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SECULARISM- ON THE TOUCHSTONES OF NEWSPAPER HEADLINES “A STUDY OF THE NEWSPAPER HEADLINES ON ALLAHABAD HIGH COURT VERDICT ON ‘RAM JANMABHOOMI-BABRI MASJID’ ISSUE”

Dr. Rajendra Mohanty*¹

¹Asst. Professor, (Mass Communication) at Kushabhau Thakre Patrakarita Avam Jansanchar
Vishwavidyalaya, Raipur, INDIA

*Correspondence Author: mohantyrajendra@gmail.com



ABSTRACT

Secularism is the backbone of the Indian Constitution. According to article 25, all those who reside in India are free to confess, practice and propagate religion of one's choice subject of course to social health and law and order (1). The pluralistic character of the country, which has been attributed as the greatest asset of India, sometimes, however, becomes the liability when communal frenzy takes shape. Hence, the role of mass media becomes extremely important in maintaining the pluralist character of the society and thereby strengthening the democracy of the country.

This paper seeks to look into how the newspapers represented one of the most important news events of our time- the Allahabad High Court Verdict on 'Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid' issue- the issue that has witnessed several communal violence's over last several decades.

Keywords:

Secularism, democracy of the country, Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid.

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1. INTRODUCTION

"I do not expect India of my dreams to develop one religion, i.e., to be wholly Hindu or wholly Christian or wholly Mussalman, but I want it to be wholly tolerant, with its religions working side by side with one another," So said Mahatma Gandhi.

The father of nation was always in for a pluralistic Indian society with all the religion co-existing in India peacefully and thriving. The vision of the father of the nation was also captured well when the constitution for the new Indian Republic was adopted. The Preamble to the "Constitution of India" declares that India is a secular country.

Even though the country was divided into two on the basis of religion, India accepted democracy and secularism with equal right to all its citizens.

The term secularism refers to the governmental practice of indifference towards religion. Secular politics attempt to prevent religious philosophies or bodies from influencing governmental policies. The philosophy that the Indian constitution upholds is a kind of "Secular humanism." Secular humanism made relevant through a historical development of the ideology within the context of religious pluralism in India. The Constitution of India prohibits discrimination against members of a particular religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth (en.wikipedia.org).

According to dictionary, Secular means Not Religious or spiritual (2). Secularism in India has very different meaning and implications. The word secularism has never been used in Indian context in the sense in which it has been used in Western countries i.e. in the sense of atheism or purely this worldly approach, rejecting the other-worldly beliefs. India is a country where religion is very central to the life of people.

India's age-old philosophy as expounded in Hindu scriptures called Upanishads is **sarva dharma samabhava**, which means respect for all belief systems.

This could well be attributed to Swam Vivekanand when he wrote to a Muslim friend in 1898 " For our own motherland, a junction of the two great systems, Hindusim and Islam- Vedanta brain and Islam body- is the only hope. (3)

But for Nehru, secularism, both as a personal philosophy and state policy, was an expression of India's cultural-civilisation personality and not its negation and repudiation. Secularism suited India's requirement as he saw them (4). On the other hand, "many observers have been astonished by India's survival as a pluralist state. But India could hardly have survived as anything else. Pluralism is a reality that emerges from the very nature of the country; it is a choice made inevitably by India's geography and reaffirmed by its history (5)."

But there are differences of opinion on this subject too. To quote M. S. Golwalkar (*Bunch of Thoughts by Golwalkar*) one of the leading figures of Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) "It is ironic that the government is talking about secularism after having chosen the symbol of a theocratic state-Asoka Chakra- as India's national emblem. According to the Hindu tradition, the state always has to be secular. It has never accepted theocracy. It grants total freedom to every individual to follow a mode of worship of his or her choice. It does not permit discrimination on the basis of one's faith, either in society or in the state's relationship with citizens. It has never identified the state with any single form of worship (6)

Similarly as eminent Harvard economist Amartya Sen in his book '*Argumentative Indian*' puts it, "secularism as it is practised in India... reflects the sum of the collective feelings of intolerance of the different communities and is not based on combining their respective capacities for tolerance." (7)

