



PRINT MEDIA AND PUNJAB MILITANCY: AN ANALYSIS OF CATEGORY OF LABELLING AND ISSUE OF SENSITIZATION

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Abstract

Punjab faced acute torture³ of militancy from the 1980's and acquired disastrous shape after the Operation Blue Star by Indian Army to flush out militants from the Golden Temple premises. Whereas the conflict was continuing among militants and security personals at plains of Punjab, English and vernacular print media were in tussle with each other over covering news related to the occurred violence in Punjab. The English and vernacular media had labelled news related to perpetuating violence in Punjab to people which was created fractured sphere of news world. The media had presented the news covered by ideological contours which was too offended the communities' emotions that were having century's old roots. The print media were looked divided while representing violent incidents in Punjab due to their ideological differences. The paper has attempted to understand the meaning of the covered news related to the violent incidents through the ideological lenses by the newspaper and the occurred consequences of that labelled news to society. The paper applied content analysis method, which covers under the qualitative and quantitative research methodology. The paper has solely based on the qualitative methodology. The paper briefly concluded that the role of media is crucial in creating social capital in security. The English and Vernacular print media represented the news related to the violent incidents according to their set ideology, which created fractured views of the sphere in society.

Keywords: Punjab Militancy, Print Media, Political Ideology, Sensitization.



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Introduction

Punjab in the post Indian independence faced its first religious confrontation known as Sikh-Nirankari clash⁴ on 13 April, 1978 at Amritsar. The clash between the both groups brought 13

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³Out of the total, 11,694 persons killed by the terrorists in Punjab during the period 1981-1993, 7139 more than 61 percent were Sikhs (The Knights of Falsehood 2008).

⁴The Nirankaris decided to hold their convention in Amritsar on April 13, the birth of Khalsa...it was alleged that the place, date and time of convention were deliberately chosen by the Nirankaris in
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Sikhs and 3 Nirankari to the mouth of death and left several injured. In 1980, the court found that the Nirankaris had taken action in defence and dropped all the charges including murder charge and freed them. In revenge of 13 killings of Sikhs, Nirankari Head Baba Gurbachan Singh finally killed in Delhi in year 1980 after failure of five attempts over his life on different states. Before that, the highest body of Sikhs, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee⁵ (SGPC) issued a 'Hukamnama' from Akal Takhat (Highest chair of the Sikh Community) declaring Nirankaris as the enemy of the Sikhs and instructed to sever all relations with them in June 1978 after the Amritsar clash. The *Hukamnama* (a religious order) was followed by a series of incidents which pushed Punjab completely into grip of militancy on the name of religion and spread in every corner and grasped every community (Kapur 1985, 237). The vengeance in Sikhs sooner turned into revenge and forced them to stand opposite the governments. In subsequent years, 1981 and 1982 worried the government as 26 people were killed by the extremists and in 1983, the number of killings jumped to 76 (Gill 1997). One side, Shiromani Akali Dal was busy in organizing religious *morchas* (agitations) for more rights to the state, other side state was confronting with a group of Sikh extremists fighting for the sake of Khalistan⁶ charged over religious sentiments after the Operation Bluestar.

During turbulent period, English and vernacular print media published news on front and inside pages covering the occurred violent incidents and as per convenience. The pattern of

connivance with the congress, which had been out of power and was trying to embarrass the Akali-Janta alliance. One day before the convention, on April 12, the Nirankaris took out a procession, during the course of which their chief allegedly made some derogatory remarks against the Sikh religion... Next day some followers of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and those of the *Akhand Kirtni Jatha*, went totally unarmed to the venue of Nirankari congregation to dissuade the Nirankari Chief from denigrating Sikh religion and Gurus. The Nirankaris, who were well equipped with rifles and stenguns fired at the approaching Sikhs, resulting the death of thirteen of them... Meanwhile, the 62 Nirankaris, including the head of the sect, Baba Gurbachan Singh, charged in connection with the killing of 13 Sikhs in clash of 1978 had faced trial and were acquitted on the grounds that they had acted in self-defence (Gill 1997).

⁵SGPC is the abbreviation for the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. It is directly elected by an electorate of the Sikh Nation, male and female above 18 years of age who are registered as voters under the provisions of Sikh Gurdwara Act 1925. This act enables SGPC to control all the Historical Gurdwaras as well as other Gurdwaras under Section 87 of this act. The elections to SGPC are held after every five years. SGPC is also called Parliament of the Sikh Nation. Now apart from the management of Gurdwara, it runs many prestigious educational institutions including Medical colleges, Hospitals and many charitable trusts (<http://sgpc.net/about-sgpc/>).

