Journal of Journalism, Media Science & Creative Arts
ISSN (Print): 2790-9700 ISSN (Online): 2790-9719
Volume 2, Issue 2, Page 53-64, December 31, 2022

LEADING NEWSPAPER REPORTING ON TALIBAN BEFORE AND AFTER TAKEOVER OF AFGHANISTAN

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Abstract

The following study is concerned with the theory of peace journalism with reference to the issue of Afghanistan and Taliban. To fulfill this purpose, a two-month report from the Daily Dawn has been selected. The collected data has been investigated by the theoretical frame work of peace journalism and the methodology of content analysis. Although peace journalism analysis of content shows that reporting on Afghanistan is war related which is in contradiction to peace journalism, however, a number of unbiased news were also mentioned. The concluding results of this research shows that after the retaliation of the Taliban, the trajectory of news reporting has shifted to peace journalism, which can be predicted as a positive indication. Conflict reporting is complex but when done under the framework of peace journalism, even the most calamitous scenes and pictures could be altered in a manner that can help pave the path of peace and reconciliation.

Keywords: Peace Journalism, War Journalism, Dawn, Taliban, Afghanistan, Framework, Retaliation.

Introduction

Afghan conflict has been a very sensitive issue for the world, specifically for Pakistan and other neighboring countries. The decade's long war has stripped the country off of its economy, military, education and health-care system. The Afghan citizens have been living under hostile conditions and are denied even their basic human rights. They are always living with the fear of being targeted, anywhere, anytime, in their own homeland. This war was encompassed when USA, along with their allies and NATO, broke into the territory of Afghanistan and brushed out the Taliban from Kabul. After overthrowing the Taliban, the western allies of the USA formed a government under Hamid Karzai's supervision and then Ashraf Ghani became president of Afghanistan, but in 2020, when Ashraf Ghani was reelected as the president, America signed an agreement with Taliban in Doha, Qatar on 29th February, 2020.According to this agreement America agreed to withdraw from Afghanistan. A few months after, American presidential election was held and Joe Biden was elected as and the new American president, who truthfully honored the previously signed treaty.

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Joe Biden's administration abruptly decided to withdraw from Afghanistan and on 15th August 2021, Taliban reached Kabul as Ashraf Ghani fled to UAE and they entered in Kabul. For over 20 days, Afghanistan had no law and elected leader. On 7thSeptember 2021, Taliban announced that the Afghan law will be based on the interim government system, which was a blatant denial of inclusive governance. Although they did apologize to the forces fighting in opposition, they refused to discuss the issue of women's education, employment, and rights, for which they were subjected to criticism by the media and western nations.

The Media was in a constant turmoil as it had almost no access to the data which was needed to present to its audiences. The Taliban arrival into Kabul was a rather sudden one, as they made no clear indication beforehand, thus, the journalists were left with undone information, and couldn't fully deliver any updates. Taliban have always had a questionable reputation for never providing reliable information regarding their location and agenda. They controlled the whole region of Northern Afghanistan in Panjshir Valley, where anti-Taliban forces and Ahmad Shah Masood's heir Ahmad Shah junior together had announced to fight but failed. Media, then too was denied any access to Panjshir Valley, Taliban and fighters were giving information but there was a lot of ambiguity, and both sides claimed they killed a large number of opposition fighters. It wasn't easy for media to balance the news and fact check.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani fled from Afghanistan, but no one had a clue where he landed. The media's speculation continued, and then out of the blue, UAEs Foreign ministry announced that they have welcomed Ashraf Ghani and his family. It was 7th September 2021, when Taliban had announced their agenda for an interim government, just three weeks after they broke into Kabul.