However, secularism in the present context in India has been summed well by Asgar Ali Engineer when he said "India is a pluralist democracy and it was pluralist even before it became democratic. Its ethos happens to be pluralistic and have been its strength for centuries. Our secularism thus

carries more sense of pluralism than an atheistic political ideology... A secular democracy is bound to have majority religion and minority religions and they can co-exist without any conflict if state remains either equidistance from all religions or equally protective of all religions.”(8)

Despite all these, ‘communalism is a pervasive phenomenon in the public life of India and communal riots are the ugliest expression. Communal riots have become an integral part of communalism in India... though India was not new to communal riots, the first recorded riots were in the year 1714, 1715 & 1716 and in 1750... Maximum communal riots in India took place during 1923-26’ (9)

According to experts, communal riots are not spontaneous. They usually arise due to the political interests which are often related to economic interests.

Ramashray Upadhyaya in his book *‘Indian Muslim in a Whirlpool’* writes “the communal polarisation of Hindus and Muslims in the Indian sub-continent started with national renaissance movement particularly after the advent of British rule in this country.

The politicization of this divide got further momentum after the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 as the Muslim leadership which looked at the party as more for the Hindus, dissociated from it and formed the All India Muslim League in 1906.”

The communal hostilities intensified with passage of time and controversies about sharing power between Hindus and Muslim elite and constitutional arrangement for sharing power.

Even though political and economic interests could be attributed to the main cause of communal frenzy in the country, there was a socio-cultural-political angle also which in times, could play a significant role in raking up religious mistrust and thereby animosity between different communities. The Ram Mandir- Babri Masjid issue is one of such classic examples that fall under this category. Even though the matter came to the centre stage of India’s social and political life in early 90s of the 20th century, its genesis goes back to year 1885 when according to the *Gazetter* of Faizabad district wrote “when the Muslim mounted an attack in 1885, they took possession of the Ramjanmabhoomi and attacked the Hanuman Garhi but were repulsed. (10)”

With the ‘Ram Mandir- Babri Masjid issue’ was taken up at the political level, which political analysts term as the emergence of ‘Hindutwa’ politics in the beginning of the 90s, the already polarised communities got more polarised on the basis of religion and political affiliation. “Ramjanmabhoomi movement” resulted in sharp polarisation of Hindus and Muslims in late 20th century, which continues until today (11).”

The issue saw large scale communal riots across the country. Since then, politics has been the major cause of communal riots.

News media has been playing a significant role in disseminating information and educating the people of this country for the last several decades. While doing this, News media also been documenting the socio-cultural and political happenings a document for the sake of history. As we are discussing the impact of the Ramjanmabhoomi movement on the lives of people in this

country- it is equally pertinent to discuss how the judgment of Allahabad High Court over the 'Ram Mandir- Babri Masjid issue' in Sept 30, 2010, which was historic in many counts, was covered/ documented by the newspapers in the country.

This paper will look at how the print media in the country reported this event. Given the fact that, newspaper headlines creates the first and lasting impression about the news on the psyche of its readers, this researcher has decided to see how the newspapers have dealt with this important incident through their headlines.

MEDIA AND NEWSPAPER IN INDIA

Thomas Jefferson, the founding father of USA who also wrote the Declaration of Independence had said "The basis of our governments being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter..." in year 1787.

More than 225 years later, this statement, it appears more relevant in case of modern democracies across the world. And it is more so in a vigorous and vibrant democracy like India, where the media, not only guards the democracy against evils but also purges it of a host of socio-political, cultural and economic impurities that tend to eat into its basic fabric now and then.