⁶The Sikh Diaspora has always been politically more radical than the Akali Dal with its leadership rooted to the large peasants or farmers. The Gadar Party had few active supporters among the Akali Dal Sikhs. In 1960s, Sikh immigrants raised the slogan of an 'Independent Punjab' much ahead of the Sikhs living in India. The Khalistan movement also originated first in North America under the patronage of the Diaspora and only years later found a certain solid support from a section of Sikh youth. Between 1971 and 1978, a number of Sikh organizations abroad raised the slogan of Khalistan, a separate Sikh state. (Gupta 1990, 365)

reporting and labelling news by the media had initiated another debate during the conflict time. The difference of opinion based on ideology of the newspapers was visible clearly which raised issues regarding to the neutrality of the newspapers. The vernacular newspapers during the conflict period were touching higher circulation. The circulation of the newspaper is basic requirement for sustainability of a newspaper (Deol 2000). The catchy headlines with photos of violence in the newspaper were threatened the mind of public. But also it brought a position of alienation while selective ideological based reporting for their target audience. It is perceived that media is the de facto eyes and ears of the people within a system of governance in a democratic political society. It is possibility that the very system may manipulate the media aimed at serving ruling class interest. Unfortunately, it has been seen in the case of Indian media which has been tamed at various by Government agency whenever the rulers perceive a threat to the country's unity and integrity from the internal disturbance, dissent or an external enemy. Ultra-nationalism is the benchmark for not only editorial comment but for news reporting as well (Sidhu & Chamadia 2014, 11)

The research paper has selected three months' time period; May June and July 1984 for unearthing meaning of reporting and labelling of news by the English and Vernacular newspapers. The chosen time of three months for study was very turbulent period for Punjab. It was the time before the launching of the Operation Blue Star in June. The month turns more crucial imperative as the change in approach to deal with the news by the print media. Selected editorials and news of three newspapers, *The Tribune*⁷ in English, *Punjab Kesri*⁸ in Hindi and *Rojana Ajit*⁹ in Punjabi originated and based in Punjab were selected for the study.

⁷The Tribune is owned by *The Tribune Group Trust*, is English daily having significant circulation in Punjab and near regions. *The Tribune* was one of the earliest newspapers to be established in Punjab and its readership was among the upper class of Punjab and one of the most readable newspapers in community. The newspaper was founded by the Jat Sikh aristocrat Sardar Dyal Singh Majithia on 2nd February, 1881. Sardar Majithia was known for his links between the aristocracy in Punjab and the rising intelligentsia. His family had an aristocratic background and had been open to modern English education and modern liberalism (Deol 2000, 156).

⁸*Punjab Kesri*, owned by the Hind Samachar Group (HSG) is one of the largest Hindi newspapers in Punjab. It emerged as a major player in the 60's when Punjab was going through a big change. The newspaper was founded by Lala Jagat Narayan who was also its founder editor. He was a staunch Congressman and apart from participating in India's struggle for independence, he was also active in the Arya Samaj Movement (i.bid, 153).

⁹*Rojana Ajit* belongs to the Ajit Group. This newspaper is in Gurumukhi and is the largest selling Punjabi newspaper in Punjab. *Rojana Ajit* in Punjabi was launched in 1955 by Dr. Sadhu Singh Hamdard, who was its founder publisher and editor. He worked for the SGPC and was active in Quit India Movement (QIM) against the British. He was succeeded by his son Barjinder Singh Hamdard as the editor (i.bid, 154).

Punjab Kesri published the news and editorials at that time without any hesitation by given labelled as 'Ugervadi' (terrorist) to the person who were involved in the violent conflicts. The newspaper criticized them openly for their activities and looked towards state for more preferential actions against them (Deol 2000, 159). Similarly, *The Tribune* followed the same line and do not hesitate to call violence creators as 'terrorist' and looked more stick with nationalistic approach. However, *Rojana Ajit* followed slightly different from its media group. While reporting the conflict and violence, it labelled the persons in news moderately such as 'Dehshativadi', 'Ativadi' (extremist), 'Dehshatgard' (Violence Creator) and 'Dehshatpasand' (Violence Liker) etc. The newspaper had published news that was entrapped with ideology become sensationalism. This news has become successful in delivering selected identities. This was happened because of the success of media is depend on the number of readership. The vast expansion in the number of people reading newspaper and other means of mass media confirms that print media was working over the process of identity creation in Punjab (Deol 2000, 149).

Veteran journalist and former cabinet minister, Arun Shourie writes in an article that 'in journalism like as other professions, we have larger opportunists. But in a short span, two main things have converted opportunism into a threat; first the influence of people, occupying the offices of state have spread their tentacles far deep and the second is the journalists who are offering themselves to grab their favour. Now, the number of politicians has made their purchase an art¹⁰.

Print Media: Formation of Labelling and Sensitization

Labelling and sensitization are two different concepts bearing different meanings with no resemblance at all. Although in the case of Punjab, the two words relatively had become a reflection of the societal discussions as the fear was gripping the minds of the public. Fearful environment further had created fractured groups of people who discussed the issues as per their convenience. Public Sphere¹¹ is an area in social life where individuals come together to freely discuss and identify social problems and through the discourse it influence the political decision. As Gerard A. Hauser (1999) believes that vernacular public discourse not only as expressing but also as constantly creating, regulating and fine tuning public opinion through a process in which we cultivate and maintain a sense of ourselves in dialogue. Through this

¹⁰ Things to do about the press, <http://arunshourie.bharatvani.org/print/19900801.htm>, Arun Shourie, Public Union of Civil Liberties Bulletin, August 1990.

¹¹ Public sphere is "a discursive space in which individuals and groups come together to discuss matters of mutual interest" and is a peculiar character of bourgeoisie societies (Habermas 1989).

vernacular discourse we create public opinion¹² about particular issues and at the same time, in a side effect not merely incidental, we create and sustain our conceptions of identity and community.