Media's role was crucial for covering Afghanistan in those dire moments but Taliban's takeover created problems for International and Pakistani media workers and channels. For news gathering, the global media platforms were relying either on Pakistani media outlets or Afghanistan's local media workers. However, Pakistani media sent their reporters to Afghanistan, who then tried to gather news and updates from there. Pakistan's biggest newspaper Daily Dawn published a report with the help of their private reporters, Afghan media channels and news wires. Daily Dawn published exclusive reports and their special correspondents informed from Afghanistan of actual situation. Media highlighted the human rights violations, ethnic differences and Taliban's ideology.

In this paper, an analysis was conducted on Daily Dawns reporting on Taliban after their takeover in Afghanistan and before entering into Kabul(1st August to 31 September 2021). This can be divided into three parts, Pre-Taliban-invasion 15days, the post-Taliban-invasion initial 20 days when they were in command of Afghanistan but no government formed, and the third part is on the reporting on after Taliban's interim government had formed. This analysis was conducted under the framework of peace journalism and the methodology of content analysis.

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Rationale

The choice of studying the reporting on the Taliban's return in the Daily Dawn Newspaper is driven by the need to understand how a reputable newspaper navigated the coverage of a sensitive and potentially volatile event. By comparing the reporting before and after the formation of the Taliban government, this research aims to shed light on the newspaper's evolving narrative and its adherence to peace journalism principles. The study's findings will contribute to our broader understanding of media's role in conflict reporting and peacebuilding efforts.

Problem Statement

The reporting of conflict and political transitions in the media plays a significant role in shaping public perception and understanding of complex geopolitical events. The situation in Afghanistan, particularly the return of the Taliban to power in August 2021, was a momentous event that garnered global attention. The media's portrayal of this transition, whether it adhered to the principles of peace journalism, and how it evolved over time, is a matter of critical importance.

Research Questions

1. What are the key facets that distinguish the reporting of Taliban from August 1st to 31st September and after formation of government from August 15th to September 31st, 2021, in Daily Dawn Newspaper?

2. According to peace journalism, how did Daily Dawn Newspaper report Taliban’s return in power in Afghanistan after nearly two decades?

Research Objectives

1. To examine the key facets that distinguish the reporting of the Taliban in the Daily Dawn Newspaper from August 1st to 31st, 2021, compared to the period after the formation of the Taliban government from August 15th to September 31st, 2021.

2. To analyze how the Daily Dawn Newspaper reported on the return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan, in line with the principles of peace journalism, after an absence of nearly two decades.

Literature Review

Afghanistan and Taliban

Afghanistan is situated in a very important strategic position and shares borders with Central Asian countries, which includes Pakistan, Iran, and Middle East. Due to its location, Afghanistan has been the center of war between the world power politics. Also, Afghanistan has suffered from the internal war, insurgencies and clashes between tribal lords. Afghanistan was the main pawn of Great Game in the nineteenth century between the Russian power and the British Empire. Britishers who were ruling in India wanted to expand their rule beyond the sub-continent. British Empire was successful in taking charge over most parts of Afghanistan, but later on they had to

withdraw from the country. After independence in 1919, Afghanistan did not form a democratic or any new system of government and in 1923monarchy was once again established which failed to cater even for the basic necessities of Afghan citizens. The Soviet Union increased its influence in the region including Afghanistan. Communist Party was also established and became a strong force to influence government and state affairs, and during the elections in 1969 emerged as a pro soviet strong force. Communist party was actively working for demolishing monarchy from Afghanistan and a military coup was instigated by the communist party in 1978.(C. Neal Tate, 2006, page 2)

During these events Afghanistan faced bloody incidents and Afghanistan became a pro soviet state and Russian interference was not invisible. Muhammad Zahir Shah was the last king of Afghanistan; however, the end of his reign fueled the destruction of the country, which continued to this very day. Soviet Union was expanding the territory and after the coup in Afghanistan, their direct invasion established while after ten years of coup Mujahideen movement was established which became a guerrilla movement and challenged soviet interference in the country. Although they were getting support from world power which includes armaments and financial support by America and Gulf states.(C. Neal Tate, 2006, page 2)

