, 2.2 (2014), 25–52.

³ Anggoro.

⁴ Puji Laksono, 'Kuasa Media dalam Komunikasi Massa', *Jurnal Al-Tsiqob (Dakwah dan Ekonomi)*, 4.2 (2019), 49–61 (pp. 60–61) <<http://e-journal.ikhac.ac.id/index.php/altsiq/article/download/610/428>>.

⁵ Anggoro.

⁶ Anggoro.

The above Indonesian media context is an example of what routinely happens in the news media landscape in many countries. The media as one of the democratic branches is sometimes powerless, particularly for the mainstream media who are funded by the capitalist and dominant class⁷. This case indicates that the media sometimes becomes the political propaganda instrument for achieving the government or capitalist's goal.

Recently, media has become a tool of political propaganda in defending and amplifying the government's voice. This phenomenon could be perceived in the Indian media especially in the earlier phase of the Covid-19 pandemic. Even though the news media broadcast the government's voice, but in this context, the media implement their role as an informant to report the critical situation about Covid-19 to society.

As cited by many media in some countries, the World Health Organization (WHO) claims that the level of the contagiousness of the Corona virus is extremely massive. Therefore, the governments in all countries play a crucial role in protecting their citizens.

Policies taken by the government in defending their people from the Corona virus are social/physical distancing and lockdown. Fundamentally, the social distancing policy is an effort to stop the spread of the virus⁸.

According to Musinguzi and Asamoah, social and physical distancing play a crucial role. It can gradually reduce the spread of the Corona virus because people are asked to stay at home. On the other side, lockdown policy is an effort to restrict travel by shutting down railways, flights, and public transportation⁹.

In India and most countries around the world also apply both lockdown and social distancing policy to stop the outbreak of Covid-19¹⁰. However, in many cases, as portrayed through social media, the Indian mainstream media, and even the international media, the way Indian government stop the outbreak of Covid-19 is by mobilizing policemen to repress the citizen (physically) who are in social interaction during the Corona pandemic¹¹.

*"Both Indian and international media have recorded the beatings, torture and humiliation India's impoverished masses have had to endure at the hands of the police for contravening lockdown regulations"*¹²

The unfortunate point, in this case, is that the Indian media justified the repression of the policemen that torture people, particularly for the minority classes. Most of the Indian mainstream media attempt to disfigure the public especially those from the minority classes of Indian population, such as the Muslim community who attempted to go out from their house for doing activities¹³. As a minority, the

⁷ According to Bourdieu dominant class could be meant government, capitalist, or particular group of people who have power to hegemonize and to control the productive tool in economic and politic sector. Pierre Bourdieu, *Dominasi Maskulin*, ed. by Dwi Margo Yuwono & Sista Pavitrasari, 1st edn (Yogyakarta: Percetakan Jalasutra, 2010).

⁸ Geoffrey Musinguzi and Benedict Oppong Asamoah, 'The Science of Social Distancing and Total Lock Down: Does It Work? Whom Does It Benefit?', *Electronic Journal of General Medicine*, 17.6 (2020), 17–19 <<https://doi.org/10.29333/ejgm/7895>>.

⁹ Hien Lau and others, 'The Positive Impact of Lockdown in Wuhan on Containing the COVID-19 Outbreak in China', *Journal of Travel Medicine*, March, 2020, 1–7 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/jtm/taaa037>>.

¹⁰ Mahaveer Golechha, 'COVID-19, India, Lockdown and Psychosocial Challenges: What Next?', *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 66.8 (2020), 830–32 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0020764020935922>>.

¹¹ Chandana Mathur, 'COVID-19 and India's Trail of Tears', *Dialectical Anthropology*, 44.1 (2020), 239–42 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-020-09611-4>>.

¹² Mathur.

¹³ Asad Islam and others, 'Stigma and Misconceptions in the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Field Experiment in India', *Social Science & Medicine*, 278, January (2021), 10 <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.113966>>.

Muslim community is often blamed as the distributor of the Corona virus.