Like as construction of social reality through stories and public discourse, media sensationalism is a term related with the mass media where the events and incidents are overhyped giving biased impression and manipulation of the truth. Most of the time sensationalism includes omitting facts to obtain more attention of the public especially readers. Sensationalism refers not only the content, but the style of presentation keeps importance as such stories focus on attention-grabbing that attract viewers and readers to buy the newspapers and big picture covers (Andersen et.al 2008, 477).

Simultaneously, the words labelling in general looked simple but the use of it according to every individual's convenience Merriam Webster online Dictionary, labelling is "a word or phrase that describes or identifies something or someone". In simple sense, the labels help to identify thing easily as per human tendency and it issued to things or person and in which context, the labels have issued for them, is important to understood. During the militancy period, the print media concisely used certain labels in news like *ugervadi* (in Hindi, equivalent to terrorist in English), *Deshhatgard*, *Dehshatmand* and *Ativadi* and more are few affixes which were frequently used for people involved in terror violence. These labels were turned more into identity formation of the person's religion which hunted Punjab so hard that the Punjabi newspaper *Rojana Ajit* came against it and blamed others two newspapers for playing games with Sikhs. Simultaneously, print media knowingly or unknowingly left no effort to sensitize the problem in which the role of English and vernacular media is under scrutiny.

According to Anthony Giddens (2013), the notion of structure is some given form, even a visible form of some sort. The agency is not merely contained within the individual; it is more flow of people's action and to connect it with the tributes of the self-consciousness. The structural properties of societies and social system are real properties, but at the same time they have no physical existence. They are real properties in the sense in which they depend upon the routine qualities of people's actions and they can be very fixed or hard. They are real properties in the sense in which they depend upon the routine qualities of people's actions

¹²According to Habermas, the *res publica* was any property generally open to the population, and in feudal times the commons was regarded as public because general access was provided to the foundation and market square. The fundamental concept is one of openness or availability (Habermas 1962)

and they can be very fixed or 'hard'. As per Durkheimian point, society is a structured phenomenon and that the structural properties of a group or a society have effects upon the way people act, feel and think.

In conflict ridden Punjab, the key players who were part of the conflict were political people, administration, militants and common public and the media particularly print media. The print media was entangled and engaged with each other and were trying to represent their own view. However, the involvement of print media during militancy and their role in creating a fractured public sphere made vast impact over the situation.

Print media published news related to the conflicts covered by labels had started debates in the community and responsible for the fractured view over the problem. The ideology was become base for awarding such labels which further produced a divided mediascape¹³. In this divided mediascape, the English and vernacular media produced fractured sphere of information and views which had put its effect over public opinion. Instead of being neutral in delivering information about the problem, the print media construct perceptions; become an issue thus created sensationalism¹⁴. All these actions help the newspapers to grow in circulation.

Opposite, the people and large groups came into discussion about the conflicts within a social system which later converted into concepts about each other's actions. These concepts eventually become reality with the passage of time and habitually continued with each other. According to Berger and Luckman (1966), the continuous process further develops an embedded meaning about the reality in society. Knowledge and people conception about the reality creates embedded scenario after continuous flow of views perpetuate over reality which loads society with socially constructed fabric of information.

Vernacular Media - The Ideological Differences

The journey of vernacular press is not older than 125 years in the Indian subcontinent and it witnessed of many changes at political and regional levels from its inception in the late 19th century. Indian modernity was special as it represented a peculiar blend of tradition and modernity in the making of what is called as 'our modernity' (Chatterjee 1997). The rise of middle class in India as an outcome of the modernization process, among other things,

¹³Mediascape refers to the mass media in context of global cultural flows. Mediascape indicates the electronic capabilities of production and dissemination, as well as, the picture of the world created and presented by the media (Appadurai 1990).

¹⁴Sensationalism according to Merriam Webster online dictionary is; the use or effect of sensational subject matter of treatment (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sensationalism>).

contributed to growing demand for English and vernacular newspapers (Neyazi 2010). The Indian modernity is also inseparable from the making of communitarian identities; it not only constituted communities but also impelled them against each other (Devika and Varghese 2011). The vernacular press of Punjab also in significant ways began to be organized on communitarian lines (Deol 2000).

The term ideology is broad in nature and has a complete set of normative values, mindful and insentient ideas that an individual, group or society observes. The nature of the ideology, positive or negative, leads the individuals and it makes impact over the society through their actions. According to TA van Dijk (2006), an ideology is narrower in scope than the ideas expressed through various concepts. The concept of ideology is often used in the media and the social sciences, but it is particularly vague. Its everyday usage is largely negative and typically refers to the rigid, misguided or partisan ideas of others. Through the large part of 20th century, both in politics and in the social sciences, the notion of ideology continued to carry its negative connotation, and were often used in opposition to objective knowledge. The Professional ideologies may be view as attempts by intellectuals to relate to society through the creation of symbolic models of reality and reductive abstractions that reflect their individuals and group interests (Kinloch 1981, 16).