Global power houses like America were alarmed of the nefarious Soviet agenda concerning Afghanistan. The USA warned all the neighboring countries of Afghanistan like Pakistan, whose security was too somehow threatened by the attack on its neighboring country. In result a coalition was established against soviet invasion and a long bloody journey started in the lands of Afghanistan. World powers confrontation in Afghanistan encompassed the region and special neighboring country Pakistan. This confrontation of world powers was prolonged to an extent which resulted in the ruins of the Afghan land, which later on turned into the battle field of Cold War between the west and the Soviet Union and engulfed several countries including Afghan neighbors. Mujahideen were trained by United States, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and others; they were equipped by latest weapons to fight against the soviet forces. This Power-politics game instigated civil war in Afghanistan, and a war against the pro soviet government and the Soviet Union as well. Afghan government and soviet forces could not resist the coalition of western allies and Mujahideen, and then Soviet Union had to withdraw from Afghanistan in 1989. After the soviet withdrawal, clashes between Mujahideen and government forces extinguished, and American had to retreat. The Mujahideen hijacked Kabul in 1992, but this already damaged land was then affected by the war among tribe lords and clashes between different groups of Mujahideen.(C. Neal Tate, 2006, page 3)

The appalling civil war and a fractured government of Mujahideen lead to another armed movement and new guerrilla forces established. A rich history of Afghanistan is overlooked because the image of the Afghan land is distorted after the country's division into multiple tribes, ruled by monsters disguised as human beings. Despite war and destruction Afghanistan has a history of social achievements, spiritual harmony and a peaceful society where arts and science flourished. (WillianMaley,1998) Afghan nation is known for the best resistance against invaders. Afghan tribes' (which are not official organizations) acts as political establishments to sort the affairs of state. Tribal heads known as war lords are the representatives of the

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country, thus the nation's reputation depends on every step they take. Tribal alliance protects not only their people but also shields their land against the nasty power politics. (WillianMaley, 1998)

Emergence of Taliban

Mullah Mohammed Omar, who fought against soviet forces as a commander of Mujahidin, founded Taliban movement in 1990s; this movement got attention of religious students of madrasah and rapidly expanded their control from Kandahar to most parts of Afghanistan.(Jonathan Cristol, 2019. P 11) In a rather short time-span they were in control of the country where external fighters were present but they were not part of Taliban, however, they supported Taliban.

During Mujaheddin tenure Afghanistan was fully in turmoil and different factions were fighting each other for power, because of this the dream of a prosperous nation was burned to ashes. Mujahidin government was an amalgamation of different groups who fought against the Soviet Union forces during 1980s. Gulbaddin Hikmatyar was then prime minister and Burhanuddin Rabbani was the recognized president, both of them had difference of opinion and they failed to unite all groups of Mujahideen. They were threatened by each other, even prime minister warned to destroy the capital city of Kabul. President Burhanuddin Rabbani was of the view that country should be administrated in accordance to the Islamic Shariah.(Jonathan Cristol, 2019, P 2)

When Taliban movement was established in Kandahar in 1994, the Mujahideen government could not control the anarchy. This movement started from the Singesar, a village in Kandahar. Taliban movement also attracted the many Mujahideen commanders who fought against Soviet Union, and they joined the new Islamic movement named Taliban and followed Mullah Omar as Chief and was given the title of Ameer ul Momineen. The Taliban movement aimed to enforce Islamic Law with full spirit, to end anarchy, and reestablish the peace and de-weaponize the Afghan society. Taliban, under the command of Mullah Omar started taking control of neighboring cities and provinces of Kandahar; however, they had to fight hard to reach Kabul. Taliban took control of Kabul on 27 September 1996 and most parts of Afghanistan fell under the supervision of Taliban but they failed to defeat Ahmad shah Masood's northeastern province of Panjsher. When Osama Bin Laden came to Afghanistan from Sudan, the Taliban movement gets more power to fight against warlords and then forces of Northern Alliance of Afghanistan, consist of Mujahideen Leaders, who were also ruling in Afghanistan. With Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda fighters also gathered in Afghanistan but years later that became a global crisis.