They were frequently associated as a group of people who increase the spread of Corona virus due to their religious activities. Moreover, long before the India government enacted the lockdown policy as a way to stop the spread of the disease, the Muslim community has been accustomed to torture and discrimination in the Indian news media¹⁴. Based on several Indian media, the discourse of Muslim group has had a negative stigma and bad image in Indian civil society. This is a case of systemic Islamophobia due to the discriminative policies of the government toward the Muslim community. The term Islamophobia is the object of the researchers' analysis.

In this research, the researchers are utilizing the qualitative research methodology in approaching and collecting the data related to Islamophobia in India. The primary data are sourced from two sources, i.e., the Indian media and some social media accounts possessed by Indian netizens. For the former source, the data are collected from three Indian news (i.e., 1. Timesofindia.indiatimes.com, The Times of India, 2. Sabrangindia.in, and 3. Theprint.in.) which spread Islamophobia during the Corona virus. These media often broadcast the government's voice or interest when handling the outbreak of Covid-19. That is why, the researchers use these media as the research object. For the secondary source, the data are collected through some social media accounts, such as from Instagram and Twitter (i.e., Truly Secular, Govindhindu56, Lucknow.up32, tfipost.com and missindian) that demonstrates

how Indian buzzers perpetuated the Islamophobia narration by making memes and racial statements addressed to the Muslim community. The latter source indicates how the Islamophobia issue narrated by Indian news media has had an influence in society. In analyzing the data collected, the researchers used CDA to analyze the relation between power, news media text, and social context in India.

The Islamophobia Cases Occurred in India

According to the Runnymede Trust report¹⁵, the term of "Islamophobia" emerged approximately at the end 1980s. At that time, the Islamophobia was used to describe the fear of the Muslim community. The term also is defined as a form of anti-Muslimism because the hatred is not against Islam as a religious ideology, but is directed against Muslims as citizens particularly for the minority class who does not have socio-cultural or economic power¹⁶.

Islamophobia have been occurring in many places. One of those places is India. The hatred towards the Indian Muslim does not only involve an attack against the community as a minority, because they have been discriminated in every sector of society such as economic, educational, and socio-cultural aspects of life¹⁷.

Fundamentally, the phenomena of Islamophobia are prevalent in India. One of the reasons why the Indian government and its state system tends to discriminate against their Muslim minority is due to the latter's

¹⁴ Divya Bhanot and others, 'Stigma and Discrimination During COVID-19 Pandemic', *Frontiers in Public Health*, 8, January (2021), 1–11 <<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2020.577018>>.

¹⁵ Kunst et al.

¹⁶ Fernando Bravo López, 'Towards a Definition of Islamophobia: Approximations of the Early

Twentieth Century', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 34.4 (2011), 556–73 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2010.528440>>.

¹⁷ Ingrid Therwath, 'Working for India or against Islam? Islamophobia in Indian American Lobbies', *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, 1, 2007, 0–16 <<https://doi.org/10.4000/samaj.262>>.

“monotheistic” belief system¹⁸. According to Husain, the impact of this monotheistic belief makes the Muslim people different than the majority population. Moreover, the Muslim community are not admired in civil society.

Another discourse on the issue of discrimination towards the Muslim community is studied by Osman¹⁹. He argues that Islamophobia is not only about the differences of faith between the Muslim and non-Muslim, but also about the social system of domination. The social system of domination could be seen as the competition of acquiring political support for dominating society. Therefore, the adherents of Islam are frequently marginalized in the political system and unable to have the civil rights, education, health insurance, et cetera, because they are the underclass in Indian civil society and unfortunately do not have power.

In addition to the above researches, Muslims are also discriminated in the economic sector especially in applying for job vacancies in the formal sector. In India, the human resources for the Muslim citizens are under-represented in every category of jobs. This is because the preponderance of job vacancies for Muslims are concentrated in the labor sectors, whereas the majority class (read: Hindu adherent) are in the exclusive sector, such as in government departments, financial institutions, banking, et cetera²⁰.

On the other hand, the Indian Muslim minority also are frequently not allowed to conduct religious activities. Recently, the world

was shocked by the violence shown in videos that have been viral on social media such as Youtube, Twitter and Facebook. On the video Khan²¹ perceives that there are several police officers who were repressing and torturing Muslim when they wanted to worship in the mosque.