The print media in the country launched in 18th century when majority of the Indian community were illiterate and were working in their own vernacular languages, though Hindi and Punjabi. In January 1780, *Bengal Gazette*, an English weekly, first time published by James Augustus from Calcutta. After establishing of the English press, the modernization process of the vernacular press in the city improved the literacy levels in vernacular languages. It was at the centre of the social reform movements all across the country. It played a pivotal role in perpetuating nationalist ideas among the Indians and thus contributed significantly to India's struggle for freedom from British colonialism (Hofmeyr et.al 2011). The mass media in India has been a vehicle of diverse and inconsistent ideologies and politics, positive and negative in its long history stretching right from the colonial time (Jeffrey 2010). It has become a tool of domination as well as resistance. The access to media and the money to run the media houses have not been available to all.

The modernization process in the country engendered the vernacular press, which in turn improved the literacy levels in vernacular languages alongside spreading modern ideas and thinking among the people through a process of cultural translation (Menon 2007). The media played a pivotal role in perpetuating nationalist ideas among the Indians and thus contributed

significantly to India's struggle for freedom from British colonialism (Seal 1971). The Indian Express¹⁵ in its article described the role of press and explained that the vernacular publications that were individually inspiring the masses to partake in the fight against the British empire by informing them about the dire situation of the Indian people.

The meaning of the Vernacular is "the form of a language that a particular group of speakers use naturally."¹⁶ According to Oxford online dictionary definition, vernacular is language or dialect spoken by the ordinary people of a country or region or the terminology used by people belonging to a specified group or engaging in a specialized activity or spoken as a one's mother tongue."¹⁷ So the meaning of the vernacular press indicates towards the press in a specific local language which is used by the majority to deliver their thoughts and sentiments while speaking. Beginning in the late 19th century, the vernacular press in Punjab witnessed a strong force to awaken the public for the rights. When the British were establishing the English language and newspapers were the key source, the Indians were dealing in journalism activities; especially in vernacular language as most of the Indians were unaware about the English language at large and a microscopic minority was getting perfect in this foreign language. During the time, the tension between Hindus and Sikhs were rising. Sikhs were trying to establish themselves as a different religion from Hindus but a segment of Hindus was disagreeing with it. Dating back to 16th century, Sikhs dissociated themselves from Hinduism and launched an action to replace Sanskrit with Guru's hymns (Uprety 1980).

In 1923, the vernacular press was become a key source to perpetuate their own view and ideology. At that time, total number of newspapers and magazines of Punjab touched to 390 publications and it touched to 661 number of publication in 1929 by various religion people. Each individual community in Punjab was arming itself with dailies, weeklies, bi-weeklies and fortnightlies, monthlies and annual numbers to represent their own view and to make attack on opponent (ibid). The Vernacular press began to play a crucial role in the Punjab politics particularly from the Punjabi *Suba* agitation onwards. It became a party in the subsequent phase of militancy in Punjab from the late 1970s onwards which was rolled into a violence phase with a clash between Sikhs and Nirankaris occurred in Amritsar. The

¹⁵ During the reign of the British empire there were several acts passed as stringent curbs over the Indian press. Prior to the rumblings of the 1857 mutiny, the press was fiercely involved in rallying the masses, and inevitably, the British Government was increasingly becoming apprehensive about the press freedom (<http://indianexpress.com/article/research/a-pre-independence-history-of-press-freedom-in-india>).

¹⁶ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/vernacular>.

¹⁷ www.freedictionaries.com/militant.

vernacular press became an important channel through conflicting positions on militancy began to get currency and there had been no area of life in Punjab which is unaffected by such a media positioning (Bassi 2012).

Print Media - The Construction of Reality

The culture plays an important role in construction of knowledge in society. As, Foucault (1980) observes that the affixed categories are established through cultural interventions and processes of mediation. The politics of construction in the creation of knowledge, information and construction of dichotomous categories like sane/insane, civilization/madness, orient/occident, etc are inextricably related to cultural politics of domination. The relegation of resistant people and groups as violent, insane, fanatic and barbaric was part of the colonial strategy of de-legitimizing popular struggles against domination (Arnold 1986).

Punjab Kesri too has the larger circulation during 1980's when Punjab was crossing from dilemma of murders and violence and every person was affected with it and a stigma over the mind or deteriorating relationship. Vernacular media has played a key role in the process of deepening India's democracy. The English media, which was mainly confined to the urban and English educated sections of society, could not play an effective role in the grassroots mobilization that started in the 1980's. The media revolution, which began with the unprecedented growth of Indian language newspapers from the 1980s, occurred parallel to the greater mobilization of the Indian masses in North India (Neyazi et.al 2010, 78). Critics such as Hall (1992) and Chomsky and Herman (1988) also argued over the issue that media is stressing over the information twentieth century media aimed at production of consent not reflection of consensus (i.bid 8). According to McLuhan, Print brought linearity. It meant that every experience could be described 'in print', pinned down, ordered, preserved, and probably sold for a price (Jeffrey 2000, 5)

The different types of branding done on the militants in different contexts by the newspapers make the environment more complicated as they frequently used as appellations like *ugarvadi* (Terrorist), *deshatmand*, *deshatpasand*, *ativadi*, *deshatvadi*, *deshtgard*, terrorist and extremist in different contexts. This issue is revealing the media preferences and the position they have taken.