After 9/11 in America, pressure on Taliban increased to expel Osama bin Laden, who was previously expelled from Sudan in 1996, on the charges of terrorist activities but the Taliban refused to bend to the demands of America and other powers. In result, Taliban had faced limited sanctions from United Nations Security Council and then lead to attack on Afghanistan on 2001, but Taliban, who were still hosting Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, restricted him and made everyone believe that Bin Laden was assassinated.(Frank A. Clements, 2003)

Taliban's Fall and Revival

Taliban was under attack by western countries headed by USA and Britain, and Afghanistan once again became the battle field for nations drunk o power. In America, terrorists attacked on World Trade Tower and Pentagon City, where nearly 4000 people were killed who were from different countries including Americans. These attacks were linked to al-Qaeda by US and Britain and Osama bin Laden was called the main financer. After that U.S and UK through United Nations Security Council, demanded Taliban to handover Osama bin Laden, but Taliban straightaway refused. Taliban's refusal poked the United States of America to announce war against terrorism, with the aim of eliminating al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden and Taliban government, and started bombing their territories on October 2001 and claimed that they are destroying the hideouts of al-Qaeda and their camps. On 7 October 2001, U.S forces launched their first air strike on Afghanistan. Taliban did not resist and easily left the Afghan cities to anti-Taliban forces mainly Northern Alliance.(Frank A. Clements, 2003)

This war in the name of eradicating terror affected the neighboring countries of Afghanistan, as well as the whole world. After Afghanistan, Pakistan then became the victim of terrorism, where attacks, suicide bombing and targeting the citizens became frequent. Almost two decades of war on terror and installing governments in Afghanistan, American administration started negotiating with Taliban. In America, after Barack Obama, Donald Trump became president of U.S who announced to withdraw the American forces from Afghanistan and he nominated Zalmay Khalilzad as American representative of Afghanistan. Zalmay Khalilzad started interacting with the Taliban to set a mechanism for peaceful withdrawal from Afghanistan. With Trump's administration Taliban's revival began. Taliban's presence was still unknown; however, in Qatar they were allowed to set an office in Doha. Pakistan and Qatar played a very important role for the peace agreement between two enemies. America and Taliban signed a peace agreement on 29 February 2020, in the presence of the secretary of state Mike Pompeo. According to the deal U.S had agreed to withdraw their forces from Afghanistan within 14 months of agreement. American representative Zalmay Khalilzad and Taliban representative Abdul Ghani's brother signed the agreement from both sides. (Daily Dawn, March 1, 2020). After the agreement in November, Donald Trump lost American presidential election and Joe Biden resumed as US president in January 2021. Biden's administration took some time and finally decided to pull out their forces from Afghanistan before August, according to that decision, America and NATO forces left Afghanistan and Taliban entered Kabul on 15 August 2021, however, they didn't announce the formal government for more than 20 days. On 7 September 2021, Taliban announced interim Government and named prime minister and ministers and also named nation as the Islamic state of Afghanistan.

Research Methodology

Methodology for this study is content analysis as primary tool in accordance with the qualitative nature of this research, examining the strategy that characterize the reporting and to identify the key factors that influence reporting of Afghan Taliban in Pakistan's leading newspaper; Daily Dawn from 1st August, 2021 to 31st September,

ISSN (Print): 2790-9700 ISSN (Online): 2790-9719
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2021. Using peace journalism, as a theoretical frame work, to have a greater insight into reporting on Talibans and their activities. Political turbulence during this particular time period in Afghanistan went uphill as Talibans captured the country swiftly without any strong resistance, as Western allied Afghan government and foreign forces pulled back from Afghanistan. Economic growth went further down because of this upheaval. Hence, this time period is selected for this research to study and examine the reporting of early days of Taliban's comeback within fifteen days without proper government and then after announcing the interim government, however it is linked to developments before Taliban came in Kabul, from 1st August 2021. This study itself is a comparison of Taliban's earlier months and later fifteen days. This study uses Johan Galtung's classification of war/peace journalism. A close assessment of the discursive strategies used by Pakistan's leading newspaper in reporting Taliban and their activities is used as research methodology.