The above discrimination cases (based on the explanation of the previous studies) confirmed the power of Hindu adherents as the dominant class. They tend to maintain their status quo in acquiring the advantageous things for their race/class although it exploits the minority class. If the previous researches discussed Islamophobia in the political, economic, and religious sectors, this research elaborates on Islamophobia in Indian news media and its implication on social media.

Therefore, in order to analyze Islamophobia cases in news media, the researchers utilize the critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach as a branch of applied linguistics theory in studying language usage critically.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a study that can analyze the language using both text and context²². The experts of CDA perceive that in analyzing the text, the researchers should find out the data that is related to its context such as where or when the text is written, who express the text and to whom the text is addressed²³.

Roger, one of the CDA theorists, states that CDA has been defined as language use in social practice²⁴. This above statement means

¹⁸ Shabbir Hussain and others, ‘Hate Crimes against Muslims and Increasing Islamophobia in India’, *Journal of Indian Studies*, 5.1 (2019), 7–15.

¹⁹Shabir.

²⁰ Barbara Harriss-White and Aseem Prakash, *Social Discrimination in India: A Case for Economic Citizenship*, 2013

<<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>>.

²¹Barbara.

²² James Paul Gee, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis Theory and Method*, 3rd edn (New York: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2011).

²³ Ruth Wodak and Gavin Kendall, ‘What Is Critical Discourse Analysis?’, *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung*, 8.2 (2007) <<https://doi.org/10.7203/qfilologia.11.5041>>.

²⁴ Rebecca Rogers and others, ‘Critical Discourse Analysis in Education: A Review of the Literature, 2004 to 2012’, *Review of Educational Research*,

that language usage is the reflection of social class background. A person who is classified as the lower class will surely have a different understanding, interest, and even language skills both in expressing and receiving the information than someone who lives in the top of the social class²⁵. The upper class, with high education and political power, tends to dominate the entire society, such as in politics, economy, culture, and language usage in media.

Therefore, the language use in media cannot be considered neutral due to its relation to the political, racial, social, religious, and cultural formation²⁶. The CDA theory also is a critical way to understand how the ruler's hegemony spreads to the mass media²⁷. By comprehending the CDA theory, people are not just understanding the text in the newspaper; rather, people also are able to conceive the issue, the social impact, and the purpose.

In order to understand how the CDA theory works in analyzing the mass media, let us discuss the explanation by Munfarida²⁸, who identifies five characters as follow: (1) Linguistics Practice in Socio-culture; (2) Socio Practical Discourse; (3) Social Interact Context; (4) Ideology and Social Relation; (5) Language Usage in Political Power

The first character asserts that socio-cultural life and civilization are produced and developed through linguistics practice/text, for example, the text in literary work as the socio-cultural art or the text in the newspaper. The CDA in this character is potentially able to amplify the linguistics dimension of discourse and social culture.

Furthermore, the second character describes the CDA as a social practice that

could alter people's consciousness and behavior. The third character is a perspective that attempts to collaborate those two characteristics. These characteristics perceive the CDA as requiring the critical linguistic analysis in studying language usage in the social context.

The next characteristic explains that the CDA is designed to study the media plan in hegemonizing people with a particular ideology. The CDA perceives that media discourse contributes in creating the social relation between the dominant/upper class and the working/lower class. This character is slightly similar with Marxist theory in classifying social class relations, namely the bourgeoisie and proletariat.

The final characteristic reflects the relation between language use and the political power interest in news media. The CDA in this character has the same perspective with roger's explanation above. The CDA sees that the discourse in the news media is not neutral and has a bias and negative stigma to marginalized people. This character tries to uncover the political power relation and at same time tries to inform and increase people's critical awareness in committing social transformations.

The above CDA theory is a guidance in analyzing the Islamophobic discourse portrayed in the Indian media. As has been mentioned in the previous point, the Indian media often discriminates against Muslim community and spread antagonistic information about Muslim religious activities. Through the news media, the Indian government is able to indoctrinate and hegemonize people to believing that Muslim

86.4 (2016), 1192–1226
<<https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654316628993>>.

²⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, 'Social Space and Symbolic Power', *Sociological Theory*, 1989
<<https://doi.org/10.2307/202060>>.

²⁶ Rogers and others.