Ever since its birth in 1780, Newspapers in India have passed through different phases of evolution. 'The history of press in India could be classified into three phase i.e. colonial, nationalist and post-independence (12).' The post-independence period could also be divided into pre-emergency and post-emergency periods. In the present context, as we are living in a globalised world, to quote Marshal McLuhan 'in a global village' (13) the media scenario has been changing with a rapid pace. The pace of News gathering and news dissemination has witnessed a sea change. New communication technology and digitisation has, in fact, given a new dimension to the news industry altogether across the globe, with India being no exception. However, what was distinct about India, during all this development was that, while newspaper circulation and readership clocked a negative growth in developed world, Indian Newspaper industry has been witnessing a robust growth.

According to a report on newspapers growth, Indian newspaper industry has become the largest in the world surpassing the US and China with 2,700 dailies. There is a 44 per cent increase in the number of newspapers in India since 2005. A study titled 'World Press trends 2010' published by the World Association of Newspapers (WAN-IFRA) says that India also has the world's highest paid-for daily circulation, having surpassed China for the first time in 2008. The US has got 1,397 paid-for daily newspaper titles and China 1,000. The growth of newspaper industry has been attributed to the increasing rate of literacy in the country. According to the government estimates, the literacy rate in the country has gone up from 35 per cent in 1976 to 82 per cent in 2009. (14)

On the other hand the Indian Media industry has also recorded impressive growth during the last one decade. According to the *Economic Times of India*, "The Indian media and entertainment industry is expected to grow at a compounded annual growth rate of 13.2% to reach a size of Rs

1.19 lakh crore by 2015, said consulting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) in a media outlook report. The Indian industry grew by 11.2%, one of the highest growth rates in the world, in 2010 on the back of improved economic conditions and rebound in advertising (15).

The media ignites the opinion building process and impact the political decisions and audience's reactions in society. This eventually shapes the course of prevalent crisis and conflicts (16). With this kind of growth of the media, its profound impact on public psyche could well be gauged.

ROLE OF NEWSPAPERS IN REPORTING COMMUNAL CONFLICTS/ ISSUES

The media by nature play an extremely important role for any socio-political situation irrespective of the boundary they hold (Mohanka, 2005). Be it the cause of news reporting on important events, or setting agenda before the public and the government for any issue or discussing political development, it is the media that plays an important role. But the role of media becomes all important in cases of war or communally sensitive issues. Do the Indian media play the role of a natural observer in such cases?

“Is the media, both print and electronic, against Indian Muslim? My reply will be, by and large, a guarded ‘Yes’, since there are many notable exceptions, especially in the English Newspapers. I can’t say the same about the Hindi and the other language press,” writes Rafiq Zakaria (17), a scholar of international repute.

Another Muslim scholar Asgar Ali Engineer writes “the media, both print and electronic play no mean role. It also fall victim to majoritarian attitude with some honorable exceptions. Some newspapers display almost chauvinistic attitude and condemn minorities outright without appreciating their problems (18)”. On the other hand B P Sanjay, a renowned media academician writes “Liberlisation and the slow erosion of the institution of the editors in newspapers is a cause of concern. The ethics of the press and its role in sensitive issues such as communal riots has also come under scrutiny and introspection (19).”

Many scholar believe that the Indian Media forgot to prioritise issues and failed to act upon them. Senior Indian journalist Manoj Mitta along with H.S. Phoolka in the book ‘when a tree shook Delhi’ writes that media focused on the assasination of Indira Gandhi and did not care enough about the Sikh murders during the roits (the 1984 Sikh riots), notes Saifuddin Ahmad in his research paper titled ‘The role of Media during communal riots in India.’ On press coverage of the Godhra riots in Gujarat in year 2002, he went on to say that “there were two different approaches followed by the local and the national media. The local section of the press covered the events from a pro Hindutwa stand... while the national media were overtly critical of the channelised attacks against Muslims.

NEWS HEADLINES & BANNERS

According to Dictionary of Journalism (20), a **Banner** is the headline for a story of unusual importance, stretching the entire width of the page. The dictionary also defined Headline as ‘the title of a newspaper/magazine story.

Headlines or heads as they are called are the display window of newspaper. Headlines are like label. They tell us what is inside the story. Headlines are an advertisement for the story. A good headline will reach out and attract the reader. When it is bright, informative, clear and accurate, the readers are hooked. They read on, that's the basic objective behind headlines (21).