Textual analysis emerged in the 1960s and became accepted in the field of social science research. According to Van Dijk, textual analysis can critically analyze texts to ascertain meaning, also known as discourse analysis.

Theoretical framework: Peace Journalism

Taliban's resistance in Afghanistan was declared as insurgency. After 9/11, sanctions were imposed on Taliban and declared them as a terrorist organization. Their leaders' names were added in the most wanted list of terrorists. However, Americans continue their talks with Taliban that resulted in both sides signing an agreement in February, 2020 and Americans agreeing to withdraw forces from Afghanistan. This situation was hypercritical for media for reporting Afghanistan and Taliban related stories. Peace journalism was best suited for broadcasting because, Peace Journalism is not only a term but it is a process which plays a role to diminish the enmity and fill the communication gap and humanizes the other side through journalism. For reporting conflicts through media peace journalism is the best option. (Hafsa Khalid, 2014)

Peace Journalism is proposed by Norwegian Social Scientist Johan Galtung, who described the war journalism as journalism about conflict that has a value bias towards violence and violent groups and presented an alternative for instability which is called peace journalism. According to him, peace is a link between two or more parties of conflict. These parties may be journalists, media professionals, audiences, and organizations, a person, states or nations, regions in conflict. Johan Galtung's approach of peace journalism considered a remedial approach for the treatment of conventional conflict coverage and conflict coverage that further divided into two categories, war journalism and peace journalism. (Lubna Zaheer, 2016)

Peace Journalism decreases the intensity of the issue and make the parties realize the importance of peace and create the environment to start dialogue process and mediate on mutual understandings to resolve the conflict in good will. (Annabel McGoldrick and Jake lynch, 2001)

Peace Journalism has basically three main approaches; people oriented, solution oriented and truth oriented. These approaches give options to focus on reporting for peace.(Lubna Zaheer 2016)

While conventional reporting presents one sided story that might be biased and prone to creating conflicts. On the other hand, peace journalism covers all involved parties of the conflict exploring root causes of conflict in order to create opportunities for society at large and to consider and value non-violent responses to conflict without any interest except peace.(Samuel Peleg, 2018)

Peace journalism creates opportunities for readers and audiences to respond to conflict in peaceful and non-violent manner as peace journalism encourages harmonious reporting.(Shabbir Hussein and Jake lynch)

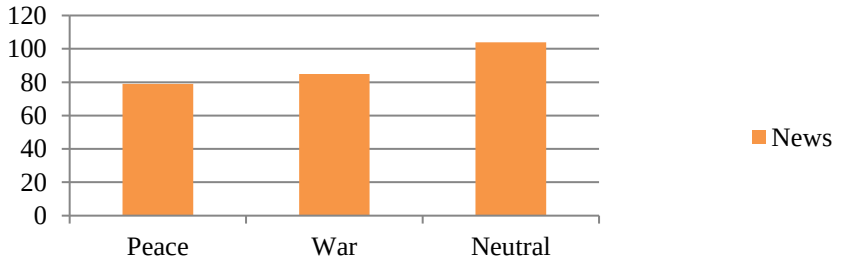
According to Jake Lynch peace journalism not only gives voice to all rival parties but also exposes lies, cover-up attempts and culprits on all sides. It gives creative ideas for conflict resolution, peacemaking and peacekeeping. It focuses on peace stories and post war development. (Jake Lynch, 2007)

This research paper is based on above definition of peace journalism that is cover-up attempts and culprits of all sides, pays attention to stories and post war developments. In this study, research will be framed in three categories and analyze through peace journalism theory.