²⁷ Elvi Susanti, 'Critical Discourse Analysis: Hegemony of the Social Media Twitter About National Issues in Indonesia and Its Implications to the Discourse Analysis Subject in Colleges', *TARBIYA: Journal of Education in Muslim community*, 2.2 (2015), 153–66
<<https://doi.org/10.15408/tjems.v2i2.3180>>.

²⁸Elvi

community is the biggest problem in spreading the Corona virus.

This discourse automatically makes people believe and justify the government in repressing and even discriminating the Muslim community. This case testifies to the theory above that the language used in media discourse is not neutral and is frequently used as a political instrument for the governments interest. That is why, by analyzing the Indian news media using the CDA theory, the researchers expect to find the connection between the government in power, the media company, the news media, and people who consume them in relation to the spread of Islamophobia.



Figure 1. Scheme of the News Media in Spreading Islamophobia.

The above frame demonstrates how the news media is produced to hegemonize people. The discourse is designed to justify the government in taking repressive policies against a particular group of people. The first circle is the government power who dominates all the instruments. The second circle is the media company which is perceived as one of the political tools in conveying government interest to the public.

In the process of making news, the media crew prepares the news content that can be expected to hegemonize the views of their readers that the Muslim community is the only

culprit who have been spreading the Corona virus due to their religious activities. Afterwards, the news media productions are consumed by civil society.

The consequence of this is that people can justify the government’s repression against the minority group. Finally, the researchers observe that the implication on taking the repressive policy to the minority Muslim community indicates the presence of Islamophobic discourse. This is how the CDA theory analyzes the news media in indoctrinating the public readers’ consciousness.

How the Indian Media Constructs the Islamophobia Discourse to the Public during the Pandemic of Covid-19

Before demonstrating the data related to Islamophobia cases in India, the researchers desire to classify three mainstream media that have been stigmatizing the Muslim minority especially at the beginning of Corona pandemic in March 2020. Those three media are Timesofindia.indiatimes.com (The Times of India), Sabrangindia.in, and Theprint.in. The reasons why the researchers take these media as samples because these media frequently broadcast Islamophobia. Besides, these media are mainstream media that have wide reach of the Indian public.

The reportage of Islamophobia during the Corona pandemic can be perceived in the news report of the Tablighi Jamaat. This community is publicly broadcasted as a group of people who spread Corona disease to the Indian civil society though their religious congregations. Most Indian mainstream media are convinced that the community conference held in mid-March 2020 at Nizamuddin markaz in New Delhi have dramatically increased the number of Corona cases. This situation could be perceived in the below scripted from www.Timesofindia.Indiatimes.Com:

Data 1: “The health ministry said on Saturday underlining how the event (Islamic conference) contributed significantly to the caseload of 23 states including those with high burden of the infection. Of the total 14,378 confirmed case of Covid 19, 4291 or 29,8% linked to the Islamic religious congregation”²⁹.

The above data shows that the discourse written in this reportage implicitly blamed the Muslim minority due to their religion activities. In fact, Islam is not the only religion that conducts ritual congregations in India; there are dozens of religions that held similar events. However, according to the news of Newyorktimes.com, the India’s health ministry has blamed the Islamic conference as the only cause of the spread of the Corona virus.

This above narration confirms the theory of CDA that in analyzing the news media, the government (in this case represented by the health minister) frequently utilizes it as a political instrument. The Indian government also officially objectified Muslim as human bombs of Corona virus³⁰.

Another issue that stigmatized Muslims in India could be seen in one of *Sabrang.in* news’ title which is read *Science, not Islam, is teaching Muslims how to deal with the Corona virus*³¹. This title explicitly described the notion that Islam is anti-science. Based on the above narration, Islam is only perceived as a ritual activity and does not have a particular perspective in overcoming the Corona disease.

In fact, in Islamic belief, there are a lot of Hadith, and verses in the Qur’an that discuss viruses and disease and how to deal with them.

For instance, one of popular Hadith that talk about lockdown narrated by Bukhari in his *Sahih* number 6973 chapter 13, “If you hear an epidemic in an area, you should not enter it. But if an outbreak occurs where you are in it, then do not leave that place”³².