While headlines give relative seriousness of the news to the readers, it also guide the readers to stories in which they are interested in. In fact, it summarizes the story for the readers. On the other hand, a banner headline is used for **special occasion** on the front page (Saxena, 2007).

According to *Headline writing*, headlines help reader judge the relative importance of a news report. ... (Besides) headlines lend a distinct character and identity to newspapers. Headlines also reflect emotions such as anger, joy or sadness by using appropriate adjectives or adverbs (22). According to this book, a banner is a headline that runs across all the eight columns on top of the front page. The banner is used for momentous events and is set in big and bold letters.

According to *Editing, A Handbook for Journalists*, headlines have to tell the story to draw the reader's attention and must fulfill the objectives of attracting attention, selling the story, telling the facts and dressing up the page (23).

The headline attracts the reader to go through the story. It tells him what the story is all about. Thus a headline sells the story (24)

THE GENESIS OF THE 'RAM MANDIR- BABRI MASJID ISSUE

Hindus believe that Ayodhya is the birthplace of Lord Ram, one of the avatars of Lord Vishnu. The land is, therefore, considered sacred and befitting the profile of a holy pilgrimage. The communal tension over the land took root to the claim that a Masjid was allegedly been constructed by the Muslim emperor Babur, after destroying the temple. This was believed to have been occurred in the early 16th century. Presently Ayodhya is in the Faizabad district in Uttar Pradesh state of India.

As early as 1767, Joseph Tieffenthaler, a Jesuit priest, recorded in his French works that were Hindus worshipping and celebrating Ramanavami at the site of the mosque. In 1788, he recorded that Emperor Aurangzeb demolished the fortress called Ramkot to establish a Mahometan temple (25).

A book 'A Historical Sketch of Fyzabad Tehsil' by British officer (P Carnegie) who was officiating as a Commissioner and Settlement Officer, Faizabad, in 1861 was based on what he found was "locally affirmed" and his own surmises - Ayodhya must at least have possessed a fine temple in the Janmasthan. The dispute was initially only regarding Chabutra adjoining the Babri Masjid. He further wrote: "It seems that in 1528 Babar visited Ayodhya and under his orders this ancient temple was destroyed". There is slender evidence to conclude that Babar ever passed Ayodhya (26).

The District Gazetteer of 1905 notes that till 1855, Hindus and Muslims prayed in the same premise which is now contentious Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid site. (27)

For a long time before and after Independence, the Hindu effort to reclaim the Ramjanmabhoomi site mainly followed a legal course. After the 1885 incident, Mahant Raghubar Dass, a local Hindu leader, appealed to the Faizabad District Court that an order be given for the construction of a temple on Janmabhoomi. On March 18, 1886, the judge of the court, a British named Col. F.E.A.Chamier passed the following order: ‘I visited the land in dispute yesterday in presence of all parties. I found that the Masjid built by Emperor Babar stands on the border of Ayodhya, that is to say, to the west and south. It is clear of habitants. It is most unfortunate that a masjid should have been built on the land specially held sacred by the Hindus. But as that occurred 356 years ago, it is too late now to remedy the grievance. All that can be done is to maintain the party in status quo’ (28).

In 1934 riots, which were triggered off by the slaughter of a cow in the village of Shahjahanpur near Ayodhya, riotous mobs demolished part of the wall surrounding the mosque and damaged the domes. However, the mosque was restored at the cost of the Government (29).

L K Advani in his autobiography has it that ‘on the night of 22-23 December 1949, some people installed the idols of Ram, Sita and Lakshman inside the disputed structure, which has remained locked since 1934. K.K. Nayar, the District Magistrate of Faizabad at the time when the province of Up was ruled by a Congress government, allowed Puja of the idols to be performed daily in the sanctum sanctorum. He further writes that the Allahabad High Court in its judgment on April 1955 on a writ filed by some Muslims, upheld the Hindu’s unrestricted right of worship.