Punjab Kesri

The *Punjab Kesri*, has kept tough stand on Punjab militancy, branded militants indulge in violence clearly as *Ugarvadi (Terrorist)* which is used in with a clear sense as terrorists. It often finds resemblance with the statist discourses on militancy in Punjab. *Punjab Kesri*, with Copyright © 2017, Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies

a predominant Hindu constituency of readers, has been branded often as Hindu press by newspaper like *Rojana Ajit*. The newspaper in its editorial points out the threat to the security of the public and state as well as usage of religious place for hideouts of the extremist indulge in violence as government claimed to recover arms as well which directly points out to the senior leaders of the Shiromani Akali Dal party. The newspaper in its article on 6 May, 1984, writes:

“...In order to force the government to end the blockade, Sant Longowal had threatened to send martyrs groups and Jathedars to Moga...before getting the situation worse; the government took decision to end the blockade. Now the discussion is continuing who won? Government announced that total 16 Ugerwadi (terrorists) arrested from inside the gurdwara and also recovered arms too but Sant Longowal and other Akali leaders declared it as pure lie and that no Terrorist was captured nor recovered any arms as the BSF did not have permission to enter the Gurdwaras....DC Faridkot moved into Gurdwaras along with a few local residents in the evening at 6.30 for an inspection in order to assure that there are no arms and suspected person are inside the gurdwara. They checked each of the room in gurdwara. Akali leaders can say that when they sent in Shaeedi Morcha towards Gurdwara, BSF lifted the blockade of gurdwara. The government can say it encircled the place in order to catch them from their hideouts in the gurdwara and fired at the BSF from inside...about the issue, Sardar Atma Singh, acting president SGPC, and Secretary Sardar Maan Singh has seen submitted a report to the Morcha dictator President Sant Harchand Singh Longowal. Some portion of the report has been already published in a Punjabi daily from Jalandher. According to that report, there is *jungle raj* in Moga, due to which eight people have been died.”¹⁸

(‘Who’s win?’ Editorial, *Punjab Kesri*, 6 May, 1984)

Later after 10 days of Operation Blue Star in Amritsar, *Punjab Kesri* again wrote to express their concern and worry that *ugarvadis* (Terrorists) should not be taken lightly as they can regroup and strike again. The call was on a military intelligence shared by the Major General who led the army into the Golden Temple. The newspaper raised doubts over security and showed its concern regarding security to the granthis of the Golden Temple and Shri Akal

¹⁸Translated in English from original Editorial ‘Jeet Kiski’ originally published in Hindi newspaper *Punjab Kesri* on 6 May, 1984.

Takhat. The papers indirectly hope for a stern action over the remaining terrorist in the state.

In its editorial in 17 June, 1984, *Punjab Kesri* writes

“The intensions of *ugarvadis (Terrorist)* can be understood from the reply of Major General Brar that the life of granthis of Golden Temple and Akal Takht are still under danger and hence they have security arrangements at their houses too. In army security, they are coming to Harmandir Sahib and taken back.....Major General Brar accepted that still *ugarvadis (Terrorists)* moves in small groups inside the state and hope that sooner they will be under control.”¹⁹

(‘Still Need to be more careful’, Editorial, *Punjab Kesri*, 17 June, 1984)

In a subsequent editorial the newspaper raises its concerns about the proposal of withdraw army from Punjab as they see *ugarvadi(Terrorist)* still quite active in the state. It reminds the central government the poor law and order situation in the state calls for informed decision in this connection. The newspaper again looked worried for the security as the Army started to return from the key highways and other places, the threat to the security has risen and recovery of arms is a proof of it. It makes base of arrest of terrorists on routine bases. It also points out over murders continue in state on daily bases and attributes the complete responsibility of Operation Blue Star to SGPC. The newspaper again writes on 15 July, 1984

“.....While demanding to call back the army from Punjab, it should not be forgotten that at a time when the army is vacating the national highways and other public places, a lot of ammunition is being recovered on a daily basis and more and more suspected *ugarvadi (Terrorist)* are being captured. Violent incidents still occur though in limited scale. In July, number of murders is declined but one or two murders continue to occur on every day basis. “Moreover Sikh Student Federation once again revived their activities under its new name the Black Beard.....It is well known that SGPC did not adequately honored their responsibility to uphold the Guru’s shrine in the sanctity. This is pointed out not only by the government but even opposition parties endorse this.”²⁰

(‘To the Akali Leaders’, Editorial, *Punjab Kesri*, 15 July, 1984)

¹⁹Translated in English from Editorial ‘*Abhiaursavdhanikejaroorathai*’ originally published in Hindi newspaper *Punjab Kesri* on 17 June, 1984.

²⁰Translated in English from original Editorial ‘Akali Netaon Se’ originally published in Hindi newspaper *Punjab Kesri* on 15 July, 1984

Punjab Kesri also calls for Hindu-Sikh unity and suggested for renovation of Golden Temple and building friendly relation between the communities. It also called the Akali leadership to work for community amity and resolve the fissures in social fabric created by the activities of *ugarvadi (Terrorist)* instead of organizing *Shaeedi Jathas*.