This above narration, especially for both underline sentences, shows that Islam has provisions for stopping the spread of viruses. The first underlined sentence indicates that by not entering a place where an epidemic or pandemic has occurred, people will be safe. The second underlined sentence means that if people are already in a place where an epidemic or pandemic has occurred, they should not leave for fear of endangering other people in different places.

Besides, according to the *Sabrang.in* news, Muslims are portrayed as being not able to deal with the Corona virus due to their social behaviour that tends to be religious. Based on the *sabrang.in* news, each time Muslim face other Muslim adherents, they are going to doing the shake hand and hug each other. This means that Muslim behavior violates physical distancing policy. This issue could be seen in the bellow scripted data based on the news media of *Sabrangindia.in*:

Data 2: “... his interaction with fellow Muslim is as much a social act as it is religious. Muslims across the world shake hands and then hug when they meet a fellow Muslim or even others. It must have been really hard for them to forgo this cultural and religious practice since the current medical advice has been against such a form of greeting. Similarly, practicing Muslims partake of food from

²⁹ Sushmi Dey, ‘30% of Cases Across India Tied To Jemaat Event:Govt’, *Www.Timesofindia.Indiatimes.Com (The Times of India)*, 2020 <<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Coronavirus-cases-in-india-over-1000-tablighi-jamaat-members-infected-account-for-30-of-all-india-cases/articleshow/74988433.cms>> [accessed 10 June 2020].

³⁰ Kai Schultz and Suhasini Raj Jeffrey Gettleman, ‘In India, Coronavirus Fans Religious Hatred’, *Newyork Times*, 2020

<<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/12/world/asia/india-Coronavirus-muslims-bigotry.html>> [accessed 10 June 2020].

³¹ Arshad Alam, ‘Science, Not Islam, Is Teaching Muslims How to Deal with the Coronavirus’, *Sabrangindia.In*, 2020 <<https://sabrangindia.in/article/science-not-islam-teaching-muslims-how-deal-Coronavirus>> [accessed 11 June 2020].

³² Muhammad bin Ismail al Bukhari, *The Book of Tricks*, 9th edn (Riyadh: Dar us Salam, 1997).

the same plate, believing it to be mandated by Islam. One of reasons why the virus spread within the Tablighis must also be because of their habit of eating from the same plate”³³.

The above narration implicitly shows Islamophobia especially in the underlined sentences. The sentence, “Muslims across the world shake hands and then hug when they meet a fellow Muslim or even others,” assumes that during the Corona virus pandemic, Muslim adherents did not obey the government policy of physical/social distancing. It is unfortunate that the Indian news media claimed that only the Muslim minority did not adhere to the physical distancing policy ordered by the government.

Therefore, the researchers perceive that this statement is not neutral and can frame the public opinion that Muslim adherents are the primary cause that has been spreading the Corona virus due to their religious behavior. This is how the news media marginalize and stigmatize minority groups.

Besides, according to the Indian news published by Theprint.in, the federal government listed the Corona infections connected to the Muslim. This statement is slightly tendentious because the government claims that the Muslim as a large group of people, rather than the minority that it is.

This statement influenced the majority group of Indian society to have hatred towards the Muslim minority and this led to violence in some cases. One of the violent cases could be seen in the case of Mohammad Shamim and his family, who were driving minivans full of fresh fruit and vegetables. The Hindu villagers began to heckle them and asked others not to do

business with them. This is what happened to the Muslim minority because they are assumed to be source of Corona virus and citizens are afraid to associate with them.

Data 3: *“Then more people began harassing us saying, ‘you Muslims are spreading this illness, we don’t want you people coming to this village.’” he said. “People who had bought vegetables from us were told to return them” Stated Mohammad Shamim to the Print.in³⁴.*

In Mumbai the Muslim minority are afraid to self-report because the discrimination towards them is often increased. The Print.in news inform that 50 people are dead because of anti-Muslim violence during the Corona pandemic.

Data 4: *“India has seen a continued marginalization of its Muslim minority since Modi and his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party swept to power in 2014, over the past year it’s accelerated and become more violent. In the last week of February, before the country began to see a steady uptick in Covid-19 cases, three days of anti-Muslim violence in a part of the Indian capital left more than 50 people dead”³⁵*

The above data demonstrates how frightened Muslim community are to self-report due to the physical violence that they have been facing during the Corona virus pandemic. If they are confirmed to have the virus, this automatically creates religious and social tension between the Hindu majority and Muslim minority.