In 1986 (Feb 01), while hearing an application by a lawyer of Ayodhya, Umesh Chandra Pandey, the district judge Faizabad, ordered to open the locks for the disputed site forthwith and not to impose any restrictions or cause hurdle in the darshan and puja, etc. of the applicant and other members of the community in general (<http://twocircles.net/news/indian-muslim>)

In 1989, the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi allowed shilanyas, or ground breaking ceremony, at a nearby undisputed site. The hearing of the case was shifted to the high court. And on Sept 25, 1990, the then Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president Lal Krishna Advani launched Rath Yatra from Somnath to Ayodhya. In Nov 1990, his rath was stopped and he was arrested in Samastipur, Bihar. Following this the VP Singh led coalition government at the centre fell after the BJP withdrew support (30).

Though the BJP took the issue in 1990s, it was the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) which was politicised and nationalised the issue since 1980s. After the fall of the V P Singh government on the issue, the Congress party came to power at the Centre whereas riding the temple movement wave, the BJP wrested power in Uttar Pradesh.

The demand for which the mass mobilisation was aimed by the VHP was to open the lock of the Babri Masjid and permit puja and darshan. After the lock was opened, the next demand was handing over the entire site for construction of Ramjanmabhumi Temple and shifting of the mosque outside panchkoshi parikrama. Yielding to the pressure, the then UP state government acquired the place surrounding the place in the name of providing certain facilities to the pilgrims. However VHP declared a Kar Seva (Labour Contribution) at the disputed site on Dec 06, 1992

and mobilised masses from all over the country for Ram Temple. The Babri Masjid was demolished on Dec 6, 1992 by the mobs at the site.

This led to riots in which large number of people killed in communal riots across the country. Ten days after the Babri Masjid demolition, the Liberhan commission was set up to probe the circumstances that led to the demolition. Then the Union Government issued ordinance named 'Acquisition of Certain Area at Ayodhya Ordinance' on 7.1.93 for acquisition of 67.703 acres of land, including the site of Babri Masjid. The Ordinance was later replaced by an Act.

In a landmark judgment of 1995, the Supreme Court found nothing unconstitutional in the acquisition of mosque under the land acquisition act 1894 and justified the acquisition of Babri Mosque for public purpose under the Acquisition of Certain Area at Ayodhya Act, 33 of 1993 (31).

The Allahabad High Court on March 05, 2003 ordered the Archaeological Survey of India to carry out excavation at the disputed site of Rama Janmabhumi - Babri Masjid to ascertain whether a temple existed at the place where the Babri Masjid was constructed. On Aug 22, 2003, ASI submitted its final report to the High Court. The 574-page report says that excavation found distinctive features of a 10th century temple beneath the Babri Masjid site. (Times of India, Sept 30,2010).

On Sep 30, 2010, the Lucknow bench of Allahabad High Court of Justice S. U. Khan, Justice D. V. Sharma and Justice Sudhir Agrawal gave its verdict on the Ayodhya title suit on ownership of the disputed land. The bench decides on four title suits: Gopal Singh Visharad Vs. Others; Nirmohi Akhara Vs. Babu Priya Dutt Ram & Others; Sunni Central Board of Waqf Vs. Gopal Singh Visharad & Others; and Bhagwan Sri Ramlalla Virajman Vs. Rajendra Singh & Others (32).

“A Special full bench of Allahabad High Court has ruled that the disputed land in Ayodhya where the Babri Masjid stood for 500 years until it was demolished in 1992 shall be divided into three parts. A two-thirds portion is to be shared by two Hindu plaintiffs and one-third will be given to the Sunni Central Board of Waqf.” (33)

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The basic objective of the study was to see how the mainstream news media, especially the daily newspapers, have dealt with such a sensitive issue. Through this research, *it was envisaged to study the secular credentials of the newspapers by analysing their headlines after the High Court verdict on the Rama Janmabhumi - Babri Masjid was delivered. In the process it was studied whether the headlines were 'value neutral' or 'value addition' to the news.*

Hypothesis:

NEWSPAPER HEADLINES HAD A MAJORITARIAN BIAS ON COMMUNALLY SENSITIVE ISSUES

Data Collection:

Data collection for the research was done from the newspapers. As the study was on the headlines by the newspapers on the Lucknow bench of Allahabad High Court on *Rama Janmabhumi - Babri Masjid* issue, data collection was done from six newspapers, three English and Three Hindi, dated Sept 30, 2010 and Oct 01, 2010.