“In order to bring Punjab into normalcy and heal the wounds of the people it is utmost important that *Karseva* for renovation Darbar Sahib should start immediately. The five Singh Sahibans also insisted to start this work without any delay. The octogenarian Sikh leader Baba Kharag Singh also accepted the proposal. In the task of renovation, if the Hindus and the Sikhs work together then the differences between the two would be bridged at the larger level. But it is said that after one-and-a-half-hour talk consultation with friends of *ugarvadi (Terrorist)*, *Baba Kharag Singh* now have withdrawn his support to the idea. of renovation. It is a matter of concern if what is said is true....we know that Akali leaders are not keen to listen to us. But for the future of Punjab and them also, we definitely want to say that they should act after thinking and understanding and they should never do the kind of work which would upset the peaceful environment” (Ibid)²¹.

In short, the *Punjab Kesri* in its editorials brought a strong discourse of security concern in the state before and after the Operation Blue Star from extremists in Sikh community but called them *Ugervadis (Terrorists)*. Their attitude towards SGPC and Akali Dal has been extremely critical for their role in the whole violence movement but largely ignores to discuss role of Centre Government. The striking similarity of its editorial appears with the viewpoint of state that underlines branding of militants as *ugravadis (Terrorists)* in all its deliberations.

Rojana Ajit

The editorials of second vernacular newspaper, *Rojana Ajit*, in line with their communitarian and ideological leanings, has been describing the militants involved in the violence as *ativadis*, a carefully chosen tag which is soft in intensity than usage of *ugarvadi (Terrorist)* labelled by selected Hindi and English newspaper, but makes disparity between them and general Sikh public. The newspaper apart from other newspapers, makes issue of labelling affixed before the Sikh community and strongly denounced and showed its resentment to newspapers, especially *Punjab Kesri* and *The Tribune* for their leanings to

²¹Translated in English from original Editorial ‘Akali Netaon Se’ originally published in Hindi newspaper *Punjab Kesri* on 15 July, 1984

brand Sikhs as *ugervadi* (Terrorist), written after Operation Blue star. In their editorial on 19 July, 1984 written by Dr. Sadhu Singh Hamdard, editor of *Rojana Ajit* take relief with the fact that the Prime Minister refused to brand every Sikh as *ativadi*.

“I appeal to all that now we should not be going back to the cases of *ativadis*. We are notifying every looter as *ativadi* or *deshtpasand*. The newspapers even brand clean shaved people from other states as Sikhs and miscreants among them are called *ativadis*. But now even Smt. Indira Gandhi said that every Sikh is not *ativadi*”.

(‘You have taken pain Sadhu Singh Hamdard’, Editorial, *Rojana Ajit*, 20 July, 1984)²²

The growing tendency of branding Sikhs as *Ativadis*, which is allegedly the handwork of vested interests and the English and Hindi newspaper denounced Sikhs for indulge in terror violence and marked them terrorist but why they were called terrorist was a issue of research which ignored by the large media circle to brand Sikhs as *ugervadi* (Terrorist) which could be able to develop more gap between both the communities, facing lack of faith. In its argument, *Rojana Ajit* declared whole mess a deliberate concern. It looked worried over issue of labelling as a threat to the peace of society. In an editorial on 21 July, 1984 in *Rojana Ajit* by the then editor, Dr. Sadhu Singh Hamdard, writes:

“All the *Ativadis* seen as Sikhs, and this perception, we say will create more difference between Hindus and Sikhs. Now even Smt. Gandhi has stated that calling all Sikhs as *Ativadi* is wrong. The truth is that is a misconception spread deliberately by a few people and Sikhs would mind it. If we continue see and discuss all *Ativadis* as Sikhs, then this will lead to further discussion that why and how someone become *Ativadi*. I want to say only this that should not be recollecting the tough times so we should not enter into discussion on *ativadis*”.

(‘You have taken pain Sadhu Singh Hamdard’, Editorial, *Rojana Ajit*, 21th July, 1984)²³

Keeping the core issue of labelling Sikhs bestow with different affiliation over violence in Punjab, the main concern which print media largely escaped, are Sikhs itself responsible for

²²Editorial ‘Le LeyaDakhu Dana Sadhu Singh Hamdarda’ originally published in Punjabi in *Rojana Ajit* newspaper on 20 July 1984 translated in English.

²³Translated in English from original Editorial ‘Le LeyaDakhu Dana Sadhu Singh Hamdarda’ originally published in Punjabi in *Rojana Ajit* newspaper on 21 July 1984.

selecting the path of violence and threat for security? Print media cornered the certain issues which confined Sikhs for indulging in violence. The role of print media while reporting over Punjab violence, observed roughly and print media looked into confrontation with each other due to divided mediascape over security and violence. Print media criticism due to difference in ideological approaches, developed vacuum and sympathy. Dr. Sadhu Singh Hamdard writes:

“Also we have appealed to the people; the basic meaning of that appeal was that the assault on Akal Takht (whoever is responsible) created wounds in the hearts of Punjabis; now it is time to heal such wounds. Even those people who may not be in agreement with me that the Jalandher press is responsible for the problem, even then my appeal is appropriate that for this healing Jalandher Press can jointly play a lead role” (Ibid)²⁴.