On the other hand, the hospitals did not want to treat and medicate Muslims until they have been tested for the Corona virus, as has been stated in the Times of India news: “It (Indian hospitals) would treat Muslims only when they produce a report showing they have tested negative for Corona virus”³⁶. This makes it hard for Muslims to self-report.

³³ Alam.

³⁴ Muneeza Naqvi and Upmanyu Trivedi, ‘New Wave of Anger against Muslims Threatens to Hurt India’s Virus Fight’, *Www.Theprint.In*, 2020 <<https://theprint.in/india/new-wave-of-anger-against->

[muslims-threatens-to-hurt-indias-virus-fight/407964/](https://theprint.in/india/new-wave-of-anger-against-muslims-threatens-to-hurt-indias-virus-fight/407964/)> [accessed 11 June 2020].

³⁵ Muneeza Naqvi and Upmanyu Trivedi.

³⁶ Sushmi Dey, ‘Will Admit Muslim Only If They Are Corona Virus-Free’,

As a result, the researchers perceive that during the Corona pandemic in India, the government have successfully been using media as a political instrument in marginalizing the Muslim community as the source of Corona virus. This creates Islamophobic discourse in religious intercommunication. Moreover, Islamophobia was broadcasted in the above media and would eventually have implications on social media such as Twitter and Instagram.

In the below, the researchers elaborate how the Indian news media have influenced social media wherein the Indian Muslim minority are blamed and bullied and stigmatized as carriers of the Corona virus.

How the Islamophobia Discourse in News Media Impacts Social Media Interaction

To elaborate this point, the researchers take several cases on some social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter where Indian netizens describe the Muslim community as the source of Corona virus. On Instagram, there are various hashtags that attempts to corelate the Muslim community with Corona virus such as *#Coronajihad*, *#muslimCorona*, *#muslimCoronavirus* etc. These hashtags have been viral on the Instagram and causes racism and bad communication both on social media or in the real life.

Since the Corona virus spread from China, many mainstream media from any countries objectify Corona as the Chinese illness³⁷. In India, as has been mentioned in the previous point, the government has successfully utilized the mainstream media to provoke and spread the propaganda of this illness related to where it comes from and how it spreads.

Unfortunately, the Indian citizens would accept the news without filtering the

information. Consequently, many people believe that the Muslim community is the only community in India that infects people with Corona virus. This situation could be seen on the below data where an Indian netizen on Instagram, namely *truly_secular*, posted a content that describe Muslim community as the distributor of Corona virus.



Data 5. A meme posted by *truly_secular* that describe Muslim as the spreader of Corona virus

The above picture demonstrates how the Muslim community are accused as the disseminator of Covid-19, whereas the Indian people are perceived as the victims of it. This post is extremely tendentious and baseless because the virus itself can infect anybody without seeing the religion, race, and country. This poster has been liked by 15 netizens in April, 11, 2020.

In addition to the above picture, another poster that similarly describe the discourse of Muslims as spreaders of Corona virus can be seen on another Instagram account, namely *govindhindu56*. In its content, *govindhindu56* classify four causes of how the Corona virus infects Indian people. This situation could be viewed as follow:

Www.Timesofindia.Indiatimes.Com (The Times of India), 2020 <<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/will-admit-muslims-only-if-they-are-Coronavirus-free-says-hospital-faces-fir/articleshow/75236548.cms>> [accessed 12 June 2020].

³⁷ Isaac I. Bogoch and others, 'Potential for Global Spread of a Novel Coronavirus from China', *Journal of Travel Medicine*, 27.2 (2020), 1–3 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/jtm/taaa011>>.



Data 6. a meme posted by govindhindu56 that amplify how Corona virus infects Indian society.

From the picture, we can see that the Chinese are objectified as a chef who cooked the Corona virus as a cuisine. The Muslim community are perceived as waiters, who are serving the Corona virus for Indians. This meme was liked by 17 netizens in April 1, 2020.