The newspapers taken for the study includes 1. The Indian Express (Nagpur Edition) 2. The Hindu (New Delhi Edition) 3. The Times of India (New Delhi Edition) 4. The Rastriya Sahara (New Delhi Edition) 5. The Nav Bharat (Raipur Edition) and 6. The Dainik Bhaskar (Raipur Edition).

- **The Indian Express** is one of the leading English Newspaper in India having reach across the country. The newspaper created a niche for itself in the field of news media publications for its investigative reporting. In fact, it boasts its journalism as ‘Journalism of courage.’
- **The Hindu** is one of the leading and largely circulated English Daily of the country since pre-independence era. This is the only English broadsheet in the country, which has also got ISBN (International Standard Book Number) number for its daily publications. The paper is adored by its readers for in-depth and comprehensive coverage of news events and current affairs.
- **The Times of India** is the oldest and largest circulated English Daily of India. Liked by both old and young, the paper maintains a clear balance between hard hitting news coverage, Business & economic news, fashion, new trends and movies.
- **The Rastriya Sahara** is one of the leading Hindi daily which, though has a national footprint, has more readers and impact in the North India.
- **The Nav Bharat** is a leading Hindi daily of Central and Western India. The newspaper has a strong circulation base in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Maharastra. Being published for more than 60 years in some locations of the aforesaid states, the paper commands a strong credibility factor.
- **The Dainik Bhaskar** is the leading and largest circulated Hindi daily of the country. In recent years, the newspaper achieved exponential growth and become the leading Hindi News daily.

While newspapers dated Sept 30, 2010 had news items on how the people, communities and the country was getting prepared to receive the court verdict on the issue, newspapers dated Oct 01, 2010 had carried items related to the verdict and subsequent reaction from different walks of life. The objective behind selecting news coverage for two-days was to see whether the mainstream media maintained neutrality while giving news or writing news headlines on communally sensitive subjects.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research was done on the basis of ‘Content Analysis’ method. Two types of contents were collected i.e. 1. News coverage and news headlines on news related to ‘*Rama Janmabhumi - Babri*

Masjid issue for two days i.e. dated Sept 30 and Oct 01, 2010 and 2. Lead news headlines/ banner headlines on the subject of '*Rama Janmabhumi - Babri Masjid*' after the court verdict was delivered. By doing this, the researcher wanted to know how the newspapers dealt with the topic through their headlines. Though the basic objective was to analyse the use of words or symbols in the banner headlines by the newspapers following the verdict was delivered, the research would also look into the other headlines on the '*Rama Janmabhumi - Babri Masjid*' issue to bring a comparison between the two.

The researcher has selected three English and Three Hindi newspapers for the research for the reason that they reaches to a wider audience than any other language newspapers. Besides, the selection of the newspapers was done to see whether there was a specific trend exists in the newspapers on the basis of their language of publication.

NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF THE ISSUE BEFORE & AFTER THE VERDICT WAS DELIVERED

A day before the judgment i.e. newspapers dated Sept 30 with news coverage of Sept 29, the newspapers maintained maximum restraint in giving any news that might flare-up communal disharmony. The newspapers carried stories on security arrangements in Ayodhya and other parts of the country, appeal by the Prime Minister to maintain peace, appeals by several chief ministers, appeal by political parties i.e. Congress, BJP, CPI, etc., by religious leaders and by all those who matters. Besides, there were stories on citizen's initiatives to spread peace and communal harmony amongst the Hindu and Muslim communities ahead of the historic verdict. While the newspapers carried all such stories that spoke about peace and religious harmony, there was hardly any news item which has a communal overtone ahead of the judgment.