The argument regarding security issues and alienation was a point of worry for Sikh community as the Gurdwaras were allegedly used to provide shelter to people indulged in Punjab militancy and it has been condemned by Centre Government and denounced by others too which need to be settled down with the consent of all Sikh bodies. But the very basic argument to give rights to Punjab state, the main argument by the Sikh bodies, still in limbo over step-motherly behaviour by the Centre Government and majority community means Hindus with Punjab which is the key force to push Sikhs to the wave of violence. In an editorial by *Rojana Ajit* on 3rd May, 1984 writes²⁵.

“The appeal issued from five Singh Sahibans has been published by *Ajit* as it is. Before making this appeal Singh Sahibans talked to Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Talwandi group, *Akhand Kirtni Jatha*, Sikh Student Federation, *Babar Khalsa* Youth Akali Dal and members of SGPC and listened to their views. After which Singh Sahibans appealed to all the concerned to agree upon the 6 points they put forward. Following are those six points; no individual should take any fight any time Inside the Darbar Sahib Amritsar Complex, stop all threatening, tortures and

²⁴Translated in English from original Editorial ‘Le Leya Dakhu Dana Sadhu Singh Hamdarda’ originally published in Punjabi in *Rojana Ajit* newspaper on 21 July 1984.

²⁵Singh Sahibans are the five Sikh high priests of the Akal Takht, supreme for all Sikh Community. During the time of militancy, when people were getting killed on the roads and inside the Darbar Sahib complex where thousands of devotees pay obeisance regularly became a matter of great concern for all. At that moment, Singh Sahibans made an appeal to all the Sikh groups in Punjab to make situation peaceful and issued an appeal where they want assurance from all the moderate and hardliner groups to maintain peace inside the Darbar Sahib complex. This appeal was issued around one month before the Operation Bluestar.

killings of human beings, there should not be any killing inside the premises of Darbar Sahib at any cost, stop hate speeches and allegations between the groups which only increase the gap between the groups, Start working on regaining the respect and power of the community and the purity of Darbar Sahib should be maintained at any cost.....The territory of Punjab is being grabbed away. Putting all the law and order in the backburner, the water of Punjab is being taken away from the state. The situation is grave that though Punjab owns the water, it is disallowed to use it. Chandigarh was built for Punjab and in lieu of that the two districts Abohar and Fazilka has been taken away. Hurdles are created everywhere in using the recycled water released through canals from the Ropar Power Plant. ”

(‘Through the Light of Singh Sahibans Appeal’, Editorial, *Rojana Ajit*, 3 May, 1984)²⁶

The labelling to Punjab Violence become an issue of debate between the media houses the labels brought fear to the security and disconnection of Sikhs from main stream. The stand of English and Hindi regarding Punjab violence was tough than *Rojana Ajit*, which generate questions over procedure of selection to develop labels for certain group of people who are fighting for independent state while fading their role in fight for independence and three wars and things are develop in connection with political leaders. *Rojana Ajit* in its allegation over *The Tribune* editor writes:

“Sikh brotherhood lost the sympathy that they had gained from different political parties in the country....Are Sikhs supporters of Khalistan? So many times Akali made it clear that they are not in favor of Khalistan instead of that they are part of Hindustan. This position remains unchanged even today. The said incidents of Punjab are not related to Khalistan; but vested interest forcefully try to create an impression in that direction; but Sikh community has nothing to do with that....We laughed at the writing of our friend who is a friend of Mrs. Gandhi, and also immature. We know that he our brother will be angry on us on this issue; but we request him discussion on such serious matters should be based on correct position

²⁶Translated in English from original Editorial ‘Singh Sahibaan Di Appeal Di RoshniCh, Ativad ate TashdadKithon ate KyonPaidahunda Hai’ originally published in Punjabi newspaper *Rojana Ajit* on 3 May, 1984.

and facts. He also cannot say that we misrepresented his writing or torn it. We have taken this from the group's Punjabi language paper".²⁷

(‘Wrong talks are dangerous,’ Editorial, *Rojana Ajit*, 10 July, 1984)

The Tribune

The Tribune explicitly expressed its nationalist predilections with the writings and news related with militancy incidents occurred in Punjab. The editorials of *The Tribune* in their evaluation of the incidents, kept centric view to keep the situation under control, however, it remained on target of ‘vernacular newspaper’ like *Rojana Ajit*. The latter condemned *The Tribune* for their alleged anti Sikh stands and describing them as terrorist. However, *The Tribune* often ignored such allegations and did not respond in a same manner. The security in state was worsening with the passage of day which was evident with the incidents occurring at various places but the state government looked ignorant about the situation and the policemen and their families are on their target and the security in the state looks fragile. *The Tribune* in its argument writes about the worsening situation of law and order on 3rd May, 1984:

“There was a glib claim about the administration having come to grips with the terrorist’s problem. What sort of a grip it became frightfully evident by an event that took place at Amritsar within 24 hours? Two terrorists on a bicycle gunned down Mr. Bachan Singh, retired Deputy Superintendent of Police, his wife and gunman and left the scene without any trouble. Mr. Sethi has proposed to set up a ‘task force’ to deal with the terrorists. More paramilitary units are being sent as proof of the administration having started reacting to terrorist’s activities”.²⁸

(‘Time for Delhi to Act’, Editorial, *The Tribune*, 3 May, 1984)

The security and violence whereas become curse for public, the political parties looked ignorant about the issue, which gave support to militancy in a manner and trying to reap crop of votes but the murders in state has no mean for them. The argument through an article of K.R. SundeRajan related with the statement of congress (I) to see Bhindranwale as primarily a religious leader is seen as an attempt to oversee the subversive activities of the militant leader.