The use of social media as an instrument to stigmatize the Muslim community as the distributor of the Corona has been systematically carried out by the Indian online buzzers. they continue to spread negative content and objectify Muslims with stigmatizing terms. If Muslim community, in the past, used to be addressed as a terrorist, in India nowadays, Muslims are identic with Corona virus. This case could be viewed in the bellow data:



Data 7: A meme that compares Muslim back then as a terrorist and currently turn to be Corona distributor

Data 8 shows how the online buzzers kept addressing the Muslim community with the terrible stigma. The term terrorist is similar

to the latest predicate (Muslim as spreaders of Corona virus), in that both lead to death. Moreover, this latest predicate is more dangerous than terrorism because the virus is not easily traced to certain agents. This meme was posted on Instagram, in March 31, 2020 which liked by 120 netizens.

The three memes above are the effect of the mainstream news media that have been forming the citizens consciousness about the Corona virus pandemic. The Muslim community are frequent blamed for infecting millions of people in India both on the mainstream news media and social media.

If on Instagram the Indian netizens are making negative memes related to Muslims and Corona, on Twitter, the Indian netizens have varied opinion. The researchers have take four samples of Twitter accounts that have different perspectives in stigmatizing Muslim community as the disseminators of the Corona virus. Two of the four netizens deliberately blame the Muslim community with their racist statements, whereas others were neutral, though their opinions still suggest that Muslims are Corona virus spreaders.

As for the first account, it states that the Muslim community should be assassinated by the Corona virus itself due to their activity of infecting people with the disease. This racist statement could be seen as follows:



Data 8. This twitter account shows how sensitive this statement to Muslim community.

As can be seen from the above data, the sentence “Let the virus kill 50 Crore Indians’ Radical Islamists have launched such a Corona jihad on India” attempts to influence the public opinion on social media that Muslims should be responsible for the spread of the Corona virus, as the mainstream media has been broadcasting. Therefore, this netizen desire that the Corona virus infect only Muslim community. This statement is liked by 151 netizens, retweeted by 84 Twitter users and commented by 8 netizens.

In fact, even if Indian territory were “cleaned” of the Muslim community, this would not guarantee that the Indian people will be saved from the Corona virus. The researchers perceive that this statement shows how some Indian people are afraid of the Muslim community and that it indicates Islamophobic sentiments.

Moreover, this account continues by stating that “a new form of terror has been unleashed.” This last sentence has a correlation to what data 8 has shown, namely that the form of terrorism has been transformed from bombs to viruses. This word terror is definitely directed at to the Muslim community. The racist statement has led Indian Muslims to counter the above statement with posts like the following:



This twitter account attempts to counter the Islamophobic narrative. It shows that although the Muslim community has been stigmatized as being Covid-19 bombs and terrorists, the Muslim community donated their plasma to save the lives of Covid-19 patients. This tweet was posted in April 22, 2020, and 141

netizens like this post, 148 retweet it, and 12 twitter users commented on it.

Furthermore, the second twitter account spreading the accusing that Muslims were spreaders of Corona virus posted a statement demanding the Indian government to arrest Muslims, particularly to those who are part of the Jamaat Tablighi or support that organization:



Data 9. This statement demonstrates how this account address Muslim with Corona virus and demand to arrest Muslims into jail.

According to the above account’s opinion, those who join the Muslim Tablighi Jamaat or those who support the organization are totally guilty of spreading the Corona virus. This statement is not based on data because the virus can infect anyone regardless of race, religion, and social background.

Therefore, the researchers perceive that both these insensitive and baseless statements above (read: Both data 8 and 10) are the effects how the mainstream news media successfully influenced people to keep blaming a particular community as the virus spreader, in this case the Muslim community.

Conclusion

As a result, the researchers conclude that most of the Indian mainstream media have been successful in hegemonize the Indian civilian consciousness. This has impacted spread of the Islamophobia. The media, in this case, are attempting to construct public opinion and stigmatize the Muslim community. The

discourse broadcasted by the news media justifies the CDA theory that the government frequently use the media as their political instrument to form and even stigmatize minority groups. Furthermore, this broadcasting has influenced Indian netizens to keep pushing the propaganda by making racist and insensitive memes against the Muslim community. This situation indicates an environment of Islamophobia, because both the mainstream news media and social media are discriminating against the Muslim community without actual facts on the ground.

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