A day before the verdict, **The Hindu** carried news items on what the union home minister had to say on security arrangements in Ayodhya, security arrangement in the High Court and for the judges, on the history of the dispute and the issues that could be answered by the court and an appeal by the Congress Party Chief Sonia Gandhi for maintenance of peace. Similarly **The Indian Express** carried stories on alert in Ayodhya ahead of the verdict and security arrangements across the country. **The Times of India** carried news items on Prime Minister's appeal to the Nation for peace, chronology of the dispute, security measures in different states, peace move by the religious bodies and appeal by the leading political parties.

Looking at the vernacular dailies, **The Nav Bharat** carried stories on security arrangement in Ayodhya and other parts of the country, chronology of the dispute, appeal by the union home minister (referring the father of nation) for maintenance of communal harmony and appeal by citizens for peace. Similarly, **The Rastriya Sahara** carried news items appeal by the Prime Minister and Congress party chief for peace, security arrangement at Ayodhya and other parts of the country, appeal by the religious heads to people to shed communal stand etc. The paper has also carried a story quoting a litigant in the case that 'politics over the issue would die' after the verdict.

The Dainik Bhaskar also carried items on Hindu-Muslim peaceful co-existence, appeal by various political and religious parties and police, security arrangements in different parts of the country, chronology of the issue etc.

When the researcher looked at the news coverage by these newspapers after the verdict was delivered, i.e. newspapers dated Oct 01 with news coverage of Sept 30, it was observed that, they carried news items on different aspects of the verdict, reactions from different affected parties but without any communal overtone, appeals by political and religious parties for peace, appeal by industrial and commercial organizations etc.

The common headlines include Congress responds Cautiously; BJP will not play politics with Ayodhya says Gadkari; Left parties react cautiously; All parties should maintain peace: NCP; Verdict will strengthen unity: Narendra Modi; Industry appeals for peace; Prime Minister appeals for peace; Verdict should not be taken as a victory or defeat of any party: Chhattisgarh Chief Minister; Peaceful condition in Ayodhya after the Verdict etc.. Leaving the banner headline on the Verdict, the six newspapers carried 114 items.

In all, the six newspapers carried more than 50 news items a day before and 114 news items after the verdict was delivered. Looking at the placement of these news items and space allocated to these items it can well be said that the newspapers had tried to contribute their bit in sensitizing the people on 'pluralistic character' of our democracy. The basic objective was that **peace should prevail**. This was in the minds of everybody. Be it the government, administration, political parties, religious organizations or general public. This sentiment of the nation was well reflected by the newspapers in their news coverage. News on communal harmony, appeal for peace by government, religious heads and political parties were given better placement. Simultaneously, the newspapers from their part have given adequate space to the communities concerned and tried not to give any news/ news headline that could have a negative impact on the prevailing mindset or trigger any disharmony amongst communities. In the process, they also, to a greater extent, have succeeded in establishing their own credential as secular and non-biased.

NEWS HEADLINES/ BANNER HEADLINES AFTER THE VERDICT WAS DELIVERED

Looking at the banner news items on the following day after the Lucknow bench of Allahabad High Court, **The Indian Express** banner read '*Ram Stays Under Babri Dome-HC*' with sub-headline '*Verdict: split disputed land 3 way, says judges: Waqf Board to challenge HC ruling in SC.*'

The Hindu banner item had '*High Court Awards two-third of disputed Ayodhya site to Hindu parties, one-third to Sunni Waqf Board*' with sub-headline '*rules that makeshift temple belongs to Hindus; Waqf Board, Janmabhoomi trust to go on appeal.*'

Similarly **The Nav Bharat** Oct 01, 2010 issue had the banner '*Jahan Ramlala, Wohin Janmabhoomi (Where is Lord Ram, There lies the Birth Place)*' with the hammer '*ayodhya Mamle main High Court Ki Lucknow visesh peeth ka Faisla (verdict of Lucknow special bench of High Court in the Ayodhya Issue)*'.