Coverage

During analysis of data on reporting on Taliban three aspects were emerged: reporting from 1st August to 15th August when Talibans were not in power but they were capturing different cities and provinces, reporting was different when Taliban entered Kabul on 15th August and lastly more than 20 days they did not form the government after which they setup interim government on 7th September. These two months of Taliban had three different aspects and according to that there were differences in reporting. During the this time period, studies shows the result was total of 268 stories being published, which was framed as 79(29.48%) news as peace related, 85(31.71 %) news as war news and 104(38.81) news categorized as neutral news, which shows in chart and table below.

Figure 1: Published News frame



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Table 1: Published News frame

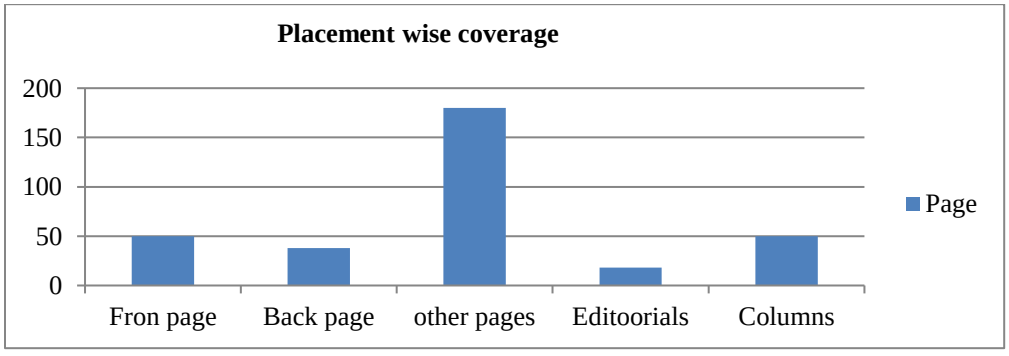
News category	No.	Percentage
Peace journalism	79	29.48
War journalism	85	31.71
Neutral	104	38.81
Total	268	100

In the charts it is evident that the frequency of neutral news stories is high, that is due to fair inclusivity of both sides involved and their stories. During analysis it was observed that stories published by one agency or new agencies were almost similar in content.

As we analyzed the news of Taliban and Afghanistan in Daily Dawn, we observed that this newspaper was centered on this issue and gave enough attention and space. These stories were published on front to back and other pages, even in the sports section, where they provided with sufficient details of Afghan-Taliban turmoil. In this study we selected news about Afghanistan or Taliban which was published in Dawn.

Placement of news is a parameter to determine the given priority to any issue, according to that Daily Dawn published stories on this issue not only from Afghanistan but also including Pakistan and from other countries where this issue was discussed and taking actions to resolve the issue or support to new regime of Taliban, so, there would be stability within Afghanistan, which would benefit the whole region. Dawn focused on Taliban and Afghanistan tension with 268 stories, and these stories were published on front pages and international pages while editorial columns also addressed this issue. During this particular two months Dawn's coverage with 50 news on front page, 38 news on back pages and remaining stories were on other pages, during this period 18 editorials and 50 columns were also published on editorial page. The frequency and distribution of news coverage shows in chart below:

Figure 2: Placement wise coverage



As evident from the chart above, we observe that the reports from Afghanistan was based on international news agencies and mostly AFP ,while reports regarding Taliban and Afghanistan are from several countries i.e. Pakistan, America, Qatar, China, Russia and other countries. Data shows 61 news stories from AFP, 28 from Reuters, 14 from AP, 26 from other agencies and 139 stories from media reporters and not a single story from Afghanistan's media.