²⁷Translated in English from original Editorial ‘GalatGallanKerniyankhatarnak, Sikhannu desh di dharanalonkaunvakhkerrehahai’ originally published in Punjabi newspaper *Rojana Ajit* on 3 May, 1984.

²⁸Editorial ‘Time for Delhi to Act’ originally published in English newspaper *The Tribune* on 3 May, 1984.

“Take for instance, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi’s statement in Chandigarh that Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale is a religious leader and has shown no inclination towards politics. The Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) is up in arms against this assessment. According to Mr. L.K Advani, Mr. Gandhi description of Sant Jarnail Singh as a religious leader amounts not only to condoning violence but to giving murder and mayhem religious respectability. In his view Mr. Gandhi’s clarification only proves to the hilt the charge made by the BJP that the Congress (I) has been consciously and systematically projecting the Sant as the principal leader to the Sikhs and has been trying to boost his personally, totally unmindful of the fact that his has been the greatest contribution towards vitiating the atmosphere in Punjab.”²⁹

(‘Not by Guns Alone’, Article, *The Tribune*, 7 May, 1984)

Though the conflict between the state and militants was continue from last few years but it was fighting on the name separate homeland for Sikhs and for the sake, fraction of public was on the target of militants but it is difficult to understand that the key leader of rebellion group, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale was not in the favour of Khalistan which was a relief sign for the Government. In an argument, *The Tribune* on 7th May, 1984 writes:

“While denying the contention that they had given a clean chit to Sant Jarnail Singh, the two Janta leaders who enjoy great esteem all over the country said, when we asked Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale whether Khalistan was his ultimate objective, he immediately responded by saying that taking into consideration the sacrifices his community had made during the freedom struggle. There was no reason why he should think of opting out of the Indian union. It was as much theirs as of others and there was no question of leaving it” (Ibid).³⁰

The relationship of the state and press was very crucial as the stand of English and Vernacular newspapers was observed different on the Punjab militancy problem. Every newspaper made its point clear on the crisis problem. The gap in the ideologies and labelling by the press only add the tension and friction in the print media fraternity. *The Tribune* in its argument on 14 June writes:

“Press publicity and comments in a crisis situation of the kind prevailing in Punjab cannot be entirely or even largely favourable to the government. While newspapers

²⁹K.R. Sunder Rajan’s Article ‘Not by Guns Alone’ published in English newspaper *The Tribune* on 7 May, 1984.

³⁰(i.bid)

must do nothing to add to the difficulties of the authorities, civil and military, they have to access the developments according to their reasoning....The peremptory restrictions on news coverage when the army action around the golden temple complex began made one wonder whether the government was fighting the press addition to the terrorists.”³¹

(‘Press Relations in Punjab’, Article, *The Tribune*, 14 June, 1984) (Bassi 2012)

Conclusion

‘Media is known as fourth pillar in a democracy’ denotes the significance of the media for a country. The role of media during peace time is far different than crucial period of conflict and war but in Punjab during conflict period of 1984, thereview of selected editorials of *The Tribune*, *Punjab Kesri* and *Rojana Ajit* newspapers brought a crucial reality on floor that print media in Punjab was looked divided while fighting with militancy. Whereas *Punjab Kesri*denoted the people indulged in violence *Ugravadi*(terrorist) and condemned them as anti-nationaland urged government totacklethem with hard hands. *The Tribune* though remained critical of the state as well as violence group along with freedom of press named militants as ‘terrorist’ and had very littlesympathy for them. Though the language of the newspapers is different but their nationalist stand along with admiration of the Centre Government for the stern action against the violence is not an exaggeration point for media but lesser focusing over failure of government in their duties is a matter of concern. On the contrary, *Rojana Ajit* looked more worried and aggressive for Punjab rights and confronting over the stand of centre government for denying rights. Instead of naming terrorist, it chose appellations like *ativadis* and *dehshatpasand*, which is nearly equivalent to extremist in English. At the same time, it also attempts to highlight the material and religious reasons behind conflict, alongside divides created by the governance. It sometimes criticizes*ativadis* as anti-nationals and separatists but It describe the reason behind the trouble is not an impulsiveoutbreak but outcome of concrete circumstances of discriminations and insultof Sikhs.The role of journalism and news have always been much more complex activity than simply providing a window on the world because a view through the window is large or small, has many panes or few, whether the glass is opaque or clear. The role of journalism is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable but the trends towards the market driven

³¹K.R. Sunder Rajan’s Article ‘Press Relations in Punjab’ published in English newspaper *The Tribune* on 14 June, 1984.

journalism where various interests of the audience and the advertisers remains on preference. Independence of the press in such a significant situation whereas crucial for smooth running of the system, it also helps to keep the public in high enthusiasm. This is one aspect of media but the other side of the media is; expansion of print media brought many kinds of pressure on it as lot of people have attached with it due to various reasons and targets. Though, the news media have expanded; it often loses the plot, content and cross the limits while covering sensitive stories and left deep-rooted inequality and injustice with the content and case of print media of Punjab during militancy is an example of that.

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