The head-line had also a sub-headline '*Teen hisson main bantengi vivadit jamin, nahin hatengi murtiyan (The disputed land would be divided into three parts, the idols will not be moved)* & '*60 saal baad aaya bada faisla (Big verdict after 60 years).*'

The Rastriya Sahara dated Oct 01, 2010 had the banner headline '*Teen Hisson main Bantegi Vabadit Bhumi (The disputed land will be divided into three parts)*' with sub heads 1. '*Nirmohi Akhada, Ram lala aur Sunni Waqf board ko milega barabar hissa, jahan hai wohin rahenge ramlala (Equal share to be given to Nirmohi Akhada, Ramlala and Sunni Waqf board, Ramlal will stay put)*' & 2. '*Appeal ke liye teen mah ka waqt, tab tak rahegi yathastithi (Three weeks for appeal, till then status quo will be maintained)*' & 3. '*Waqf board jayega supreme court (waqf board to move Supreme Court).*'

The Times of India did not carry a banner but the lead news item on the subject read '*Two parts to Hindus, one part to Muslims*' with sub headline '*Ram Temple gets legal nod from Allahabad HC*'

On the other hand, **The Dainik Bhaskar** had a special front page to cover the verdict. While the special cover page banner read '*Ayodhya Sabki (Ayodhya is for all)*' with sub-head: '*apni jagah par banerahenge Ramlala, Teen Pakshon man bantegi Jamin (Ramlal will stay put in his place, land will be divided into three parts amongst the parties).*'

However the papers main page-1 banner read '*Garbha Griha Ram Lala Ka (the sanctum sanctorum belongs to Ramlala)*'

As the banner/lead headlines of all the six publications are compiled, it was found that two newspaper banner head line had focused on 'Ram' or 'Ram Lala'. While The Indian Express had '**Ram** Stays under Babri Dome', The Nav Bharat had 'Jahan **Ramlala**, Wohin Janmabhoomi (Where is Lord Ram, There lies the Birth Place).' Though The Dainik Bhaskar main page banner read '*Garbha Griha **Ram Lala** Ka (the sanctum sanctorum belongs to Ramlala), it was technically in the Page-3 of that day's newspaper.'*

On the other hand, the other four newspapers under consideration i.e. The Hindu, The Times of India, The Rastriya Sahara and The Dainik Bhaskar had the HC ruling on trifurcation of the disputed land as their banner/ lead headline.

This implies that more than half of the newspapers taken for research had given banner headline which does not have a majoritarian bias. Given the fact that, banner headlines/ lead headlines plays a significant role in deciding the reader's preference to an issue or developing an impression towards a news story, the placement of 'Ram' or 'Ram Lala' in the banner could well be taken as 'value addition' to the issue itself.

On the other hand, the four other banner headlines that discuss the court ruling on division of the disputed land, did not do any 'value addition' to the issue but were 'value neutral.'

4. LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The research result was based on the study of news headlines and banner/ lead headlines of only six newspapers on the said issue. Besides, editorials, special articles and special stories on the subject were not taken for consideration. The research also did not go in length on the contents of

the news stories. Had more newspapers were taken into consideration and had the editorials and other contents of the news stories been taken for consideration, the result could have been different.

5. CONCLUSION

The media faces its toughest task while covering communally sensitive issues. In such cases, the general perception was that the media did not play its role as an independent observer. However, through the study, it was found that the Indian Media plays quite sensitive but responsible role in reporting such issues. Minus the banner head-lines on the historic Ayodhya dispute verdict, the newspaper coverage on the issue was quite neutral in nature. In fact, it appears that, the newspapers, through their news coverage/ headlines during the run-up to the historic verdict and on the verdict had strongly pitched for maintenance of peace.

However, it appears that the selection of words/symbols in the banner/ lead headlines by some newspapers following the HC verdict had a bias towards the majoritarian community, which could have been avoided. Given the fact that only six newspapers were taken for consideration and only banner headlines were studied, the findings are only indicative. However comprehensive researches on the topic or similar topics could be done to find out whether it was a trend or an aberration.

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