Findings

In this research, analysis conducted on reports published on Taliban-Afghan conflict by Daily Dawn Newspaper during these two months, shows that according to the research question which were put early and those are:

Question 1: What are the main facets that characterize the reporting of Taliban from August 1st to 31st September and after formation of government from August 15th to September 31st, 2021 in Daily Dawn?

Data of study shows that during this period 79(29.48%) news were related to peace journalism, 85(31.71 %) news as war framed and 104(38.81) news categorized as neutral. It shows that stories towards Taliban were not supportive to peace journalism, however, 104 news were framed neutral but most of those news were also having tilt towards war journalism. During this period of study in first 15 days Taliban were approaching to take control of Kabul and on 15 August they got the control and after more than 20 days on September 7, Taliban announced interim government. During these three phases this newspaper treated Taliban little differently. In reports of early 15 days words like insurgents, militant, armed movement and radical were used for Taliban and portrayed them as fanatics, extremists, and cold-blooded. On 1st August, a report said that 'Violence has surged across the country since early May, when the militants launched a sweeping offensive attack as US-led foreign forces began a final withdrawal that is now almost complete'.

In this phase mainly news was in favor of American backed government and their forces. Mid 20 days of this period was focused on inclusive government but above words which were used before for Taliban were mostly disappeared. However Talibans were depicted as the executioners of human rights especially women rights. Even though they announced that they will respect the human rights and women could resume offices and education but it was never implemented.

Question 2: According to peace journalism, how did Daily Dawn report Taliban's return in power in Afghanistan after nearly two decades?

Data analysis of two months reports in the frame work of peace journalism shows that Taliban's presentation was in war journalism frame, as apparent from the table above that 29.48% news were in peace category and 31.71 % news were in war category. Although, in over all coverage the percentage of neutral news was high but when we analyze those stories which were published after taking control of Kabul, terms used for Taliban in stories were toned down before entering Kabul but still they were called militant and radical group. In these findings Taliban's radical aspect was highlighted, although their point of view was also included but when stories from Pakistan or other parts of world were published then, Taliban's view is non-existent.

ISSN (Print): 2790-9700 ISSN (Online): 2790-9719
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As on 16th August reports from Pakistan, presents a situation which was not good for Taliban but also not against them totally. On day one of Talibans taking over where it was reported that 'Afghans fearing that the Taliban could re-impose the kind of brutal rule that eliminatedwomen's rights, flocked to leave the country, lining up at cash machines to withdraw their life savings. The desperately poor who had left homes in the countryside for the presumed safety of the capital remained in parks and open spaces throughout the city'.(Daily Dawn 1 August 2021)

The analysis on the basis of coverage. It is clear that peace ratio is less than war journalism and representation of Taliban after coming in power, their perception in the world altered. With time number of peace related reports are increasing and highlighting the need of peace and needy people of Afghanistan and cracked economy. Concerns regarding human rights situation remains the main topic for newspapers.

Conclusion

To conclude this study on reporting on Taliban/Afghanistan in Daily Dawn it is although over all representation of Taliban is still in frame of insurgents but change of terms is also highlighted and compared to other militants' groups. Taliban is called less radical than others. It shows that reporting perception is also changing. Summarizing on conflict reporting as, for commercial media on conflict reporting, peace oriented stories hardly qualify as news but war oriented reports are given the spotlight (Daily Dawn, 18 August, 2021).

But the positive thing is that realizing that peace and stability is important for Afghanistan and for the people of Afghanistan who had been facing severe insurgency nearly for four decades. Peace journalism is basic need for this society because this is the need of time to boost the morale of people who are badly affected by terrorism. Media through peace journalism not only helps to strengthen the peace in the country but also can play a vital role for human development, build infrastructure and eliminate the decade long economic uncertainty. Peace Journalism is a tool to unite the people in a badly polarized society. Moreover, through peace journalism best possible picture could be presented to the world to realize that working towards peace in Afghanistan is necessary for the region and rest of the world.

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